Democracy versus Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing[1]

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The American culinary field has experienced a broadening in recent decades. While French food retains high status, gourmet food can now come from a broad range of cuisines. This change mirrors a broadening in other cultural fields labeled "omnivorousness" within the sociology of culture. The authors take gourmet food writing as a case study to understand the rationales underlying omnivorousness. Their findings, based on qualitative and quantitative data, reveal two frames used to valorize a limited number of foods: authenticity and exoticism. These frames resolve a tension between an inclusionary ideology of democratic cultural consumption on the one hand, and an exclusionary ideology of taste and distinction on the other. This article advances our understanding of how cultural consumption sustains status distinctions in the face of eroding boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow culture.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines gourmet food journalism to understand how some foods are legitimated as high-status cultural signals. As experts within the culinary field, food writers have considerable power to shape perceptions of food as high quality, fashionable, and worthy of attention from high-status consumers. It might have come as a surprise to some people, then, when *Bon Appétit* magazine declared in January 2004 that the hamburger was the dish of the year. In apparent agreement over the high status of the hamburger, *Food and Wine* magazine published a cover story in Au-

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gust 2004 on the 10 best burgers, in which they surveyed 10 top chefs for their best interpretation of a hamburger. Other stories valorizing hamburgers have appeared in other various high-end venues, such as the *New York Times* food and dining section. What is more, similar stories have been published about hot dogs, meatloaf, and macaroni and cheese.

What does this attention to traditionally undistinguished foods by culinary trendsetters mean in cultural terms? At first glance, it might look as if a new age of food democracy were dawning—out with the snobbish history of elite foods for elite people. One might conclude that, according to these food experts, *any* food is eligible to ascend to prominence as a high-status dish. When the elite are eating hamburgers and hot dogs, food snobbery and culinary stratification must be fading away.

One reason to be skeptical about such a conclusion is that dining practices have been linked to status for centuries across cultures (Elias [1939] 2000; Goody 1982; Mennell 1996). One of the many social functions of food, and the modes in which it is consumed, is to serve as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Given this long-standing association, how are we to interpret a move to include traditionally humble, working-class foods as acceptable for upscale restaurants serving an elite clientele?

CULTURAL OMNIVOROUSNESS: A STATUS DISPLAY STRATEGY FOR THE AGE OF MERITOCRACY

We are by no means the first to observe the broadening of the repertoire of high-status foods in the United States. Kuh (2001) documents the "end" of haute cuisine in North America, as culinary culture rejects the former snobbish notion that only a single tradition—French cuisine—can be a legitimate highbrow option. Today the culinary omnivore can dabble in a variety of culinary forms picked from ethnic and class cultures around the world. Native American bannock is supplemented with foie gras meatloaf, lychee martinis are ordered alongside gourmet hot dogs and truffle oil bruschetta. Not only have a vast number of new ethnic foods been integrated into the gourmand's palate, but high-end cuisine has also witnessed the appropriation of the "comfort" foods of the North American working class. In addition to the aforementioned hamburger, *Bon Appétit* reports that Alain Ducasse, "the world's only nine-star Michelin chef, decided to start making macaroni and cheese, clam chowder and chicken pot pie at his new restaurant in Manhattan" (*Bon Appétit*, January 2004, p. 18). Houghton Mifflin's *Best American Recipes 2003–2004* lists the year's top 10 food trends, which include a recent hunger for "retro food" like Rice Crispies, and "poor food" like eggs, stale bread, and bacon (*New York Times Magazine*, December 14, 2003).

We argue that the broadening of the high-status culinary repertoire is part of a larger cultural trend of what Peterson et al. refer to as cultural "omnivorousness" (Peterson 2005*a*, 1997*a*; Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson and Simkus 1992; Levine 1988, p. 243).[2] Peterson and other cultural sociologists have posited a general trend away from snobbish exclusion toward cultural eclecticism by high-status cultural groups. In the omnivorous era, cultural consumption that marks high status through a reliance on a few highbrow genres of culture is no longer effective. In place of the traditional high/low divide as a status marker, high status is signaled by selectively drawing from multiple cultural forms from across the cultural hierarchy. With musical tastes, for instance, high status in past decades was signaled through a preference for, and knowledge of, classical music. More recently, however, high status can be effectively signaled through knowledge of a wide variety of musical genres ranging, for example, from Appalachian bluegrass to Cuban music from the 1930s, in addition to knowledge about chamber music and Wagnerian opera.[3]

While past sociological work on cultural omnivorousness has mainly focused on musical tastes (van Eijck 2001; Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson and Simkus 1992), reading (Zavisca 2005), or a variety of types of arts consumption (DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Fisher and Preece 2003; López Sintas and García Álvarez 2004; Vander Stichele and Laermans 2006), in this article we examine omnivorousness in American gourmet food culture.[4] In taking the term omnivorous back to a concern with

[2] We see omnivorousness as a phenomenon with significant similarities to "cosmopolitanism." Although a rigorous comparison of these terms is beyond the scope of this article, we note that both phenomena are concerned with a broadening of interests and with the bridging of some kinds of boundaries (Lamont and Aksartova 2002). Cosmopolitanism is associated with upper-middle-class and upper-class lifestyles (Hannerz 1996), particularly in the United States (Lamont 1992, p. 107), and with a multicultural orientation: Beck (2002, p. 17) defines cosmopolitanism as "internal globalization, globalization from within the national societies."

[3] Peterson (2005*a*, p. 264) notes that the conceptualization of omnivorousness has evolved since it was originally empirically investigated in the early 1990s and recommends that it makes the most sense to think of omnivorousness as "a measure of the breadth of taste and cultural consumption."

[4] There is a significant popular literature on omnivorous themes (without employing the sociological nomenclature). See Seabrook's (2000) *Nobrow* and Brooks's (2000) work on "bobos" (bourgeois bohemians), which both comment on the declining distance between "high" and "low" culture and observe the emergence of new forms of cultural attainment that are (paradoxically) acquisitive, but scornful of obvious luxury consumption (e.g., valuing a professional kitchen with marble countertops and a $15,000 professional range over a Rolls Royce).

comestibles, we argue that, like arts consumption in general, cuisine is a cultural realm where individuals can effectively engage in status displays.[5]

On its surface, the omnivorousness era appears to support a more inclusive and democratic notion of what counts as good or prestigious culture, and to do away with the arbitrary and discriminatory standards of the traditional cultural hierarchy. However, as Peterson and Kern (1996) and others (Bryson 1996; Emmison 2003) have noted, omnivorousness seems to function as an alternative strategy to snobbery for generating status. Omnivores are not necessarily less status seeking, but status is sought out in newly selective ways. Peterson (2005*a*, p. 261) notes that a large number of studies within various national contexts have effectively demonstrated that high-status cultural consumption is "becoming increasingly diversified, inclusive, or omnivorous." At the same time, the research emphasizes that omnivorous consumption "does not imply that people are equally apt to like everything" (van Eijck 2001, p. 1180). A key question then arises: Which cultural choices are selected by omnivores, and how are these selections legitimated? Because prior studies rely on survey data of likes and dislikes, they are not well positioned to understand the rationales behind omnivorous preferences.[6]

The research has brought some useful speculation to bear on why snobbish exclusion is in decline, such as social structural changes affecting the contours of stratification, ideological shifts in the fields of cultural production, and generational politics (Peterson and Kern 1996, p. 905; van

[5] While food consumption contains an element of necessity not possessed by other cultural realms (e.g., not everybody listens to music, but everybody must eat), food choices cannot be adequately understood as purely functional. Food scholars have persuasively demonstrated cuisine's significance as a sociocultural realm ripe with meaning, symbols, myths, and latent messages about gender, class, race, and social standing (see, e.g., Korsmeyer 2005). Our focus in this article is on omnivorousness displayed by elite culinary connoisseurs, rather than the culinary broadening observed within the general American population (see Inness 2001; Gabaccia 1998). A focus on food gourmets and connoisseurs echoes the distinction made by Lu and Fine (1995) between connoisseur-oriented and consumption-oriented visits to Chinese restaurants. While consumption-orientated customers focus on "low-prices, efficiency, and informality," the connoisseur orientation "is often found among diners who have greater temporal and economic resources and more extensive cultural capital" (Lu and Fine 1995, pp. 544–45).

[6] Zavisca (2005) is an exception in that she conducts interviews to examine the meanings that Russian individuals attach to omnivorous consumption in their reading. However, she focuses on how these individuals position themselves in the new capitalist order through their cultural consumption, which is a different question from determining the principles by which some culture is deemed worthy.

Eijck and Bargeman 2004, p. 442),[7] but it cannot explain why certain cultural products are preferred by the omnivore and not others. Peterson and Kern (1996, p. 906) suggest that "omnivorous inclusion seems better adapted to an increasingly global world managed by those who make their way, in part, by showing respect for the cultural expressions of others," but do not have space to explore the complex relationships between globalization, social class, and culture. Other authors (Bryson 1996; van Eijck 2001) have examined patterns of cultural consumption in survey data to produce excellent studies of the nature of omnivorous tastes. However, the data they employ forces them to infer, rather than observe underlying logics for omnivorousness. One of the major contributions of our study is to illuminate the principles at work in omnivorous culinary consumption to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate cultural options. Specifically, food is legitimized for omnivores when it can be framed as authentic or exotic. A second major contribution of our study is to explain why high-status culinary consumption emphasizes authenticity and exoticism in cultural selection. We argue that through these two frames, cultural consumption allows individuals to negotiate a fundamental ideological tension between democracy and distinction. On the one hand, the decline in the legitimacy of snobbism and the rise of meritocracy (whether imagined or real) encourages an inclusive cultural ethos. Both authenticity and exoticism are reasonable and potentially egalitarian criteria—not snobbish—for cultural consumption, suggesting the valorization of cultural forms outside the dominant Western cultural canon. On the other hand, as they are operationalized in the culinary field, authenticity and exoticism work to validate a relatively narrow range of foods that require considerable cultural and/or economic capital on the part of individuals. As a result, frames of authenticity and exoticism contain elements of democratic inclusivity, but also legitimize and reproduce status distinctions.[8]

Our argument has important implications for current discussions of

[7] We do not directly address the question of the cause of the shift from a snobbish cultural hierarchy to an omnivorous cultural hierarchy. Our work builds on prior research that has established that this shift has occurred and refines our knowledge of the nature of omnivorousness. An explanation of the historical changes that have made omnivorous cultural consumption the predominant high-status cultural consumption strategy is beyond the scope of this article.

[8] Mennell (1996, p. 266) noted the tension between the democratizing and status-affirmation function in 19th-century gastronomy and suggested that over the last two centuries, the codification of standards in gastronomy has democratized taste by making standards more broadly accessible to the public. We do not dispute Mennell's historical argument, but suggest that recent omnivorousness trends warrant critical interrogation, since democratic ideology appears to obscure the persistence of status distinction and displays of cultural capital in gourmet culture.

culture and inequality. Work on omnivorousness is generally characterized as part of a "post-Bourdieu debate" (Vander Stichele and Laermans 2006) because it challenges Bourdieu's posited homology between culture and class. Based on our understanding of the logic of omnivorousness, we disagree strongly that Bourdieu's analysis of cultural hierarchy is no longer relevant. A third contribution of our study, then, is an elaboration of the specific ways in which omnivorousness lends further support to, rather than refutes, some of Bourdieu's claims.

GOURMET FOOD WRITING: FRAMING FOOD FOR COMPETING IDEOLOGIES

The discourse produced by gourmet food writers is an ideal access point for understanding the contours of the contemporary culinary field and, we argue, for illuminating the constitution of cultural capital in the era of omnivorousness in the United States.[9] Gourmet food writing is an ideal data source for studying the social underpinnings of omnivorousness for several reasons. First, a number of highly regarded gourmet magazines exist that are both widely circulated and influential among "foodies" (Ambrozas 2005), and suggest a hunger for guides to cultural sophistication (Lamont 1992, p. 108). These magazines are legitimating institutions with the cultural authority to bestow symbolic capital and target upper-middle and upper-class audiences, the audiences who are found in prior research to practice omnivorous cultural consumption (Fisher and Preece 2003; Emmison 2003). Second, a major role of gourmet food writing is to spot culinary trends and to identify particular dishes and foods as being worthy food choices. This selection function of food writing defines a repertoire of desirable food choices, while excluding the majority of available foods. In this way, it is a useful guide to an omnivorous cultural consumption strategy that is open to a wide number of food "genres," but is not indiscriminate about which genres and particular foods are considered high status. Third, food writing not only identifies certain foods as worthy, but also extensively contextualizes the meanings and motivations underlying food fashions. In the extensive process of justifying why certain food

[9] The prevalence of omnivorousness as a cultural logic is tied to both time and place. Omnivorousness has superseded "snobbism" in recent decades, and we limit our argument to the contemporary United States. However, we agree with Peterson (2005*a*, p. 261) when he suggests that if omnivorousness "is like earlier standards of taste, [it] will gradually spread across geographic boundaries before it atrophies." Although we would argue that the spatial-temporal compression of current globalization processes will most likely contribute to this phenomenon, the globalization of omnivorousness is beyond the scope of this article.

choices are more interesting, authentic, and legitimate than others, the discursive legitimating of omnivorous choices is rendered transparent.

As Ferguson (1998, 2004) argues, gastronomy, and indeed all cultural fields, is textually constituted.[10] Gastronomy must be understood not simply as a fixed set of culinary practices, but as a fluid discursive field where the legitimacy of food production and consumption methods are negotiated: "texts of culinary discourse convert" individual culinary activity into a "collective enterprise" that constitutes a taste community (Ferguson 2004, p. 17). In his work on French and English culinary history, Mennell (1996, p. 267) distinguishes gastronomy and the gastronome through the element of public discourse: "The gastronome is more than a gourmet—he is also a theorist and propagandist about culinary taste." This means that gastronomy is interested in more than personal culinary pleasure and refined tastes. Through writing about food and taste, the gastronome hopes to cultivate and elevate the taste of social groups (Mennell 1996, p. 267).

To analyze the gastronomic discourse produced through gourmet food writing, we employ the analytic tools of ideology and frame. These concepts have been used to study social movements, and we argue that they provide analytic clarity and nuance to our understanding of discourses of cultural production and consumption. The concept of "frames" has been used rather loosely by social movement scholarship, but recent debates provide greater precision, clarifying the relationship between frames and discourse and reintroducing the concept of ideology, largely abandoned in the late 1980s in social movement scholarship (Oliver and Johnston 1999; Benford and Snow 2000; Ferree and Merrill 2000). Ferree and Merrill (2000, p. 455) usefully suggest the visual metaphor of an inverted pyramid to describe the relationship of discourse, ideology, and frames, with each respective term connoting a more coherent ideational concept at the level of content and specificity. At the top of this inverted pyramid is "discourse," understood as an inherently conflictual ideational realm that "links concepts together in a web of relationships" (Ferree and Merrill 2000, p. 455). Beneath discourse fall ideologies, understood as a coherent system of related ideas that combine explanation with normative prescription (Ferree and Merrill 2000, pp. 455–56; Oliver and Johnston

[10] This is not to say that preliterate cultures lack cuisine (an established culinary canon of cooking techniques that represents a particular culture), but that *gastronomy* is distinguished by the element of public writing in the constitution of food practices and mores. For those who perceive this distinction as a diminishment of food culture in preliterate societies, we would note that the term "gastronomy" allows us to make an empirical distinction, rather than a normative evaluation.

1999).[11] At the bottom of this inverted pyramid are "frames" which draw from the supporting ideas and norms of ideologies, but are understood as more specific cognitive structures advanced by social actors to shape interpretation and understanding of specific issues (Oliver and Johnston 1999).

Within the larger discourse of gourmet food, framing is an activity that shows audience members how to derive a "correct" understanding of foods and provides an understanding that legitimates certain foods as high status. To be convincing, framing must draw from ideologies, which contain values and ideals that resonate with popular culture. As mentioned, we argue that there are two primary frames employed by omnivores: authenticity and exoticism. Both frames draw from two primary, competing ideologies at play in the field of omnivorous culinary discourse and help explain its contradictory inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies. First, there is the ideology of democratic inclusivity and equality, an ideology that is overtly displayed in gourmet food writing and helps explain the ideational underpinnings of cultural omnivorousness more generally.[12] Democratic ideology is organized around normative liberal principles of human equality and meritocracy. These ideals have a long history at the national scale of American politics, but have been reinvigorated with the increasing prominence of a globalization discourse supporting a normative belief in the equality of all people regardless of race, ethnicity, and nationality (Gould 2004). More specific to the American context, democratic ideology is connected to normative conceptions and populist ideals of the United States as a classless, multicultural society, where immigrants of multiple races and ethnicities have equal opportunities for socioeconomic and cultural advancement, at least in theory (Stern 1952; Lamont 1992).[13]

[11] Social movement scholars have emphasized a value-neutral interpretation of ideologies (Ferree and Merrill 2000, pp. 455–56) that strips the concept of its critical roots to avoid the epistemologically problematic presumption that one can identify "true" causes of oppression. With Fegan (1996) and McLellan (1995), we suggest that a critical perspective on ideology remains key to understanding domination and inequality in sociocultural arenas. Ideological processes can naturalize and legitimize "ideas in pursuit of dominant interests," which are not imposed in a crude, top-down fashion, but involve a negotiation between individual subjects and dominant cultural constructions (Fegan 1996, p. 184).

[12] Here we are not arguing that democratic ideologies are the singular *cause* of omnivorous cultural patterns, an idealistic line of argumentation that we reject. The rise of omnivorousness is undoubtedly a multicausal phenomenon with both ideational and structural underpinnings (e.g., migration patterns, postwar wealth, interclass mobility) that exceed the spatial constraints of this article. See Peterson (1997*a*, pp. 85–86) for a historical account of the decline of the highbrow snob.

[13] As Lamont (1992, p. 105) writes in her comparative study of French and American class culture, a "pervasive, explicit nonexclusiveness is one of the characteristics that most drastically differentiate the French and American upper-middle classes."

Finally, democratic ideology is associated with market culture and consumerism. As Zukin (2004, p. 34) writes, "we persist in believing that shopping is a realm of freedom from work and politics—a form of democracy open to all." More specific to culinary discourse, democratic ideology fuels the omnivorous notion that arbitrary standards of distinction based on a single, elite French notion of culture are unacceptable, and that multiple immigrant ethnicities and class cuisines possess their own intrinsic value.

The second primary ideology in culinary discourse is the more covertly displayed ideology of status and cultural distinction. Operating in a dialectical tension with democratic ideology, an ideology of status and distinction operates implicitly to suggest that only certain individuals can appreciate and understand "quality" culture. This ideology recalls the hierarchy of old-fashioned snobbism, but is reformulated in individualistic, meritocratic language for a democratic era. As it becomes less socially acceptable to overtly declare high status based on wealth, social position, or ethnic/racial superiority, the status attained through cultural appreciation is framed as a matter of individual tastes and lifestyles, which are posited as sophisticated, savvy, and cosmopolitan (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1992, p. 107).[14] Because the focus is on the autonomy of individual tastes and lifestyles, the collective underpinnings of high-status cultural forms are not readily transparent or discussed, which is why we describe the ideology of distinction as operating primarily at a covert level, particularly in the U.S. context where democratic populism has such strong currency. The overt ideals of liberal democracy work in dialectical tension with a covert ideology of status and cultural distinction, informing a belief in equality of opportunity that emphasizes cultural openness (e.g., anyone can potentially make a reservation at elite restaurants), but say little about the power relations, class inequality, or ethnic hierarchies of cultural outcomes (e.g., only a select few have the economic capital to frequent these restaurants, and not everybody has the cultural capital to appreciate their importance). Like democratic ideology, the ideology of status and distinction is learned through education and socialization in the habitus

[14] Lamont's study (1992) is a rich explication of how cultural boundaries differ in two different national contexts, France and the United States. Our point here is not to diminish the important variations found in multiple national settings, but to suggest that liberal democracy, more generally, forces ideologies of status and distinction to operate at a covert level. In this article, our focus is on the United States with its distinctive populist political culture, but we would suggest that this dialectical tension between democracy and distinction is present in varying degrees in other national contexts where an increasingly global democratic ideology makes it less acceptable for elites to present themselves as obviously superior to "common" people.

(Bourdieu 1984), so that certain cultural selections and choices are presented as natural elements of sophisticated (or unrefined) taste.

More specific to the realm of omnivorous culinary discourse, we argue that the ideologies of democracy and distinction provide an analytic tension emphasizing cultural openness to multiple ethnic and class cuisines, while simultaneously constructing criteria for determining what are considered high-quality cultural forms. Acknowledging this dialectic tension helps avoid deterministic accounts which see cultural distinction as producing inevitable, hermetically closed hierarchies, and accounts for American cultural repertoires that appreciate diversity (Lamont 1992, p. 82). The challenge is to document the balance between these competing ideologies in culinary discourse and to explain how they inform the frames of authenticity and exoticism used to legitimize omnivorous choices.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows: We first review the history of gourmet dining in the United States to understand the timing and nature of the broadening of the high-status culinary repertoire. We then outline our data and methods, and follow this by demonstrating how food writers discursively construct the frames of authenticity and exoticism. In conclusion, we consider the implications of authenticity and exoticism frames for understanding how cultural capital is constituted in the contemporary United States, and the implications for evaluating Bourdieu's work on class and cultural consumption.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON HIGH-STATUS CULINARY PRACTICE

Before beginning our analysis of contemporary culinary discourse, it is useful briefly to consider how the field of gourmet cuisine moved away from haute cuisine toward omnivorousness. While the French reference point for haute cuisine waxed and waned throughout the 19th century, elite American food culture was dominated by French haute cuisine at the turn of the 20th century (Mennell 1996, p. 134). Prestigious hotel restaurants like the Ritz-Carlton and Waldorf-Astoria were run by French chefs such as Auguste Escoffier, and in the early post–World War II period, the 1941 opening of Le Pavillon both exemplified and perpetuated the high status of French cuisine among North American elites. Run by French immigrant Henri Soulé, Le Pavillon emphasized the subtleties of refined French food as well as "le standing"—an anglicized term referring to the class of elites who gained access to the elevated dining experience (Kuh 2001, pp. 12–17, 32–33; Levenstein 1989, pp. 71, 78; Kamp 2006, p. 39). The elevation of haute French cuisine through restaurants like Le Pavillon represented a form of culinary "sacralization"—a term used by

Levine to refer to a North American cultural phenomenon that prioritizes "Old World" knowledge, the supremacy of the professional cultural producer, and the valorization of a singular model of legitimate Art, Culture, or in this case, Cuisine (Levine 1988, pp. 139, 168).

The desacralization of haute cuisine was symbolized in 1959 with the opening of the Four Seasons restaurant in the Seagrams building in New York City (Kuh 2001, p. 58).[15] A new "modern" menu was overseen by James Beard—an emerging culinary giant who deigned to include such "genuine" American food items as Amish ham steak with prune knoedel, and showed a shocking insouciance toward French culinary classics (Jacobs 2002, p. 262; Kuh 2001, pp. 60–70; Kamp 2006, p. 64). The decentering of French haute cuisine was not limited to New York's gastronomic elites, but signaled an emerging culinary curiosity about exotic foods like "curry" as well as interest in defining "American" cuisine—a broadening trend that slowly but surely knocked French haute cuisine off its sacralized pedestal.[16] Interest in French food certainly did not disappear.[17] Of particular importance was the spirited media presence of Julia Child, whose best-selling text, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, and weekly television show introduced French menus to the middle-class host and hostess. In Child's own words, "What I was trying to do was to break down the snob appeal" (quoted in Levenstein 1993, p. 143). As French food became more accessible, its role as an exclusive, almost mystical culinary reference point and status symbol diminished (Levenstein 1989, pp. 80–81).

Haute French cuisine was further desacralized as a singular culinary model in the American context through its transmogrification into the relaxed, pluralistic cooking style of California cuisine. Of particular influence was Chez Panisse, Alice Waters's renowned Berkeley restaurant that drew from French culinary classics, but bucked convention to em-

[15] While everyday eating habits were evolving in step with changing immigration patterns since well before the turn of the century (Gabaccia 1998), we emphasize that our project examines changes in gourmet food practice, rather than changes in general consumption patterns.

[16] As with most historical trends, pinpointing an exact date for the "desacralization" of haute cuisine is problematic since an emphasis on "authentic" food experiences emerged in the 1940s and 1950s with the writing of M. K. Fisher and Elizabeth David. The opening of the Four Seasons restaurant signified the beginning of desacralization, but should not be interpreted as the catalyzing event, since underlying forces challenging haute cuisine's hegemony emerged in earlier decades.

[17] This is not to say that the influence of French cuisine as the technical "gold standard" for professional chefs has been eradicated. Janer (2005) argues that Western culinary arts presents French cooking techniques as rational, modern, and the basis of professional culinary knowledge, while ethnic foods are seen as premodern novelties, selectively added like spices without fundamentally changing the canon.

phasize the importance of seasonal, local ingredients.[18] Elizabeth David's (1998*a*, 1998*b*, 1998*c*) literary works on working-class and peasant cooking in the Mediterranean, Italy, and France inspired the chefs at Chez Panisse who tended to lack formal culinary training, but possessed university degrees and the political acumen of the Berkeley counterculture. Influenced by the countercultural influences of the late 1960s, the gastronomic emphasis was on the "revolutionary" spirit, not a stuffy, rule-bound nod to haute cuisine formal conventions, and less a statement on the status of those who dined in elite restaurants. Embodying this seeming democratization of gourmet culture, then *New York Times* food critic Ruth Reichl (2005, p. 228) rebutted the charge that gourmet cuisine was about "restaurants where rich people get to remind themselves that they are different from you and me," and claimed that although eating in good American restaurants in prior decades had a cultural resemblance to opera attendance, it had recently become more casual and accessible.

The desacralization path described by food historians and scholars takes us to contemporary culinary discourse—a context where food's authentic and exotic qualities appear paramount relative to formal markers of snobbery, and where the relationship to social status and distinction must be carefully analyzed to reveal its latent content.[19]

DATA AND METHODS

We substantiate our argument about the ideological tension between democracy and distinction through a discourse analysis and a content analysis of gourmet food writing. The discourse analysis is the method through which we identified omnivorous culinary frames and the discursive strategies through which these frames are constructed. The content analysis is a frequency count of the presence of these frames and strategies.

The first stage of our data collection and analysis was a discourse analysis that inductively identified the major frames and ideologies in omnivorous culinary discourse, as well as the more subtle and specific discursive strategies that make up these frames. We aimed to make explicit the mostly implicit messages about what made the featured foods worthy cultural options. This identification process was achieved in two steps.

[18] This has also been labeled the "New American food revolution" (*New York Times Magazine*, December 14, 2003), a trend with considerable diversity (even within the state of California), which we do not wish to trivialize or homogenize.

[19] Revealing this complex and implicit relationship between cuisine, class, and social distinction, Ruth Reichl (2005, p. 229) later wrote that her *New York Times* defense of elite dining as broadly accessible was "a cop-out," and that "deep down I knew that there was something basically dishonest about what I had written."

We first read a broad range of gourmet food writing to generate ideas about how food writers justified their food choices. Sources for this stage of broad reading included gourmet magazines, more general magazines that included coverage of gourmet food, and newspaper food columns devoted to coverage of gourmet food and culture. The second step was a honing of our identification of frames and discursive strategies through a close reading of four sources that were best suited to our study, the magazines *Bon Appétit*, *Saveur*, *Food and Wine*, and *Gourmet*. We focused on all issues published in 2004. These sources take gourmet food as their primary focus and are written for a relatively wealthy and well-educated demographic—the same people who were most likely to practice omnivorous cultural consumption in past research of music and other arts.[20]

The second stage of our data collection was the content analysis, which generated quantitative data that describe the prevalence of the discursive strategies identified. In constructing our sample for analysis, we first recognized that contemporary magazine publishing includes a wide variety of article formats—from the lengthy feature article to the one-paragraph blurb and photo. Because we are interested in how food is legitimated through contextualization, we included in our sample only those articles consisting of at least one page of text.[21] The typical gourmet food article contains two to three pages of text, although a given article may cover a larger number of pages in total because of the inclusion of photographs, graphics, and recipes. We also sampled only those articles whose primary topic was food, to the exclusion of articles that were primarily about wine or travel without significant reference to food. This sampling procedure produced 102 articles on which the content analysis is based. The content analysis was designed to provide conservative counts of the frames and discursive strategies that food writers employ. (See app. A for the definitions of the discursive strategies on which the counts are based.) Some elements of omnivorous gourmet food discourse could not be reliably coded, and so we refrain from reporting quantitative results in some

[20] To be specific, *Saveur* readers have an average head-of-household income of over $127,000; the average head-of-household income for the *Bon Appétit* readers is over $134,000; for *Food and Wine*, the average head-of-household income is just under $134,000; and for *Gourmet*, the average head-of-household income is just over $132,000 (Mendelsohn Media Research 2005). The "foodies" who read these magazines are, on average, high in economic capital, and we would argue that people who read gourmet food magazines also tend to possess—and to acquire—high levels of cultural capital.

[21] The criterion of a minimum of one page of text eliminated *Bon Appétit* from our sampling scheme. Articles from this source were consistently shorter. The reader is reminded that *Bon Appétit* was a source for the first discourse analysis stage, and so examples from this source are prevalent in the presentation of the findings.

instances, relying instead on qualitative results only, and we indicate these instances in the presentation of our findings.[22]

OMNIVOROUS FRAMES IN ACTION

Gourmet food writing provides useful information on food (recipes, techniques, definitions, etc.) as well as extensive contextualization that describes the people, places, and events surrounding the food itself. This contextualization is not strictly utilitarian insofar as it is not focused on conveying knowledge about specific cooking skills or techniques. Rather, it provides information to explain food's social meaning and social uses. Although gourmet food writing can go into great detail about the specific sensory characteristics of food—regarding taste and texture—arguably greater attention is given to the auxiliary details about the food's social and geographic locations. It is in these auxiliary details where we find food framed as high status in an omnivorous pattern. We identify two dominant frames: *authenticity* and *exoticism*.

The two frames are analytically distinct: they point to different ways of understanding food's significance and can be identified through the use of different rhetorical devices. At the same time, gourmet food writers use these frames quite unselfconsciously and make no effort to separate their usage. They often appear simultaneously and are invoked concurrently. To facilitate analysis, we discuss the frames in isolation from one another, though the reader is encouraged to remember that this separation is performed only to clarify how each frame works to legitimate omnivorous food. These frames can also appear in varying strengths. Instead of a dichotomous frame of exotic or nonexotic, for instance, food can be framed in different degrees of exoticism. What each trait shares is a commitment to the omnivorous paradox: increasing openness to formerly "illegitimate" culinary forms as per a democratic ideology of inclusivity, combined with adjudication criteria that redraw boundaries around a relatively narrow number of legitimate culinary options, implicitly articulating an ideology of status and distinction.

Authenticity

The first frame, authenticity, is not unique to culinary culture but is part of a far-reaching cultural valorization of authentic cultural experiences

[22] Our focus in this work is on cultural production. We must temporarily bracket important questions of cultural reception to determine how omnivorous culinary discourse influences the culinary attitudes and behaviors of readers. For a study of the reception of food magazines, see Ambrozas (2005).

(Fine 2003; Peterson 1997*b*; Zukin, forthcoming). Authenticity is an overwhelmingly positive trait in our culture, operating most broadly as a foundation for a philosophy of ethics (Taylor 1991), and more narrowly as a criterion commonly applied in the evaluation of art and culture. We find that gourmet food writers frequently invoke authenticity to legitimate certain foods as worthy cultural options. Its appearance is so frequent that it appears to be a near-essential part of the omnivorous culinary discourse. The cover of one gourmet magazine, *Saveur*, promotes itself each month with the subtitle, "Savor a World of Authentic Cuisine."

Rather than hold out a singular definition of what constitutes "authentic" food, the literature on authenticity points to several salient dimensions that form a cluster of ideas comprising a more general meaning package. Authenticity is never inherent in a person or object, but instead, certain qualities are framed to create the perception of authenticity. In other words, authenticity is a social construction, rather than an essential characteristic (Peterson 2005*b*). Qualities that lend themselves to the social construction of authenticity include creation by hand rather than by industrial processes (Bendix 1997); local settings and anticommercialism (Grazian 2003); sincere expression distant from calculation or strategy (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998); honesty, integrity, or dedication to core principles (Taylor 1991); and closeness to nature combined with distance from institutionalized power sources (Zukin, forthcoming). Peterson (1997*b*, p. 220) argues in the case of country music that authenticity is fabricated through continual renegotiations between adherence to traditional standards on the one hand, and originality that departs from those standards on the other.

Our contribution to the literature on cultural consumption and authenticity is two-fold. First, we identify a set of specific discursive strategies that food writers use in order to socially construct authenticity, and second, we show that authenticity is employed to provide distinction without overt snobbery. We identify four qualities of food that are used to frame a food or cuisine as authentic—*geographic specificity*, "*simplicity*," *personal connections*, and *historicism*. While these qualities work together to construct a food's authenticity, they are separated for analytic clarity, and we discuss them in turn.

Geographic Specificity: The Value of Place-Specific Foods

In gourmet food writing, linking foods to places is an effective way to set foods or dishes off from the "inauthentic" mainstream. It is, by far, the most common discursive strategy for legitimating food—100% of articles in the sample contained at least one geographic referent, and the average number of geographic referents per article was 13.7 (see table 1).

TABLE 1
USAGE OF SELECT DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN A SAMPLE OF GOURMET FOOD ARTICLES

Discursive Strategies	Total Usage	% Articles with at Least One Usage	Median Usage	Average Usage
Geographic referent	1,408	100	10	13.7
Handmade/nonindustrial	385	89	3	3.8
Organic/naturally raised	47	24	0	.5
Personal connection	318	92	2	3.1
Historical connection	262	76	1.5	2.6
Rarity	30	19	0	.3

Geographic referents occurred at varying levels of specificity, with greater specificity tending to correlate with stronger assertions of food's quality. The most general associations were made at the geographic scale of continents, most frequently "Asian" food or "South American" flavors. Gourmet food writers are obviously aware of the variations in cuisines within a continent, and they use these terms as shorthand to refer to some of a continent's most common ingredients or flavors. Such vague continental references were rare; broad geographic references were more often regionally based, such as the Middle East, the Mediterranean, or Eastern Europe. National linkages were common, such as French food, Taiwanese food, Argentine food, or Vietnamese food, but so was the specification of regions within a country, such as the southeastern United States, California, northern Mexico, the Côte-d'Azur, or Tuscany.

Perhaps the most remarkable finding was the frequency of geographic references to highly specific places, cities, or towns such as Bologna, Italy; New Iberia, Louisiana; Lucknow, India; Mesa, Arizona; New York, New York; Cape Town, South Africa; or Siglufjordur, Iceland. Such precise geographic specificity signals authenticity by letting the reader know that this food is valuable in part because of its specific geographic origins, which sets it apart from more generic versions. We learn from various articles that the oysters from a particular spot on the Atlantic coast of France are like no others, and that on Phu Quoc, an island thirty miles off the coast of southwest Vietnam, the local fish sauce is sophisticated, nuanced, delicate, and unlike any other fish sauce commercially available. Geography, particularly citations at the local scale, plays a major role defining authentic cuisine: there's "real" Texas barbecue, "real" New York bagels, and "real" Umbrian prosciutto. In comparison to place-specific delicacies, generic supermarket versions (e.g., Kraft "parmesan" cheese) appear unworthy substitutes.

"Simplicity": Handmade, Small Scale, and the "Simple Life"

Simplicity is valorized at various points in food's production chain. Food writers valorize simplicity in everything from "simple" nonindustrial harvesting techniques, to "simple" cooking methods in upscale restaurants, to "simple" modes of preparation like handmade tortillas, to the "simple" pleasures of a vine-ripened, organic tomato harvested on a family farm.[23] While the terms *simple* and *simplicity* are not always explicitly employed or defined, connotations of simplicity are frequently imbued in descriptions of food producers as "simple" people using "simple," small-scale, and nonindustrial production techniques, or in images of foods that lack pretension and instead respect the purity of "simple," high-quality ingredients.

The valorization of simplicity is frequently connected with a belief in the simplicity of the people who participate in food's commodity chain. As with other authentic cultural artifacts, "simple" foods are presented as "unschooled," free of commercial interests, and associated with sincere, honest people (Fine 2003). For example, in an article set in rural Louisiana, the authors offer a glowing portrait of a black female cook's "unschooled," intuitive cooking technique: "'It's from my mama's kitchen,' she said. 'I cannot tell you how to do it because she never taught me to measure anything. You just add seasoning and spice until it's right'" (*Gourmet*, April 2004, p. 52).

Food's simplicity can also be invoked without the rural or unschooled connotations of rusticity (and their frequently racialized and gendered associations). Chefs at expensive restaurants can produce "simple" food by cooking without commercial motivation, and only with single-minded artistic fervor, as we see in a restaurant review: "There's nothing calculated or commercial about Quince: It is simply two exceptional people sharing everything they know about the pleasures of the table. And for those caught up by the couple's passion, it can be transforming." (*Gourmet*, July 2004, p. 30). The same valorization of culinary simplicity is seen in a celebration of tempura made by Japanese masters. We learn that this "tempura must have sincerity," and that to produce this authentic artifact, simplicity is essential: "Top-notch tempura all comes down to simple things exquisitely done" (*Saveur*, December 2004, p. 84). Claims of simplicity are used even when the food itself seems quite complex from the

[23] Like authenticity more generally, simplicity should be understood as a dynamic social construction, rather than a static feature inherent to the food itself. To remind readers that this term is not a straightforward descriptor, we use quotation marks ("simple"). Clearly it is more time efficient (and simpler) to buy tortillas at the grocery store than to shape them individually by hand after a lengthy process of soaking corn and mixing dough; however, the "simple" process of handmade tortilla production is emblematic of the omnivore's equation and valorization of simplicity and authenticity.

standpoint of the average American diner. For example, Sir Terence Conran, "noted British designer and restaurateur," is lauded in a *Saveur* book review for his love of the simple things in life: "[Sir Conran] wants plain good food: a bowl of crab or lobster bisque, a tomato salad or some oeufs en gelée, a nice poached turbot with beurre blanc or a wood-grilled rabbit with plenty of garlic and fresh herbs" (*Saveur*, March 2004, p. 20).

Authenticity is also frequently invoked by reference to "simple" foods that are handmade. *Bon Appetit*'s editor-at-large reports that "the only Mexican food worth eating is made by hand" (January 2004, p. 43). Physical evidence of the "simple" process of making food by hand, and the unstandardized results, are depicted as aesthetically pleasing and superior, as with chocolate: "His cocoa-dusted truffles have the misshapen look of miniature spuds—or as Helen says, 'You can tell he's made them with his own very strong hands'" (*Food and Wine*, February 2004, p. 47). "Simple," handmade food was valorized as a "true" version and hence more authentic compared to haute cuisine traditions criticized as overblown, overworked, or fussy.

Foods' authenticity is also signaled when it is produced using "simple" production techniques, particularly small-scale, nonindustrial, and organic methods. The centrality of this discursive strategy is evident in the fact that 89% of articles included at least one instance of the valorization of food on account of its small-scale or nonindustrial production.[24] Small-scale production is argued to produce more delicious food, but it is also upheld as an end in itself and serves as part of a nostalgic evocation of agrarian ideals and the "simple" life they imply. In a profile of the "simple" Kalamata olive, we learn that "the annual Kalmata harvest dictates the rhythms of a simple existence" invoking a world where "there is . . . no dearth of ruddy-faced old timers plodding along on donkeys" (*Saveur*, November 2004, pp. 92, 94). In an article about farmers who handpick their potatoes, the author writes, "They do so partly because heirloom varieties bruise easily, but mostly because doing things the old-fashioned unmechanized way is what [they] care about" (*Saveur*, November 2004, p. 54). On a grocery-shopping trip in Corsica, one writer recounted the delight upon finding "that nonchain grocery stores often stocked a few jars of hand-labeled honey, a housewife's jams, or some surplus bottles of a neighbor's olive oil" (*Gourmet*, August 2004, p. 92). In these quotes, we see the happy marriage of simple production and simple ways of life, a combination thought to produce superior, authentic food. Small-scale production is even presented as morally superior to industrial processes, and producers are depicted as driven by noncommercial, moral motiva-

[24] Gourmet food writers show a clear preference for nonindustrial production processes and rarely feature industrially produced food.

tions like a sense of duty, a love of farming, and a desire to provide for others.[25] As *Food and Wine* editor Dana Cowin puts it, "For anyone like me—a city dweller who prides herself on her taxi-hailing skills—country life has never seemed so idyllic" (*Food and Wine*, May 2004, p. 23).

The idealization of "simple," small-scale production is particularly evident in profiles of organic food production, or naturally raised livestock. In addition to providing superior taste, organic or natural production is often described as motivated by a devotion to purity and integrity in food production insulated from the negative complexities brought by chemicals and industrial processes. In point of fact, most of the organic food consumed by Americans is grown and distributed through transnational agribusiness—an agricultural model far removed from the agrarian ideal of simple family farms and reliant on complex, long-distance, large-scale distribution systems (Guthman 2004; Pollan 2001). However, when gourmet food writers write about organic or natural production (24% of articles included at least one mention), they feature only individual farmers and small-scale producers that invoke images of a "simple" rural life, rather than the complexities of globalized commodity chains endemic to supermarket shopping.

Food was also framed as authentic through reference to the "simple" mode in which it was consumed. As one might expect in the age of omnivorousness, the stuffy and highly formal dining etiquette associated with traditional snobbery frequently appears almost to *disqualify* foods as high-status forms of cultural capital. "Simple" dining at restaurants where formal dining etiquette is absent is often upheld as a pure food experience, a framing strategy which relies overtly on democratic ideology. In an article about Italy's Lipari Islands, we read that "some people will tell you [the city of Lipari] has the best restaurants in the islands, but Giovanna and I decide that they are just the most formal. Like everything about Lipari, most of the food is overworked and commercial. . . . Eventually, we find some small, authentic restaurants on the island" (*Gourmet*, January 2004, p. 90). We see the valorization of "simple" rural life applied again in rural Italy where the author expresses a preference for eating among "a backdrop of rusted farm machinery and walls that aren't perpendicular to the ground" and in "an old manor house where chickens peck at your feet" rather than at "solemn" Michelin-starred restaurants with "stodgy" food (*Gourmet*, January 2004, pp. 46–48).

[25] This focus on moral superiority replicates Lamont's (1992) finding that "moral boundaries" are particularly important markers of class distinction in the U.S. context. Eating morally superior food (produced in idealized agrarian settings) may be an important way for U.S. cultural elites to distinguish authentic foods as high-status yet seemingly democratic food choices.

The preference for simple, even impoverished settings and nonpretentious surroundings was also evident in an article espousing the virtues of the Slow Food Movement, which denigrates restaurants with Michelin stars for their formality and opulence, and moralistically praises cooking in rural Italy for its "quality, sincerity, and the emotional values of honest cooking" (*Gourmet*, January 2004, p. 23). Elsewhere the gourmet reader is invited to a family gathering in rural Jordan with the following description: "It's a little agricultural paradise of fruit and olive orchards and fields where Bedouin tend crops and herd sheep, [a family member's] so-called villa is a rustic, simple three-room structure built over a small cave that has been continuously inhabited for centuries" (*Gourmet*, May 2004, pp. 118, 123).

"Simple" rural people labor to produce an authentic dining experience for discerning omnivores, while the formal dining experience of elite restaurants is often presented with suspicion and outright hostility. In this way, democratic ideologies laud the authentic food traditions of "simple" rural people, while obscuring the exclusive nature of culinary jet-setting in remote rural regions, or the privileged perspective that allows comparison with Michelin-starred restaurants.

Personal Connection: Food with a Face

Emphasizing the personal connection of food to specific personalities, families, or creative individuals was another central discursive strategy used to frame omnivorous food choices as authentic. This personal connection was drawn at least once in 92% of articles, indicating that establishing "food with a face" is a very common discursive strategy for constituting gastronomic authenticity. By establishing the food as having an idiosyncratic connection to a specified creative talent or family tradition, the authentic food was distinguished as "quality" artful food, and distanced from industrial food's faceless, mass-produced lineage and its unfortunate dearth of authenticity (obscuring the cultural and economic privilege of eating outside the industrial food system which feeds most Americans).

One way that the authenticity of personalized food was established was by conjuring images of individual artistic creativity. The personalities used to signal artistry and authenticity were mainly chefs, most commonly men, cooking in elite restaurant settings. Famous chefs such as Jean-Georges Vongerichten, Alain Ducasse, Alice Waters, and Thomas Keller appear with high frequency in gourmet food writing, along with a vast number of other chefs who are named only once or twice each. These chefs are treated as culinary artists who put their personal stamp on food, like a sculptor or an *auteur* director, and create an authentic and original piece

of culinary art which can be juxtaposed against the artless world of industrial food and chain restaurants. A review of new chefs in France explicitly connects chefs to the art world: "Each of these chefs has his own distinct personal style, but they are united, like a school of painters, by certain shared traits and convictions" (*Gourmet*, January 2004, p. 55).

In other instances, personalized food was constituted as authentic by establishing a kind of culinary artisanry or folk art within specific family traditions of food production, such as the Theos, a Greek family who run a ranch in Colorado (*Gourmet*, June 2004, pp. 124–27), or the Romanengo family who have made and sold gourmet candies in the same shop in Genoa for centuries (*Saveur*, December 2004, pp. 68–77). The foods produced or cooked by these named families are upheld as authentic because their origins are traceable to personalities and the individual creativity of family members, which is assumed to have a positive influence on food, rendering it part of a specific authentic artisan lineage and differentiating it from faceless industrial food. In these cases, the folk-art family chefs and artisanal producers are depicted as possessing great taste, and the particular foods they choose to eat, even when they are common dishes, are made special and distinct through the personal and artistic associations they bring to the table.

Naming individual personalities in gourmet food writing—either in the high art or artisan/folk art mode—was most commonly observed when the article was set in a developed country or affluent setting. Articles set in the developing world, where authors observed cooking in huts and roadside stands, tended to resemble old-fashioned anthropology, where the colonial "Other" served as a fascinating and generalized specimen, but the individual personality of the cook or artisan remained unnamed and underdeveloped. Authenticity in this instance was connoted through other discursive strategies, such as geographic specificity or the historicism of a particular food tradition.[26]

Historicism: Food Grounded in Tradition

A fourth strategy for validating food as authentic was connecting food to a specific historical or ethnocultural tradition. This connection attempted to demonstrate that the authentic food has stood the test of time and has been deemed timelessly appropriate rather than an ephemeral food fad. Mentioning the fact that whole goats have been roasted over hot coals in Monterrey, Mexico, since the 1700s (*Saveur*, June/July 2004,

[26] First-world chefs (usually men) were written up as cerebral, artistic, and trained, while third-world peoples preparing food (often women) are unnamed and described in very different terms: instinctual, intuitive, generous, "unschooled," and often naïve.

p. 44) is a way for a food writer to identify the food—*Cabrito al pastor*—as historically based and authentic. About Vietnamese rolls, we are informed that "the Vietnamese were wrapping meat and seafood in greens before 100 B.C." (*Saveur*, August/September 2004, p. 38) and that a Turinese café serving a drink of espresso and chocolate has been operating since 1783 (*Gourmet*, May 2004, p. 171). Historical traditions support the reader's belief in a food's authentic status because historical continuity can be interpreted as authoritative and undeniable, just as tradition is used to validate the legitimacy of universities, artwork, orchestras, and museums. The linking of food to a named historical tradition occurred at least once in 76% of articles.

Although a straight reference to a historical tradition was quite common, gourmet food writers also frame foods as authentic when tradition forms the foundation for artistic experimentation and elaboration, working in conjunction with the previous discursive strategy of personalized artistic innovation. As Peterson (1997*b*) argues in the case of country music, authenticity is generated through adherence to a tradition, while also departing from that tradition in an original, artistic way (see also Inglis 2005). For example, a San Francisco restaurant is lauded when it serves an "imaginative variation on classic themes" (*Saveur*, August/September 2004, p. 85), and a chef is praised because his "genius is knowing when to leave [traditional] recipes intact and when to add a twist of his own" (*Food and Wine*, July 2004, p. 177). An article on Icelandic cuisine notes that "the global kitchen may have delivered new ingredients and tastes to Iceland, but its customs are still very much alive. Old dishes are simply updated" (*Gourmet*, April 2004, p. 112). The following passage reveals that although personal creativity is highly valued—providing uniqueness linked to an individual culinary artist—tradition provides limits for creative license: "'At the beginning of a new century,' says [the chef] Decoret, 'cooking in France is no longer about perfecting a monumental and eternal battery of recipes. It's about incessant creativity.' But the there's also a decidedly French respect for basics. 'Unlike the Spaniards,' [another chef] Tartarin says, 'we never forget that we're cooks first, not chemists or magicians'" (*Gourmet*, January 2004, p. 55). Like artists working within the conventions of their genre, it would be senseless for French chefs to cook without regard for the basics of French culinary techniques. Creativity is essential, but it must have limits and a connection to its "essential" foundations—in this case, the French culinary canon—to be deemed authentic.[27]

[27] We were surprised to find very few uses of the term "fusion cuisine." We interpret this as indicative of a broad acceptance of authenticity as characterized in part as a dialogue between innovation and tradition. It is possible that as culinary genre boundaries have weakened, the term has become redundant.

The dialogue between creative innovation and European culinary tradition suggest an important finding about the geopolitical limitations of omnivorousness, since omnivores demarcate authentic foods in different ways in different parts of the world. As noted above, omnivores accept multiple cultural forms, but do not inhabit a nonhierarchical cultural world. The validation of authenticity through a dialogue of traditionalism and artistic creativity was primarily found in first-world elite culinary settings; it was almost never described when the setting was a developing country, and infrequently mentioned if the setting was a poor and rural first-world location. The foods associated with impoverished settings or developing countries were often obscure and unfamiliar to American palates (e.g., dripping hunks of pigs' feet), and this obscurity was sufficient to legitimate them as authentically original, so that artistic creativity on "classic" European culinary themes was not required for authentic validation. In contrast, food encountered in upscale restaurants in New York, Paris, San Francisco, or other "world-class" cities was most frequently legitimated as authentic through a representation of the personal artistry of an individual chef or food producer where creativity and experimentation came into play.

In sum, gourmet food writers value food that is authentic and primarily discuss four characteristics of food on which they base their determinations of authenticity. The emphasis on authenticity moves food evaluation away from a narrow, snobbish focus on French food as "good" food and opens up a world of options for what can be considered gourmet fare. Authenticity is an effective frame for democratizing the culinary field. Gourmet food culture is now omnivorous in the sense that high-status eating can be done in a large number of cuisines or "genres." Authentic foods are seemingly "simple" foods that come from highly specific places off the middle-class tourist path, they are produced by hard-working rural people with noncommercial motivations, they have ties to specific personalities and culinary artists (especially in wealthy settings), they have a rich history, and they are consumed in casual, "simple" settings.

However, the democratizing effects of an emphasis on authenticity are accompanied by distinction processes. Authentic food frames are inextricably involved in a discursive negotiation between ideologies of democracy and distinction. These ideologies are not either/or influences on the framing process, but interact in a dialectical tension. Authentic foods are frequently portrayed as more democratic—they are the foods of common, "simple" people, produced and consumed in a "simple" fashion, connected to age-old traditions, and frequently presented as superior to stuffy, rule-bound haute cuisine. The democratic nature of an emphasis on these qualities of food is made explicit in food writing. What is left implicit, however, is the exclusionary effect of an emphasis on authenticity. Given

the extreme geographic specificity and labor-intensive production techniques tied to food's authenticity, many (if not most) of the authentic foods profiled in these magazines are extremely expensive and difficult (if not impossible) to acquire in the mainstream commercial supermarkets and restaurants where most Americans buy food and eat out. Instead, authentic food items are primarily accessible to cosmopolitan, upper-middle-class individuals with ample grocery budgets who are capable of extensive global travel, allowing them to eat only authentic "Parma" ham or to acquire authentic fish sauce from a remote Vietnamese island.

Moreover, the appreciation of authentic foods requires high cultural capital, since specialized gastronomic knowledge is required to identify what is deemed an authentic food fashion (e.g., where an authentic Italian cheese is made, and why a commercially made American cheese is not an adequate substitute), and to understand why authentic foods are superior compared to their inauthentic industrial counterparts (e.g., the place-specific Italian cheese has a extended aging process and is linked to production in a remote region of Italy). Cooks with limited economic and cultural capital may not only remain unaware of changing food trends, but may also be restricted to "lesser-quality," inauthentic, industrially produced supermarket variants—Hershey bars rather than authentic handmade chocolate truffles made by an artistic chocolatier. Gourmet food writers indicate the superiority of authentic foods mostly by ignoring inauthentic foods. We almost never read of fast-food, supermarket brands, or industrial food processing—foods lacking all four of the elements of authenticity—except for a few instances when such foods are disparaged or eaten with ironic detachment.

This is a subtle ideological tension that simultaneously works to democratically open the culinary terrain to include certain authentic culinary traditions and food producers, while providing criteria for exclusion that diminish the value of "inauthentic" foods available to most middle-class and working-class cooks in neighborhood supermarkets and restaurants—a dynamic that we will also observe in the framing of omnivorous foods as exotic.

Exoticism

Gourmet food writing also valorizes omnivorous foods by framing them as exotic. Like the valuation of authenticity, the valuation of exoticism in food is part of a larger cultural valorization of exotic experiences. Heldke (2003, p. 18) provides a definition of exotic that combines a concern with foreignness with an interest in striking, remarkable features that are "excitingly unusual." This definition aptly captures how gourmet food writers frame exotic food as foreign to mainstream taste buds and excit-

ingly different and distinct. Unusualness, of course, requires a reference point, and we take the intended audience for gourmet food writers—educated Americans relatively rich in cultural capital—as the reference point. Food is framed as exotic relative to the experiences and expectations of this group. In our analysis, food can be framed along a spectrum of exoticism, from strongly exotic to weakly exotic, though even weakly exotic food can be seen as highly desirable and legitimated as worthy omnivorous food. Here we explain how unusualness and the exciting nature of food are used to frame food as exotic, and how the presentation of unusual foods as distinctive and high status is balanced with democratic ideology's distrust of cultural snobbery.

Unusualness and Foreignness

Gourmet food writers appear to view introducing their audience to unknown or obscure ingredients and dishes as essential to their work; this serves as part of the democratizing function of gastronomy, since it broadens the repertoire of "good" food. We learn of ingredients such as *mistela negra*, which is new red wine dosed with brandy, though, we are told, it is not available in the United States (*Saveur*, March 2004, p. 62); ram horn nut, which also goes by the name of water caltrop (*Gourmet*, January 2004, p. 104); and *brocciu*, which is a fluffy sheep's-milk cheese from Corsica (*Gourmet*, August 2004, p. 92). We also learn about unfamiliar dishes such as *O-a-chian*, a Taiwanese dish of oysters with scrambled eggs (*Saveur*, March 2004, p. 37); a Spanish chef's foie gras with cotton candy and avocado-tomato sorbet (*Food and Wine*, May 2004, p. 74); and *snoek*, a hot smoked fish eaten on doughy bread and jam in South Africa (*Food and Wine*, May 2004, p. 169).

In addition to naming unfamiliar ingredients and dishes, food was framed as unusual by linking it to foreign people and places. This framing was often accomplished through travel articles, a common type of gourmet food writing. At one end of the spectrum of unusual people and places are foods associated with poor, rural people in developing countries, and they are framed as strongly exotic. The food of Mexican peasants, Vietnamese fishermen, or the Bedouin of Jordan is both geographically and socially (ethnically, and in terms of class) distant from the lives of gourmet food writers. Travel articles revel in the exotic geographic settings and extreme social distance, providing a wealth of details about foreign people and places.[28] These articles are narratives that tell a story about the role

[28] Although we read about many details of foreign people and places, we never learn about the serious social problems that exist in many of these exotic locations. As a result, gourmet food writing provides what Heldke (2003, p. 58) calls "a superficial

of these foods in people's lives and deviate significantly from an accounting of the food alone.

More common are discursive depictions that shorten the social distance between the foreign setting and the audience and present a moderate or weak version of unusual exoticism. We read about Thai chefs who cook foie gras with sweet potatoes for the upper middle class, closing the class gap though not the ethnicity gap. A review of an upscale restaurant in São Paulo moderates the unusualness of the case study by describing "the area's glamorous surroundings . . . stores like Armani, Versace, Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton," and asserting that "families come to Antiquarius [restaurant] for home-style cooking in an elegant but laid back setting" (*Food and Wine*, June 2004, p. 46). The food eaten at this restaurant is somewhat unusual, "minced salt cod with julienne potatoes and fried egg and sprinkled with pressed hot-pepper oil" (*Food and Wine*, June 2004, p. 46), but not so foreign that it cannot be comprehended. In other articles, we read about food linked to people whose ethnic and class differences from the audience are minimized, and in which geographic specificity is the sole device used to frame the food as unusual. A memoir of eating foods such as trout, strawberries, plum juice, and mushrooms in rural Norway functions in this way (*Gourmet*, August 2004, pp. 46–48).

Another discursive strategy is to present unusualness through an explicit gap in knowledge, or through a presentation of premodern peoples. In this vein, we read of "pasta made by women who measure weeks in flour and seasons in egg yolks and every fold and crevice of noodle can seem as eloquent as a sigh" (*Gourmet*, January 2004, p. 46). Similarly, we read about food that is produced and consumed in "a medieval Italian town" that "rises from oblivion in the mountains of Abruzzo" (*Gourmet*, September 2004, p. 139). The emphasis on "medieval" and the hyperbole of "oblivion" stresses the remote exoticism of the area to American audiences, even though the contemporary Italian inhabitants (citizens of a G8 country no less) would probably not agree that their home represents "oblivion."

In a similar vein, a surprising number of travel articles frame American foods as unusual based on a gap in cultural knowledge and economic capital. While the geographic distance is small compared to overseas travel articles, the socially exotic clearly persists within the United States. These articles are set in rural areas within the United States, often the rural South, Midwest, or Southwest, away from the major urban culinary centers. Social distance is maintained by focusing on the food of people who

image of a culture, an image that treats that culture as if it were designed for my use and pleasure. This way of eating is harmful both to colonizer and colonized, for it reifies and reduces colonized people, substitutes for authentic relations to food the exotic quick fix and normalized colonialism, encouraging us to condone it in its other, more destructive economic and political forms."

are portrayed as relatively impoverished and/or uneducated, and possessing unusual food norms or a lack of knowledge. Take, for example, an article that describes Arkansas as "a serious pie lode," where the authors meet the owners and patrons of truck stops and diners (*Gourmet*, August 2004, pp. 32, 127). The authors report that upon explaining that they hail from Connecticut, one stranger they encounter reveals that he thinks that Connecticut is in Canada. They "don't bother making the fine point that Canada and Connecticut are different places" because the especially good Arkansan coconut pie has arrived (*Gourmet*, August 2004, p. 127).

Although unusualness in general is highly valued, there is a particular type of unusualness that gourmet food writers value especially highly: unusualness caused by rarity, which allows a relatively subtle validation of distinction along with cultural and economic capital. Food that is unknown or obscure because it is in scarce supply, or because it is not available to American audiences, is often highly recommended. One author describes eating a cheese called "Flixer, a nutty number made only from the milk of 12 very talented Swiss ewes" (*Food and Wine*, July 2004, p. 171). We are told that "the Palacios brand of Spanish chorizo, made in the Rioja region, is the only authentic Spanish chorizo imported into the United States" (*Saveur*, May 2004, p. 95). Other ingredients that are explicitly mentioned as difficult or even impossible to acquire in the United States include ang-chim crabs (*Saveur*, March 2004, p. 44) and botifarra negra (Catalonian blood sausage; *Saveur*, March 2004, p. 66). Some rare ingredients are not foreign at all, but are highly scarce, such as fresh hearts of peach palm flown to New York from Hawaii (*Gourmet*, November 2004, p. 48).

In our sample, there were 30 explicit references to food that was difficult or impossible for U.S. consumers to acquire either because of small supply or limited distribution (see table 1). This count, however, is the most conservative possible in that it relies on explicit statements of rarity, and it should be understood that gourmet food writers focus almost exclusively on food that is difficult for the average American to procure in regular grocery stores, even if this is not explicitly stated. In many instances there was no need to explicitly state that a certain food was rare and difficult to acquire because it was clear from the context. In travel articles, for instance, food is valorized for being from a very specific place and time, and the reader understands that they must go to the food because the food will not be coming to them through mass distribution channels. The same implicit rarity was evident in restaurant reviews, features on small producers, and articles focusing on family traditions.[29]

[29] It is useful to distinguish between food writers' explicit appeal to food's rarity as a strategy for valorization (as discussed in the preceding paragraphs) and the fact that

A second way that the exotic frame was connoted was through the geographic referencing of place, as mentioned above. These data can be broken down into a count of the primary geographic reference made for each article (see table 2). These figures suggest the strongly exotic is less important for omnivorous validation than weak exoticism, and that assumptions about a global omnivorous discourse are overstated, even in magazines that consistently carry travel features. The omnivore's culinary world is not a global democracy where any and all cuisines are deemed interesting. The dominant focus for culinary omnivores is overwhelmingly situated in locations in advanced-industrialized countries, with 78 of the 102 articles coded taking place in a developed-world setting. Africa, for instance, serves as a the primary context for only one article, and the more specific focus was South Africa and the opportunities for safari tours, rather than a culinary history of black South Africa. This is not to say that the strongly exotic frame is not present in omnivorous food culture, but it does suggest that culinary omnivores are more interested in weakly exotic foods (situated in immigrant American food communities, rural American settings, or Europe) than in strongly exotic foods based in continents outside of Europe and North America. It also supports Janer's (2005) suggestion that gourmet food culture remains strongly situated in the North American and European core, with other global food cultures added intermittently in ways that do not fundamentally challenge a Eurocentric culinary canon.

Exciting Food: Food That Breaks Norms

The second dimension of exoticism that emerged in gourmet food writing was a focus on food that is exciting, outrageous, inappropriate, daring, and generally not accepted by mainstream American eaters. Like the omnivorous preference for obscure ingredients, exciting food provides a relatively subtle way for food writing to confer distinction and status.

most (though not all) high-status foods are, in fact, not widely available or easily procured. The argument that aesthetic value depends, at least in part, on rarity, has been made by Veblen ([1899] 1994) and is also evident in Bourdieu's (1993) distinction between fields of mass and restricted production. It can be argued that all of the discursive strategies we identify bear some relationship to rarity insofar as they valorize qualities that are not widely available for food. However, there is a crucial analytical distinction that must be maintained. Although authentic and exotic foods are frequently rare, the discourse that justifies these foods as worthy specifies these foods' other qualities. It is precisely our point that omnivorous logic must refer to other qualities than rarity (or expense) to valorize cultural objects because of the need to resolve the tension between democracy and distinction. The frames of authenticity and exoticism rely on rarity, but cannot be reduced to rarity alone because of the need to satisfy contemporary norms that sanction overt snobbery of the kind that would hold that culture is good only when it is expensive or beyond the reach of the average person.

TABLE 2
Primary Settings in Sample of Gourmet Food Articles

Setting	No. of Articles
United States	46
U.S. immigrant community	12
Europe:	
Italy	8
France	7
Greece	3
Spain	2
Other Europe	7
Asia	4
Central America and the Caribbean	3
Australia	2
Canada	2
Middle East	2
Africa	1
South America	1
No primary setting	2

Such exciting food violates norms of purity versus impurity, or food versus nonfood, such as a Corsican cheese selection which includes "chevre '*avec habitants*'—a cheese so ripe that little, maggot-type worms had taken up residence inside" (*Gourmet*, August 2004, p. 93). (The maggots are removed before the cheese is eaten.) We see valorization of exicting food in a profile of Monterrey, Mexico, featuring "fritada de cabrito (cabrito [goat] stewed in its blood), machitos (roasted sausages of cabrito heart, liver, and tripe), and cabecita [whole baby goat's head]. I had already ordered goat's head once, and that seemed sufficient. But I ate everything else" (*Saveur*, June/July 2004, p. 47).[30]

Exciting-exotic food is not only eaten outside the United States. Among groups of people and immigrant communities who are socially and/or geographically distant from the culinary core of whitestream urbanites, we find food that pushes the limits. On a ranch in rural Colorado, a Greek-American family makes their own sausages: "There was much smacking of lips and rubbing of bellies as the sweatbreads, lungs, spleen, and hearts, were laid out in ribbons on the fell, spiced with salt, pepper, and oregano, and then wrapped in the small intestine to make the fat, lumpy, three-foot-long sausage" (*Gourmet*, June 2004, p. 126). We find

[30] In this example we are told that the baby goat's head arrives at the table with the top of the skull sawed off for easy removal to allow access to the brains. Although the food writer finds this particular dish unappetizing, it sends a clear message that high-status eating needs to contemplate breaking boundaries.

that the social distance of immigrant communities within the United States facilitates the valorization of many exciting as well as unusually exotic foods for omnivores.

When food flagrantly violates social or culinary conventions, it creates a bold spectacle of desirably daring exoticism that confers distinction; this is especially evident in the gourmet focus on eating offal found in elite restaurants.[31] In upscale Manhattan restaurants, like Thomas Keller's Per Se, chefs and diners alike seem to gain prestige by participating in this form of culinary exoticism:

> Keller has said that he loves most of all the challenge of spinning nickel into gold, of transforming cuts of meat many restaurants reserve for forcemeat into the centerpieces of a meal. Though often among the least popular options, these dishes—ox tripe morphed from rubber bands into tender ribbons soft as marrow, pastrami-like slices of confit veal heart served with heated bing cherries and Tokyo turnips—are well worth the detour. (*Gourmet*, November 2004, p. 48)

Gourmet cuisine has traditionally incorporated norm-breaking foods, such as frog legs and raw oysters, that rest outside the realm of what many middle-class and working-class American eaters would consider appetizing or even edible (at least initially). From that perspective, the inclusion of these norm-breaking, exciting foods is a natural tendency for gourmet food writers who need to continually identify new dishes for their audiences. This analysis of food's legitimation through norm breaking helps us to understand an editorial comment that "nothing is more boring than sashimi. . . . When I'm eating raw fish in a Japanese restaurant, I practically pass out in mid-bite" (*Bon Appetit*, January 2004, p. 36). In the recent past, raw fish was a norm-breaking food for American omnivores. However, raw fish is the new normal for this group, and so it can no longer be legitimated on this basis.[32]

We have argued that exoticism is framed as an important strategy in omnivorous culinary discourse through its focus on unusual, foreign, and norm-breaking foods which allow food writers to signal distinction with-

[31] The most famous culinary proponent of high-end offal is Fergus Henderson, British restaurateur and author of the best-selling cookbook, *The Whole Beast: Nose to Tail Eating* (Ecco, 2004).

[32] We were unable to provide a quantitative measure of whether foods are "new" or "exciting." Although our reading of gourmet food journalism is that foods are frequently legitimated on these grounds, providing a quantitative measure would imply the use of an indicator of "new" or "exciting" food that is valid and reliable. Although we could provide a count of when foods seemed "new" or "exciting" to us, it is clear that such an indicator would be influenced by our own knowledge and preferences about food.

out offending democratic sensibilities through overt snobbery. Exoticism suggests a radical democratization of gourmet culture through openness to non-European culinary traditions, yet the relationship of the exotic frame to ideologies of democracy and distinction is both complex and contradictory. On the one hand, democratic ideologies are clearly manifest in the omnivore's increasing openness to new foods and cuisines, particularly from non-European immigrant communities. As Gabaccia (1998, p. 9) suggests, America's multiethnic foodways "suggest tolerance and curiosity," along with "a willingness to digest, and to make [multiethnic dishes] part of one's individual identity." In addition, openness to certain norm-breaking foods, like offal, could be seen as establishing a kind of democratic culinary solidarity with chefs worldwide who cannot afford to waste the multiple, edible parts of an animal.

On the other hand, valuing foods for their foreignness and unusualness inherently establishes standards for distinction. As with the framing of authenticity, the framing of exoticism presents a dialectical tension between democratic ideology and an ideology of distinction. The broadening of the repertoire of worthy foods is concomitant with the demarcation of other food preferences as banal, undistinguished, or unsophisticated.[33] Omnivorous food culture's concern with exoticism explicitly widens the scope of worthy foods, but exoticism also maintains an implicit focus on foods that can require considerable economic and cultural capital to obtain. The rarity and obscurity of many exotic foods leave them relatively inaccessible to most Americans.

[33] In the case of the exotic frame, this situates elite food writers firmly at the colonial center where they hold the power to determine what is interesting, unusual, and exciting this season and create criteria for what is included as gourmet fashions change. Western colonialism has traditionally rested upon the idea that the ethnic Other "is not a part of human culture in the full sense, but is a resource I may mine, harvest, develop, exploit or otherwise utilize" (Heldke 2003, pp. 46–47), and this ideal is confirmed in the selective mining and rejection of certain ethnic foods as interesting and unusual one moment, and overexposed the next. As *Gourmet* declares in its listing of "What's Now, What's Next," the white rice feeding more than one billion Chinese people is now considered passé, while black Chinese rice is deemed interesting, unusual, and "stunning" (*Gourmet*, January 2004, p. 26). The same issue declares that the country of Nepal is tired and horribly "now," while Bhutan is considered the "next" sexy culinary hotspot (*Gourmet*, January 2004, p. 29). Moreover, Abarca (2004, p. 8) argues that culinary exoticism can essentialize and stereotype ethnic cultures in that the identified cultural group (e.g., Mexican Americans) must present and preserve their cultural heritage for consumption by the dominant culture, often in a context of social and economic inequality where the food is more welcome than the cultural group making the food. See Bentley's (1998) discussion of this phenomenon in relation to Southwestern cuisine.

BEYOND BOURDIEU?

Most studies of cultural consumption that examine questions of omnivorousness and the constitution of cultural capital have so far been concerned with the arts—music, the performing arts, museum going, and so on. Cultural capital is frequently operationalized as knowledge of and participation in culture outside the realm of social reproduction. As a result, research on cultural capital tends to neglect the banal concerns of everyday life, like eating and drinking.[34] Bourdieu's work on status distinctions suggests the need to examine the ways cultural capital operates in the intimate realm of social reproduction to reproduce stratified class societies; his classic work, *Distinction*, opens with a call to examine the culture and status distinctions of everyday life (Bourdieu 1984, p. 1).

A simple reading of Bourdieu's work on food, status, and everyday life might seem to suggest that the omnivorousness trend in food habits—as defined by the broadening of the repertoire of high-status foods—erodes the basis for status distinctions. With haute cuisine in decline, and a greater interest in rustic, authentic foods and filling, hearty fare (Bourdieu 1984, pp. 194–95), it might appear that the age of food snobbery and status seeking is in retreat. The prevalence of omnivorousness seems to challenge Bourdieu's argument that the consumption of high culture serves as a form of distinction, since omnivorousness entails an erosion of boundaries between haute cuisine and the food of popular culture, like hamburgers, hot dogs, and chicken pot pie.

Much recent research on culture and social class has taken up a concern with the limits of Bourdieu's scholarship, both for describing cultural consumption outside of France and for describing the patterns of cultural consumption in an age of omnivorousness. Moreover, there is concern that the principles shaping cultural hierarchy Bourdieu observed in 1960s France are not as universal as he claims.

In our view, omnivorousness as practiced in the American culinary field calls for a nuanced reading and analysis, rather than a refutation, of Bourdieu's work on social class and culture in general, and social class and food more specifically. The broadening of the culinary repertoire from a narrow and refined French canon to a world of authentic, exotic, yet still privileged food manages to preserve the essential qualities of food necessary for it to serve as cultural capital and distinction, despite dem-

[34] Food scholarship has thrived as an interdisciplinary academic realm but has been isolated from debates within the sociology of culture and peripheral to the central concern of sociologists (Ferguson and Zukin 1995, p. 194). An important exception to the trend is Erickson's (1996) work on class and culture. A key finding of Erickson's is that knowledge of better restaurants is highly correlated with class position, while knowledge of chain restaurants is not. This finding is compatible with the thrust of our argument that knowledge of "quality" food is linked to class.

ocratic ideology condemning overt displays of cultural status. Based on our reading of gourmet food culture, we argue that three elements of Bourdieu's writing remain crucial in the omnivorous process of achieving distinction in a democratic age: (1) boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture, (2) the aesthetic disposition, and (3) the disinterestedness of producers.

First, based on his data from 1960s France, Bourdieu posits that the dominant classes affirm their high social status through consumption of cultural forms consecrated by institutions with cultural authority. Through family socialization and formal education, class-bound tastes for legitimate culture develop alongside aversions for unrefined, illegitimate, or popular culture. Some scholars argue that omnivorousness among the dominant classes presents a problem for Bourdieu's analysis (see Vander Stichele and Laermans [2006] for a review of these scholars).

Although we would agree that the homology between dominant/dominated classes and high/low culture that Bourdieu observed is no longer to be found, we do not find this discrepancy to be a crucial flaw in Bourdieu's theory of distinction. The decisive cultural boundary Bourdieu draws is not between high and low culture, but between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" culture, or put differently, culture that has been endorsed or consecrated by institutions or individuals with cultural authority (universities, critics, etc.) and culture that is lacking such approval, or that is disapproved of by those with cultural authority. Gourmet food writing suggests that the omnivorous age does not usher in a relativistic cultural paradise where "anything goes" and all foods are made legitimate. Instead, boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture are redrawn in new, complex ways that balance the need for distinction with the competing ideology of democratic equality and cultural populism.[35] In this way, Bourdieu's homology between class and culture is maintained. While the prevailing boundary for legitimacy in 1960s France was between the traditional high arts and popular arts, in the United States today, "authentic" or "exotic" cultural tastes are legitimate, while familiar, bland, and broadly accessible cultural forms are deemed illegitimate for upscale consumption.[36] Authentic and exotic cultural artifacts appear to incorporate democratic impulses—to validate culture that is made by common folk, or people outside the Anglo-European ethnic norm—but simulta-

[35] See Erickson (2007) for a thorough discussion of the increasing complexity in the constitution of cultural capital and its implications for social inequality.

[36] An important variation on this theme is when popular, mass-market culture is consumed in the spirit of cultural "kitsch" (e.g., an ironic Jell-O salad). Here, mainstream cultural forms are consumed with aesthetic detachment, which Bourdieu characterizes as part of the spirit of distinction.

neously work to delegitimize the culturally and economically accessible popular culture of the U.S. mainstream (e.g., Olive Garden restaurants and the music of Céline Dion). In short, our evidence suggests that in omnivorous food discourse the traditional boundary between "high culture" and "low culture" food has become irrelevant, while the more nuanced and difficult to read boundary between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" food is reproduced.[37] Our argument implies that research on cultural classification should relax its current emphasis on hierarchy between cultural genres and increase its emphasis on hierarchy *within* cultural genres.

One central way that gourmet food writers selectively legitimate certain foods in the omnivorous age is by applying an "aesthetic disposition" to common foods to make them authentic and/or exotic. This introduces a second element of Bourdieu's scholarship affirmed in our reading of omnivorous gourmet food writing. While Kant posited a distinction between taste based on the senses (e.g., food), and taste based on reflection (e.g., fine art), Bourdieu rejects a transcendent notion of "taste" and argued that the Kantian distinction is reintegrated by the aestheticization of ordinary consumption (like food consumption) which allows for heightened classifications of distinction applied to the everyday realm of the lifeworld (Bourdieu 1984, p. 5). More important than the recognition of aesthetically valued objects (e.g., classic works of art) is the more rare ability to "constitute aesthetically objects that are ordinary or even 'common' . . . or to apply the principles of a 'pure' aesthetic in the most everyday choices of everyday life, in cooking, dress or decoration, for example" (Bourdieu 1984, p. 40). This suggests that achieving distinction relies on the ability to recognize aesthetic criteria and apply them to everyday objects like food—an "aesthetic disposition" which Bourdieu (1984, p. 5) notes is relatively rare and distinct.

Using frames of authenticity and exoticism, high-status chefs and diners have arguably greater opportunities than ever to bring an aesthetic disposition to bear on a wider variety of foods to aestheticize them. Low-status, popular, and/or ethnic cultural foods are viewed with aesthetic detachment, transformed from foods of necessity into works of art, and often in ways that make them culturally and often economically inaccessible to their original consumers: the $39 Kobe beef hamburger, haggis with foie gras, or "bacon and eggs"—slow braised *tete de cochon* with a poached quail egg and a rich *sauce gribiche* (*Gourmet*, November 2004,

[37] Not only is Bourdieu's work useful for understanding omnivorousness, but Bourdieu also seems to have been aware of emerging omnivorous tendencies, even if they were not the predominant mode of high-status cultural consumption at the time of his data collection. He observed that teachers in 1960s France, who were relatively rich in cultural capital and relatively poor in economic capital, went in "for exoticism (Italian, Chinese cooking, etc.) and culinary populism (peasant dishes)" (Bourdieu 1984, p. 185).

p. 48). The omnivorous application of an aesthetic disposition permits a cultural distancing from the protean associations of the food item, while creating an impression of authenticity, rusticity, nostalgia, and democratic inclusivity congruent with gastronomic trends since the diminishment of French haute cuisine as a singular reference point.[38]

A third theme of Bourdieu's writing that maintains relevance in the omnivorous age is the artistic quality of "distinterestedness," which appears in Bourdieu's (1993) writing on fields of cultural production. Bourdieu argues that the quintessential quality required of artists to be taken seriously is a disavowal of economic interest in the outcome of cultural production, which works as an effective signal to prove one's "claim to authenticity" (Bourdieu 1993, p. 40). Bourdieu acknowledges that disinterestedness is a form of position-taking within a field of cultural production, and that cultural producers carefully look out for their economic interests. What is important, however, is that cultural producers are portrayed as economically disinterested, by themselves and by their promoters. This portrayal was consistently evident within gourmet food writing, particularly in the presentation of authentic food as "simple" and personalized. Food was highly valued when it was cooked or produced by people who were portrayed as "simple," generous, and motivated to uphold tradition, rather than to earn a profit. Food was also highly valued when it was cooked by elite chefs who were portrayed as artists who were most concerned with making aesthetic statements and advancing culinary arts, rather than interested in running economically successful restaurants. In the vocabulary of the art world, the poor and rural food producers can be analogized to "outsider" artists (Ardery 1997) whose legitimacy is based on their being unschooled and unstrategic in their economic ambitions. The elite chefs can be analogized to serious artists whose legitimacy is based on their being creative geniuses whose aesthetic innovations represent a personal charisma and personal expression. With one far on the outside of the culinary field and one close to the core, these two ideal-types of food producers represent two modes of disinterestedness.

In sum, we have argued that gourmet food writing follows a larger contemporary cultural pattern of omnivorous cultural consumption. Contrary to assertions about a "post-Bourdieu" era, we contend that the omnivorous trend affirms and elaborates, rather than refutes, Bourdieu's

[38] See Rao, Monin, and Durand (2003, pp. 803–6) for an account of how nouvelle cuisine emerged in France to accommodate the antiauthoritarian zeitgeist sparked by the 1968 student uprising and subsequent critical movements in other cultural fields. Although their article is a study of nouvelle cuisine as a social movement, it is interesting to note that some of the characteristics of nouvelle cuisine (simplicity, chefs as creative innovators rather than technicians) can be read as a way for French cuisine to adapt to new omnivorous cultural norms.

assertions on the importance of everyday cultural forms—like food—for understanding the creation and maintenance of social status and distinction. The traditional and arbitrary boundaries between high and low culture have eroded under the pressure of democratic impulses, providing the cultural consumer who wishes to signal distinction both the opportunity to sample from a much broader cultural repertoire and the responsibility to make his or her tastes appear more democratically inclusive. While French food still enjoys considerable prestige, it is now accompanied by a large number of other culinary "genres." We argue that omnivorous tastes are informed by a broader ideology of democratic inclusion and speculate that the openness toward an increasing number of ethnic cuisines, particularly when they form part of the American immigrant experience, is associated with larger cultural and structural changes in U.S. society. Lamont's (1992, p. 146) argument that "the sheer ethnic diversity of the country has weakened the importance of signals of high cultural status that pertain to the Western definition of high culture" is supported by our data. In fact, knowledge of a number of ethnic cuisines is essential to culinary cultural capital, although our findings suggest that this knowledge is centered in Europe and North America, and does not substantially extend to the cuisines of most of the developing world.

When applied to food options as a whole, authenticity and exoticism are ways to valorize food that draw on deeper cultural values—the celebration of individuality, creativity, refinement, and professional expertise. These are positive traits that can be praised within cultural fields and credibly defended as reasonable ways to appreciate culture, unlike the previous arbitrary distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow, or between French and non-French food. The result is that the culinary omnivore maintains standards of distinction that are influenced by democratic ideologies, and represent a veritable culinary renaissance compared to snobbish French-food elitism. Yet within the omnivorous paradigm, overt class-status distinctions are displaced by a more subtle process where the construction of food quality allows cultural elites to have their cake and eat it too, articulating principles influenced by democratic ideologies, while maintaining their central place as arbitrators of omnivorous good taste.

APPENDIX A

Definition of Codes

Geographic referent: use of a place name in relation to food's production, distribution, or consumption.

Nonindustrial, small scale, or handmade: description of production practices as nonindustrial, small scale (e.g., family-run businesses and restaurants), or done by hand.

Organic or natural: description of production practices as organic, natural, or providing an image of naturalness (e.g., grass-fed cows).

Personal connection: use of a personal name in relation to food's production, distribution, or consumption.

Historical connection: reference to the traditional production and consumption of a food or cuisine at least 20 years prior to the present.

Rarity: explicit description of food as difficult or impossible for Americans to acquire.

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