

Introduction

DIS-MOI CE QUE TU MANGES,
JE TE DIRAI CE QUE TU ES

IT SEEMS ONLY RIGHT TO BEGIN a book on food by feasting on Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's ubiquitous aphorism. The phrase often has been simplified to "You are what you eat." But M. F. K. Fisher's translation, "Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are," is truer to the 1825 French original (3). The difference between the two renditions is of no small importance: following Brillat-Savarin, identity is not simply created in the process of eating—you are what you eat—but within the discursive structures surrounding it: *tell me* what you eat, and I shall *tell you* what you are.¹ Physiologically viewed, there is little difference between eating corn, caviar, or cockroaches; all three are potential suppliers of protein and calories. The differences between the edible and the inedible, the prestigious and the profane, and even the desirable and the disgusting are constructed by culturally contingent discourses. If eating were only about nutrition, we could have ourselves "fed and watered," as the philosopher Elizabeth Telfer ironically proposes, intravenously, while asleep (1). This would save us time and trouble and would probably be healthier, too. But, as the philosopher Deane Curtin states, "Food consumption habits are not simply tied to biological needs but serve to mark boundaries between social classes, geographical regions, nations, cultures, genders, life-cycle stages, religions and occupations, to distinguish rituals, traditions, festivals, seasons and times of day. Food structures what counts as a person in our culture" (4). Elspeth Probyn, more succinctly, writes: "We consume and ingest our identities" (17). How food and identity interact is determined by cultural narratives and the specific

historical moment: eating quinoa in 1965 versus 2015 has different meanings, and marks different subjectivities, although the food is the same. Food is given significance by how it is narratively framed, and by the significance we digest along with the calories.

Food instructions, discussions of meals in literature and media, images of dishes in films and paintings, and the many other narratives in which food figures prominently generate knowledge in which power relations are inscribed and produced. They are embedded in and play a part in the production of gendered and racialized subjects, as well as class, ethnic, regional, national, and religious ones. Brillat-Savarin's maxim rightfully does not claim that food choices reveal "who you are," but "*what* you are." Beyond mere personal tastes and preferences, food choices disclose an individual's station in society, making and marking his or her subject position. As food helps to nourish the individual, food discourses aid in producing the subject. They tell us how to properly perform as heterosexual men or women, members of middle-class culture, and Americans. They also offer the opportunity to resist being molded into the categories society prescribes.

Discourses produce experts, people invested with the power to decide what is right or not—the "I" in Brillat-Savarin's quote. Knowledge, privilege, and power intersect in food discourses, pronouncing who belongs by performing appropriately, and marginalizing and excluding those who do not from equal access to cultural, political, and financial resources. Conversely, food discourses have (albeit limited) democratizing potential: being raised in a culinary culture leaves everyone with a vast treasury of knowledge about the gender, race, and class implications of foodways² as well as table manners (of some kind), preparation procedures, regional and national food habits, and diverse clusters of information that may include botanical, zoological, nutritional, chemical, and historical fragments. When we talk about what we eat, we talk about what we are, and sometimes what we want to be. It is in our power to change our eating habits to fit them to what we aspire to become. Since all of us engage in eating and many of us in cooking, the power relations within food discourses are complex and notoriously volatile. As the ever-growing number of food blogs and restaurant review websites demonstrates, expertise can be more easily claimed here than in some other realms. But food blogs on the quest for the latest kick, the authentic hole in the wall, the newest ethnic cuisine to explore, can also contribute to cultural appropriation, the exoticization of cuisines, and the othering of immigrant foods.³ Examining how food advice interacts with gender, class, national, and ethnic

identity allows a glimpse into how knowledge creates privilege, tastes can marginalize, and how we endorse what we are, or are expected to be, in the act of eating and talking about food.

A TASTE OF POWER

Today we are immersed in food blogs and food memoirs, an increasingly fragmented cookbook market, an exploding number of cooking shows, food films, and food magazines, and an abundant accompanying scholarship. This makes it easy to forget that thirty years ago, food and its discourses were mostly neglected by academe (with a few famous exceptions, such as Mary Douglas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Sidney Mintz), since food was considered something biological, nonnegotiable, intake for the physical body rather than a pursuit of the mind. Food belonged to the private sphere and therefore was not of obvious scholarly interest; it was a topic slightly too mundane, too feminine, and (within the context of affluent societies) insufficiently political. But recent scholarship has enthusiastically endorsed the importance of food as a lens for approaching the past, or a gateway to studying culture. Building on and indebted to this scholarship, *A Taste of Power* thinks about how American culture has employed representations of food to create subject positions. Food advice in cookbooks and magazines has traditionally told readers not only how to eat well, but how to be Americans, how to be members of the middle class, and how to perform as heterosexual men and women. Dominant ideas of food have been reflected, and also often negotiated, in literature, film, TV shows, and art, helping to manifest and circulate the connection between food and identity. Analyzing a wide range of materials discussing food, *A Taste of Power* explores how these materials have engaged with the identity categories a historical moment produces. Expert discourses on food before World War I were mainly concerned with producing white, heterosexual, middle-class bodies, unmarked by debts to minority cultural heritages, and fully invested in the American project. What this actually entailed frequently changed and was by no means a stable ideological concept. While experts such as cookbook authors, home economists, and nutritional scientists commonly legitimized their own privileges when talking about food, the narrative strategies to do so, as well as the ideals pronounced, shifted in accordance with dominant ideas of gender, sexuality, and nationality. While pronouncing a right way to eat, it was always implicitly or

explicitly implied that there were wrong ways to eat, which were deemed irrational, unhealthy, or unvirtuous, and therefore made the noncompliant eater suspect. Men could be feminized by a yearning for food too fluffy, too light, or too colorful, or by the simple act of preparing food in a kitchen. White Southerners could put their racial privilege at risk by eating foods once considered part of their regional culture but later identified with African American food traditions, such as collard greens and chitterlings. Schoolchildren from immigrant families saw their Americanness called into question when they brought tortillas or dumplings for lunch.⁴ In this way, food discourses are not only normative but also exclusive, and, as they accompany the quotidian practices of eating and cooking, often seem innocuous and are invisible in their violence, but they are effective and enduring, as they are literally incorporated into the subject.

Rejecting the rules of polite, genteel, or scientific dining could serve as an act of resistance, as when Italian immigrants, despite the pressure of Progressive reformers and home economists to Americanize their culinary habits, continued to eat as Italian as was possible in their adopted country.⁵ But as Michel Foucault has argued, a simple view of oppression and resistance is inadequate. The power relations implicated in discourses that he defined as paradigmatic for modern, democratic, Western societies are not stable but constantly changing. They are volatile and comprehensible only within their unique historical and local context, since hegemonic discourses are constantly challenged by marginalized ones struggling for access or counter-hegemony (*History*, 95–97). Any power constellation is a fragile balance of these competing discourses, making complete oppression (or complete liberation) an impossibility. The notion of a clear-cut binary of dominance and resistance, or of a resistance that will not produce its own power effects, is in this model futile. Women authors of domestic advice have endorsed an ideology of separate spheres, but they used their publications for successful careers outside the home. They promoted women's education and defended women's intellectual capacity, but commonly thought of their female servants as stupid and incompetent. Male cooks, after losing authority over domestic cooking in the nineteenth century, rewrote themselves into the home kitchens of the twentieth, asserting their natural superiority over female cooks by claiming to be born gourmets. Health reformers arguing that individuals could improve their lives by choosing the right foods excluded ethnic cuisines from their menus and contributed to the imperial claims of American expansion by promoting exotic ingredients. These and many other examples in this

book illustrate that resistance and power are intimately intertwined, and that resistance is not always liberating, nor power necessarily oppressive.

This understanding of the connection between food and power opens up new fields of investigation for cultural studies. Kitchens and tables are now understood as prominent sites in the production of subjects through processes that are guided, reflected, and contested by a variety of food discourses ranging across cookbooks, household manuals, popular fiction, cooking shows, food blogs, and still-life paintings. Investigating these discourses emerging around food allows insights into the modes in which specific cultural contexts attempt to control the formation of national, gendered, and sexual subjectivities. *A Taste of Power* explores how food discourses, and especially expert advice, have helped to produce national identity in the early republic, masculine identities from the late 1800s to the 1970s, and lesbian subjectivities in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Thus it sheds new light on how we are told what to be when we are told what to eat.

This book owes its underlying understanding of how American culture employed food discourses in the production of subjectivities to the theoretical frameworks of Norbert Elias, Pierre Bourdieu, and, most prominently, Michel Foucault. Foucault defines power relations as the struggle of competing discourses that create forms of knowledge that discipline individuals into subjectivities. The complex relations of empowerment and disempowerment cannot be described as simply repressive, for simplistic concepts of power are not sufficient when analyzing cultural phenomena such as the complicated and contradictory texture of modern foodways. To understand the interplay of disciplining and resistance in modern democratic Western societies, Foucault suggests the concept of productive power, which he conceptualizes as complex and effective arrangements of power relations that are produced and administered by knowledge—the discursively regulated and institutionalized production of truth. He breaks with Enlightenment concepts that render power as institutional, negative, and merely oppressive, and the production of knowledge as opposed to it. In contrast, he defines power as

the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization

is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (*History*, 92–93)

This power is not stable but constantly challenged and administered by a continuously increasing number of discourses and practices contesting for hegemony. Some of them may crystallize as dominant and oppressive, and all of them are necessarily restrictive (since they govern what can and cannot be said and done), but they are also productive: they produce reality, since they control what is true, and they produce their subjects. Discourses determine what counts as a subject in certain contexts and which position the subject will hold. Individuals go through disciplining and normalizing practices regulated by discourses that allow them to recognize themselves and be recognized as subjects, but instead of being forced by outside repression, they adjust themselves by internalized disciplining mechanisms to perform what is expected of them.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that the concept of “sexuality” emerged with the rise of the bourgeoisie and served the stabilization of a status quo that privileged the middle class (superseding the concept of “blood” that served aristocratic rule). He explores how the discourses emerging around sexuality in the nineteenth century created categories such as homosexuals, perverts, and hysterics, and normalized in the abjection of these categories the (white) middle-class body. This, he claims, is only one example of how productive power works (“Subject,” 126). Another, I argue, is food. Food and the discourses around it are another decisive *dispositif* or apparatus coordinating disciplinary mechanisms in ways that normalize or marginalize subjects and steer social processes as well as individuals. Thinking about and engaging in sex are central aspects of ordinary people’s daily lives, with powerful constituting potential, since sex is tied to deep-seated biological drives yet highly regulated by law and custom. Thinking about, obtaining, and consuming food, even more basic and frequent concerns, are where the mental world of the individual meets the regulation of basic drives and functions by an elaborate apparatus of control. In the nineteenth century, scientific discourses began to regulate and govern the food intake of the American population, implementing ideas of eating “right”—which meant according to context, in conformity with etiquette, properly American, or to promote individual and national health. Other discourses around gender, race, and sex established who should and who should not engage in cooking in order to stabilize or avoid putting at risk socially recognized identity

categories. The twentieth century witnessed an explosion of food discourses that competed with one another but nonetheless ensured that eating today, too, marks one's class, race, and gender, and defines who belongs and who is excluded.

In Foucault's concept, nobody—neither an individual nor a group—“has” power. Power rather is understood as a network of discourses that has no center. All individuals are subjected to discourses, although some are privileged by them and some are not. Power relations organize themselves into effective strategies and eventually may crystallize into institutions, such as those that produce experts: schools, universities, medical establishments, psychiatric and legal associations, culinary institutes, or a genre such as cookbook writing. These experts are disciplined into administering the mechanisms that produce the subject. They have the authority to establish, maintain, and even—within limits—change the rules of the discourse, that is, of what can be said and what cannot be said, or what statements are considered to be reasonable or unreasonable, true or false. But the position of the experts, too, is unstable and subject to constant negotiation and change. Questioning the experts' authority challenges the power relations that are based on the knowledge they administer, and eventually might alter them.

Feminist scholars have produced a substantial body of work that criticizes Foucault's gender blindness.⁶ The discourses Foucault examined in his own work privileged white, male experts. Recently, some have pointed out that Foucault's ideas meet feminist thought on crucial points such as the suspicion of transcendental truth. Foucault's focus on historical, specific, and local knowledge, they argue, allows a valuable alternative. Scholars such as Susan Bordo have successfully found ways in which to complement Foucault's theories by investigating discourses producing gender and using his analytical instruments for feminist interpretations. Analyzing food discourses unveils how identity categories are implemented while opening up new perspectives on the categories themselves, as Elspeth Probyn argues: “As eating reactivates the force of identities, it also may enable modes of cultural analysis that are attentive to the categories with which we are now perhaps overly familiar: sex, ethnicity, wealth, poverty, geopolitical location, class and gender. Eating . . . makes these categories matter again: it roots actual bodies within these relations” (9).

Bordo, and, to a lesser degree, Probyn, have introduced Foucault's power concept to studies of food while critically reformulating the subject as a gendered and racialized one. But so far, the disciplining mechanisms in food

discourses and practices as an important step in the construction of subjectivity have not been thoroughly investigated. Nor has the potential of resistance within foodways been systematically and critically examined. Throughout most of his work, Foucault identifies scholarly discourses as the locus of the specific form of modern power that uses truth to gain authority and govern its subjects. Discourses, bodies of knowledge that are organized around the concept of universal truth, serve the legitimization of power relations in an increasingly secular age, when the divine is no longer deemed satisfactory as a mode to explain the world. Discourses implement and authorize disciplinary mechanisms that minimize the deployment of force but allow a greater control of the individual, since they transfer the task of control onto the individuals themselves. The examples Foucault focused on in his work are prime sites of the exercise of discipline principally in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the prison, the military, the factory, the school. But clearly these institutions did not reach all individuals equally. Most women, for example, were excluded from these places in this period, or, if admitted—as in the case of factories—only in subordinate positions. These exclusions and subordinations were not arbitrary but based on ideas of femininity that claimed that women were weaker, less effective, less rational, and less intelligent, but possessed greater moral capacities. Their exclusion from these institutions helped to ensure that such clichés were perpetuated. Foucault focused on institutions that disciplined mainly men; disciplinary institutions and practices that regulated gender outside the immediate space of paid labor and the state need to be investigated. Looking for the production of subjects marked as male or female before the twentieth century, one can usefully turn the gaze to focus on other sites and other discourses, namely kitchens and cookbooks, that constituted and regulated the “women’s sphere” as a space in which femininity was produced—and then required new discursive strategies to manage men’s involvement in cooking in historically contingent contexts.

Food discourses present a body of knowledge based on the concept of truth. They govern practices and human behavior. Like the scholarly discourses Foucault analyzes, they, too, are authoritative, normalizing, and disciplining. Cooking advice traditionally not only spread ideas about how to prepare dishes properly and healthfully (with reference to medical authority), but also circulated instructions on how to set tables, how to organize a household, how to treat servants, how to raise a family, and how to contribute to one’s community and nation. They therefore served the normalization and

legitimization of proper white and middle-class womanhood and manhood, American citizenship, heterosexual marriage, and the nuclear family. Recipes told readers from the late nineteenth century onward exactly how to handle food. Written in the imperative, giving their orders in detailed steps, they remind the reader of the military manuals Foucault quotes in *Discipline and Punish* (on how to handle a rifle properly [153]). Yet these instructions were not mere commands. The word “recipe” is derived from the Latin *recipere*, to receive. (Indeed, until the mid-nineteenth century, recipes were called “receipts” in the United States.) The recipe becomes a recipe not through the act of being given, but through the act of being taken, executed, and eventually embodied. While the reader conventionally is not overtly acknowledged in, say, a novel (aside from fleeting references to the “dear reader” in Victorian fiction), he or she is always directly and repeatedly addressed by the recipe and called into action.⁷ The imperative structure explicitly invites readers to engage with the text instead of passively consuming it. Sometimes the authority of the author is implicitly questioned: since recipes are derived from oral tradition, they imply a concept of authorship distinct from written tradition. In cookbooks and other texts featuring recipes, recipes are often named after their “authors” (a person, a country, a region, or an ethnic group) to identify their (often mythical) “origin.” This can transform the writer of a cookbook into a compiler or archivist, and the cookbook into a communal project. The identity-constructing qualities of food can be encapsulated within the recipe. As the reader is invited to participate, the recipe becomes a textual conversation over the metaphorical and actual breaking of bread. Recipes can pass on traditions, overcoming distances of time and space as well as differences between groups, taking part in the invention of traditions that can help to establish the story of the nation, the boundaries of the masculine community, the sisterhood of non-hegemonic sexualities. Food discourses are an important site of power relations and a site of dominance and resistance within the establishment and performance of identities in daily life.

Considering culinary discourses as sites that produced power-knowledge while granting disenfranchised groups access to expertise amends Foucault’s representation of power relations in important ways. At the same time, Foucault’s framework allows an understanding of nationality, sexuality, and masculinity as contested fields of knowledge and power that are not static but constantly changing, and not solely produced by political, medical, or scientific discourses, but from below and in the everyday. Equally important for

my work is Foucault's critical understanding of resistance as discourses that compete with hegemonic ones without necessarily offering more just, or more liberating, alternatives.

Norbert Elias was important for this work, as he explored how instructions around food and eating intend to have social impact. This paved the way to look at representations of food as discourses. In his examination of the evolution of etiquette in early modern times, Elias demonstrated in *The Civilizing Process* (1939) that table manners can produce social order, whether on a small scale, when "civilizing" a member of court, or on a large scale, by structuring the distribution of political power within the nation-state. Based on his readings of courtly etiquette guides, Elias lays bare the political agendas in advice literature and their impact on the subject as well as on society. The advent of courtly culture brought about the implementation of stricter rules of behavior at the table, since self-restraint increasingly became the mark of social distinction and a sign of commitment to the royal family and the centralized nation-state. Refined manners signified the individual's closeness to the center of power, the royal court. Constantly changing rules of etiquette demanded continuous self-improvement and distinguished those in the know from recent arrivals or occasional visitors. Elias outlines an increasing individualization and implementation of hierarchy in the process of refining disciplinary mechanisms. Here, too, it is a previously unsuspected space—the space of the dinner table—where power relations are negotiated and incorporated.

Like Foucault, Elias does not consider gender or race in his analysis. *A Taste of Power* expands on his work by looking at food advice in a democratic society, where it becomes a biopolitical tool that can have many, often conflicting, agendas. "Biopolitics" is a Foucauldian term to describe the regulation of populations not only through government policy but also through the more intangible, yet deeply powerful, development of cultural practices and media representations in everyday life. As newly independent Americans made the transition from being subjects of the British empire to citizens of a young republic, food discourses were a key way that the cross-cutting debates in the public sphere became intangibly linked to private everyday practices, which allowed limited participation by educated white women—and in some rare cases African Americans, and, later, immigrants and residents of initially disfavored regions—to join in the construction of a new nation. Writers and artists who took up culinary themes promoted what they hoped would be the right ingredients to constitute good citizens embracing the right national

values. If Elias found political power in aristocratic table manners, I find political disputes in the development of a republican cuisine pitting New England's claim to hegemonic representation of the national culture against counternarratives from the South; a democratic agrarian ideal concealing the defense of white middle-class privilege; and proponents of imperial expansion voting with their choice of recipes and ingredients against advocates of isolationism who patrolled the boundaries of acceptably "American" foods. They all have in common the idea that self-discipline and the regulation of bodily functions are crucial to citizenship and building a successful nation.

Similarly important to my understanding of food's significance to the social order is Pierre Bourdieu, according to whom the location of individuals in social space is not determined by their economic capital alone but also by their "cultural capital" (symbolic capital that is based on knowledge in a field that is socially widely valued). Like economic capital, cultural capital produces its own inequalities, as it is unevenly distributed and expressed through "habitus" (values, beliefs, and lifestyles held in common by certain social groups and realized in the individual as mindset and embodiment). Cultural capital can translate into social and economic profit. It can also make up for a lack of financial resources in terms of social recognition. Bourdieu's understanding of social space yields insight into why individuals willingly subject themselves to biopolitical regimes and regulate their appetites through learned behavior: because they expect to derive social advantages. Culinary instructions provide their readers with cultural competence, or what Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979) calls a "cultural code" that presents a frame of knowledge through which individuals can read and understand works of art and the full significance of food (3). Food instructions provide the knowledge or the code that allows individuals to accumulate culinary cultural capital (or "taste"). They educate their readers in the ability to transform raw ingredients into cooked foods for sustenance, with the promise of improving their social status. Because food choices demand some financial resources, but not nearly as much as transatlantic travel, real estate, or expensive jewelry, I argue that food has been a favored vehicle to acquire middle-class cultural capital and habitus in American history. While many social groups have developed a specific food habitus, food instructions since the early nineteenth century specifically targeted members of social groups that had some freedom in their food choices but insufficient resources to leave their kitchen to a highly trained chef, or have their tastes educated by frequent overseas travel and

visits to fine restaurants. Together with recipes that befit the financial resources, studied taste, and knowledge base of a wide range of middle-class readers, texts provided values and instructions on proper embodiments (for instance in the form of table etiquette) that went far beyond nutritional advice.

As cultural codes constantly shift and change—not only because different social groups struggle for hegemony but also because members within social groups compete for political and cultural leadership—cultural capital needs to evolve whenever it has been acquired by too many. A taste widely shared quickly becomes the epitome of tastelessness. New instructions, reacting to the changed ideological context, are constantly in demand.

Bourdieu developed his concepts within the social context of France in the 1960s and 1970s, so his work should not be seamlessly translated to any particular historical moment within the United States. In Bourdieu's view, the tastemaking culture is always upper-class, and elite tastes are the most desirable to members of all classes, although limited resources or solidarity with one's own class does not allow everyone to act on that desire. But historical examples show that elite culture did not always dictate American tastes. As Mark McWilliams has demonstrated, and I will argue later in this work, in early America, middle-class authors moved strategically away from elite tastes, which were linked to European decadence and British imperialism, and embraced simplicity as a marker of genuine American taste (7). As the simplicity of republican cuisine was connoted with virtue, the endorsement of simple tastes became an argument for claiming cultural hegemony for middle-class tastes. Similar strategic movements away from elite culture can be seen in other moments of American food culture: In the early twentieth century, middle-class authors borrowed from nostalgic imagery of the ways of life of the cowboy and the soldier to embrace campfire cooking and the simplest meals as especially manly, after middle-class masculinity came under fire for being too soft and sedentary. In the 1960s, an African American middle class employed soul food, an idealized version of poor Southern foodways, as a political instrument. In these examples, taste is still used as a marker of distinction, but in ways that transgress class hierarchies and the idea of upper-class ways as unquestionably the most desirable.

Inspired scholars of food studies have discussed the history and production of American food and its excluded or appropriated other (food marked as ethnic, foreign, or exotic), generating a comprehensive body of scholarship on what it has meant to “eat American” at different moments in time. Their

work has greatly influenced mine.⁸ *A Taste of Power* begins by examining popular ways of thinking about an American cuisine from the Revolution to the early 1840s, a time in which nation building and the question of national character were at the forefront of public discussions. It was also a time in which only a few American cookbooks had yet been published, domestic magazines were not so prevalent (they started to appear in the 1830s), and fine dining remained largely a private pleasure, as restaurant culture began to develop only slowly in the 1820s. Exploring key texts, including letters, song lyrics, poetry, cookbooks, and still-life paintings, the first part of *A Taste of Power*, “‘For All Grades of Life’: The Making of a Republican Cuisine,” explores early attempts by American authors to define a genuine national cuisine that would help set the new nation apart from the British identity many Americans took for granted before 1776, and would help integrate its many parts into a coherent whole. Early on, at the time of the Revolution, corn became a political instrument for self-definition and resistance, and laid the foundation for a republican cuisine. In the first cookbooks published after independence, women, who were excluded from most political decision making, wielded the genre to claim citizenship and a political voice in the young republic.

But the notion of a republican cuisine is not static, and it evolved within changing cultural contexts and public debates. In the early nineteenth century, a rising middle class evoked an imaginary settler cuisine to define themselves as makers of American taste and harbingers of American virtue, distancing themselves from European decadence and corruption. Middle-class female authors used cookbooks to inscribe themselves into the nation-building project. They used their culinary authority to publish political commentary, speak in favor of the education of women, and shape national character. They simultaneously promoted middle-class lifestyles over upper-class lifestyles as truly American, and erased ethnic and regional differences to create the image of a homogenous national culture. Health advocates in the 1830s not only promoted whole grains, but also presented new ideas of what constituted citizenship by connecting the individual body with the nation’s well-being. Casting white, middle-class women as gatekeepers of the family’s health, they also created a politically meaningful (if limited and contested) place for them in the fabric of the nation. As “‘For All Grades of Life’” shows, these different approaches to defining American cooking supported existing power relations as they promoted Anglo-Saxon cooking and Northern foodways to assert the preeminence of New England culture in the

United States, presenting a self-image of the nation as a democratic society and eliding any concerns regarding social stratification, a franchise limited by wealth and gender, or slavery. In the pursuit of creating a homogenous nation, ethnic difference was recognized only in the most limited ways and only if thoroughly neutralized and appropriated. But in the late 1820s and 1830s, texts began to appear that contested the hegemonic representation of U.S. culinary culture by promoting regional or cosmopolitan cooking. Far from being simply liberating acts of resistance, some of these texts produced their own normative narratives, for instance by normalizing slavery. Conversely, the (northern and free) African American author Robert Roberts argued that servants could make their professional skills a source of pride and independence, undermining the idea of a classless society so frequently put forward in cookbooks of his time. What emerges is a fresh portrait of the richly complex national debates and simmering sectional conflicts that were carried out not only in the halls of Congress and the editorial pages of leading newspapers, but in cookbooks, short stories, and artworks of this period.

Many valuable scholarly works of the past few decades have thought about the intersection of food and gender in interesting and innovative ways.⁹ But traditionally, gender analyses in the wider realm of food studies have concentrated on femininity alone; rarely have works explored how masculinity is defined by food discourses.¹⁰ The second part of *A Taste of Power*, “‘Wolf in Chef’s Clothing’: Manly Cooking and Negotiations of Ideal Masculinity,” goes further by examining formations of normative masculinities from the 1890s to the 1970s in cooking instructions and literature.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, women gained authority over domestic cooking and publications that advised the domestic cook. At the turn to the twentieth century, images of manly cooking emerged, not only in cookbooks directed at men, but also in literature and popular culture. In the image of the solitary hero frying flapjacks over the campfire, or the hard-boiled detective subsisting on liverwurst sandwiches, authors expressed an ideal masculinity centered on radical independence from women. But not all food advice directed at men promoted simplicity. In the 1940s and 1950s the “gourmet” became another prominent image to represent men in the kitchen. While at first glance a gender-neutral concept, the gourmet was embraced by men’s magazines such as *Esquire* and *Playboy* as the embodiment of a new masculine ideal, the sophisticated cosmopolitan and sexual conqueror.

The misogyny of some of these texts is striking. Male cookery often shielded itself from the effeminizing potential of entering the feminine sphere of the

kitchen by proclaiming that women lacked artistry in one of the tasks most closely associated with them, or else posited women as quarryers of the domesticated hunt—one carried out with cooking utensils and yielding erotic spoils. Cookbooks written by African American men that entered the market in the 1960s worked differently, promoting the concept of soul food. The framing of a politicized, nationalist cuisine made defensive references to sexual conquest and campfire unnecessary to preserve masculine capital in a domestic cooking context, but soul food produced its own moments of gendered power. Beyond offering a detailed analysis of the emergence and varieties of the male amateur cook in American mainstream culture, the discussions in “Wolf in Chef’s Clothing” provide insights into how to conceptualize masculinity in the twentieth century and how to theorize changes in gender norms from the perspective of instructional discourses regulating the everyday.

Traditionally, cookbooks and other food writing have promoted heteronormative structures, directing readers not only in how to cook, but also in how to conduct their relationships, shape their expectations, and form their families. The final part of *A Taste of Power*, “The Difference Is Spreading: Recipes for Lesbian Living,” takes up the highly commodified connection between food and sexuality, investigating how authors excluded from the heteronormative economy, promoted by cooking instructions, reinscribed themselves into culinary discourses.

Implicitly, much of the work on food and gender has discussed the heteronormativity of cooking advice. A few scholars working on food and sexuality have gone beyond looking at sexuality as a by-product of gender; Julia Ehrhardt has called for a queering of food studies.¹¹ This section explores strategies in which texts have disturbed the implicit and explicit sexual norms cooking instructions traditionally served, and discusses how literature, memoirs, and cookbooks have tried to construct alternative sexual subjectivities.

Since the late nineteenth century, cooking discourses have played a role in normalizing the notion of the nuclear family and promoted the idea that cooking is a woman’s way to express love for her husband and children. Women who loved women and wrote about it appropriated this image for their own goals. Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons* (1914), a text firmly established in the modernist canon, worked with echoes of, and grammatical references to, household manuals, simultaneously undermining their authoritative quality and using the evoked images to create another economy of desire, a “household with a difference.” *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* (1954) in a number of different ways corresponded with Stein’s work. Toklas mixed

recipes with autobiographical writing, creating a text narrating her life together with Stein that did not follow the mandatory heterosexual economy of desire traditionally ascribed to women by cookbooks.

A generation later, authors of memoirs, short stories, and cookbooks focusing on same-sex relationships began to use food imagery to describe relationships, heartbreak, and the experience of being marginalized or rejected. Working with a practically unexamined body of texts—cookbooks and cooking blogs directed at a lesbian audience—the final section of “‘The Difference Is Spreading’” shows how the texts reappropriate the trope of cooking as an expression of a woman’s love and attempt to avoid stereotypical depictions of lesbians by employing a number of different strategies. In the process, the texts create new normative expectations for their readership. Thus the analysis shows the challenge of renegotiating subjectivities in non-exclusionary terms.

A Taste of Power investigates constellations of historical food discourses in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, examining a broad corpus of texts, among them newspaper and magazine articles, novels, cookbooks, autobiographies, short stories, domestic manuals, poems, paintings, and blogs, all of them dealing explicitly with food. These varied ingredients from two centuries of American culinary culture yield an argument that food practices and discourses are decisively implicated when it comes to the production of national, regional, racial, sexual, gender, and class identities, as well as the limits they enforce. Power relations are at work when we eat and cook and when we talk, read, or hear about eating and cooking. We emerge through this process and can resist against it. Analyzing representations of food within their specific cultural contexts therefore helps us understand how we become what we are, who is telling us how to be, and where we stand in the food chain.