

# DIGITAL DINING DISCOURSE: AUTHENTICITY ONLINE

by

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## ABSTRACT

ALEXANDRIA LEE-ANNE ANDRE: Digital Dining Discourse: Authenticity Online  
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In an era marked by globalization and digital connectivity, the consumption of culinary content has undergone significant transformation. This study delves into the intricate dynamics of authenticity within the realm of online culinary discourse, focusing on the evaluation of creators by everyday users on YouTube. Drawing from previous research that explores cosmopolitanism, gender, race, and cultural identity, this research sheds light on how authenticity is perceived and negotiated on the social media platform, YouTube.

Through an analysis of user interactions and comments, the study explores three distinct dimensions of authenticity evaluation: cosmopolitan authenticity, social and situational authenticity, and home authenticity. Cosmopolitan authenticity reveals how users draw upon their cultural experiences to discern the genuineness of culinary content, reflecting an increasingly diverse and omnivorous culinary landscape. Conversely, social and situational authenticity exposes the pervasive influence of gender and racial stereotypes in shaping evaluations of food creators, illuminating the complex interplay between identity and culinary legitimacy. Lastly, home authenticity emphasizes the impact of personal experiences and familial traditions in defining authenticity criteria, highlighting the role of digital platforms in cultural preservation and revival.

By shifting the focus from professional spheres to everyday online interactions, this study sheds light on our understanding of consumer behavior and offers practical implications for content creators, policymakers, and scholars in the fields of food studies and digital culture. By highlighting the significance of user perspectives across diverse culinary contexts and

geographies, this research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on cultural diversity, representation, and authenticity in the digital era.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the wake of increased globalization, artificiality, and homogenization (Bouymaj and Pereira 2022), there has been a rise in the consumption of high and low status cuisines and an increased demand for authentic culinary experiences. Previous research on the intersection of food and culture has predominantly centered on professional discussions surrounding food, delving into the experiences of both experienced consumers and professional chefs. Johnson and Baumann (2007) observed that gourmet food writers often invoke authenticity to legitimate certain foods as worthy high-status cultural options. Authenticity serves as a tool for differentiation, with certain qualities of a food—such as its geographic origins, simplicity in preparation and ingredients, association with specific communities, or connection to a historical or ethnocultural tradition—being highlighted to frame it as authentic (Johnston and Baumann, 2007). Such attributes associated with authenticity also encompass perceptions about the creators and the cuisine and how they fit into traditional hierarchies. In another case, Gualtieri (2021) analyzed Michelin guide reviews and interviewed acclaimed chefs, revealing a tendency among chefs and critics to disproportionately evaluate non-white restaurants through the lens of ambiguous and unreliable perceptions of authenticity.

Much of our understanding of the authenticity of food revolves around its relevance within professional spheres, whereas less is known about its role among everyday consumers. Outside of professional spaces, much of the discourse among ordinary users is happening online. In these spaces, how do everyday users evaluate the authenticity of content and how is this influenced by the ways they personally connect to the content and how the internet allows for omnivorous participation in cultural traditions? New media forms, including participatory media, have the potential to disrupt these hierarchies. YouTube, for example, provides a distinctive

social media platform that seemingly democratizes content creation and consumption, allowing anyone to participate. Creators can choose to opt in to receiving feedback on their videos from users and the public and the anonymous nature of YouTube's comments section provides a unique avenue to explore how ordinary users perceive and evaluate the content they engage with. This study aims to explore how discourse on YouTube from everyday users reinforce our current understanding of who is viewed as an authentic food creator but to also explore how it may differ from what we know about high status consumers and reveal different types of authenticity perceptions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Rise in Cultural Omnivorousness and Cosmopolitanism*

Traditional research on food and culinary behaviors has centered on people's consumption of perceived high-status cuisines, namely French cuisine. However, since the latter half of the twentieth century, with the rise of globalization, people are increasingly seeking out a mixed consumption of both traditionally high-status and low-status cuisines, referred to as cultural omnivorousness or cultural cosmopolitanism. More specifically, cultural cosmopolitanism is understood as a disposition to embrace cultural differences (Cappeliez and Johnston 2013) and cultural omnivorousness suggests that consumers are expressing higher status by consuming both high and low brow products (Johnston and Baumann 2010). People's food preferences are increasingly leaning towards foods that are seen as exotic, new, and authentic. High status is given to foods that are connected to a location or tradition and low status is increasingly given to foods that are perceptually inauthentic and unexotic, like foods that are mass produced and lack a connection to a specific place (Johnston et al 2012; Johnston and Baumann 2010). Even though tastes are shifting to include a more diverse array of cuisines, research shows that a taste hierarchy still exists that values European food over non-European foods and the criteria used to evaluate what is authentic is not equally applied to all cuisines.

Gualtieri (2021) conducted a study that examined the criteria that chefs and critics use when evaluating restaurants and how ethno-racial inequality affects these criteria and they found that fields of cultural reproduction, such as restaurants, are racialized. They found that white cultural producers are celebrated disproportionately compared to non-white producers. Cultural intermediaries, or gatekeepers, employ criteria to evaluate cultural products according to shared standards (Childress and Nault 2018) and through an analysis of Michelin guide reviews and

interviews with renowned chefs, they find that food products are evaluated based on 1) technique, 2) creativity, and 3) authenticity. The three logics were not applied equally to all cuisines and restaurants associated with non-white cuisines, such as Mexican or Chinese cuisine, were disproportionately assessed by the logic of authenticity where diners developed expectations outside the context of fine dining at either inexpensive takeout restaurants or home, supporting the notion that non-white cuisines are systematically devalued by the logic of authenticity in this way.

Another study by Johnston and Baumann (2007) explores how gourmet food can increasingly come from a broad range of cuisines and is no longer limited to just French cuisine but there is still a taste hierarchy that is partially informed by perceptions of authenticity. They analyze gourmet food journals to better understand how foods are legitimated as high-status cultural symbols. They find that authenticity and exoticism are the two frames used to valorize a limited number of foods and the four qualities they identified to frame a food as authentic are *geographic specificity*, *simplicity*, *personal connections*, and *historicism*. Through *geographic specificity*, linking foods to a specific place is an effective way to set food apart from the “inauthentic” mainstream. *Simplicity* refers to food that is produced through handmade, non-industrial, small-scale methods and is simple in the sense that it “respects the purity of simple, high-quality ingredients” (Johnston and Baumann 2007 pg 181). *Personal connections* refer to connecting a food to a creative talent or family tradition and is a way to distance a food from faceless mass-produced foods. Lastly, *historicism* refer to connecting food to a specific historical or ethnocultural tradition to show that the food is longstanding and not a food fad. Johnston and Baumann (2007) recognize that although authentic foods are often portrayed as more democratic, authentic foods in fine dining are very exclusionary due to the extreme geographic specificity

and production techniques. This means that for diners to seek out authentic culinary experiences, they need the cultural and economic capital that allows them to travel and educate themselves on specialized food knowledge. Those without these resources are thus often excluded from authentic dining experiences and related discussions that are concentrated primarily in middle to upper class realms.

In a similar manner, Carroll and Wheaton (2009) analyzed historical texts to count the frequency of articles containing words related to authenticity and restaurants to demonstrate the rise in concern for authenticity. They also found 4 different interpretations of authenticity used when describing restaurants including type authenticity, craft authenticity, moral authenticity, and idiosyncratic authenticity. Like Johnston and Baumann (2007), Carroll and Wheaton (2009) found that articles that write about restaurant authenticity also evaluate these establishments based on narrow definitions of authenticity. First, type authenticity, which refers to the categorization of restaurants based on specific genres with culturally defined expectations about what establishments should look like and what kind of food they should serve. Culture is one way that restaurants are defined, such as categorizing restaurants as Japanese, Chinese, or Mexican. Second, there is craft authenticity, which focuses on the preparation and outcome of the food and emphasizes the importance of craftsmanship, expertise, skills, and technique. Restaurants who emphasize craft authenticity often highlight the use of high-quality tools and ingredients. Third is moral authenticity, which emphasizes the values, ethics and beliefs of the individuals or organizations behind a food establishment. They desire to be seen as sincere, responsible, and committed to specific values. And fourth, there is idiosyncratic authenticity, which highlights the value of individuality, history, and stories that connect consumers to a deeper understanding of the past. Again, this article demonstrates how dining establishments are

evaluated by food writers, but still leaves a gap in the knowledge for how everyday users evaluate the authenticity of cuisine.

Current research on cuisine and the role of authenticity and legitimacy in food reflects the rise in value on the consumption of a variety of cuisines, including non-white cuisines. However, conversations about these consumption behaviors center primarily around the voices of high-status culinary figures such as gourmet food writers, restaurant owners, and cosmopolitan/omnivorous foodies. Less is known about how everyday users interact with food content and their perceptions of authenticity and legitimacy. Cosmopolitan authenticity is a term that I use to capture this variety of high-status practices of culinary distinction that are associated with foodies, food critics, and restaurateurs.

### *Social and Situational Authenticity*

Sociologists of culture often highlight ways in which social characteristics like race and gender interact with processes of categorization and evaluation. Perceptions of what is deemed authentic denote symbolic boundaries that separate the real from the fake and schemas about race and gender are two components that oftentimes influence the ways people perceive authenticity.

In a study by Grazian (2004), for example, they demonstrated how authenticity is an idea that cultural producers must invent or manufacture to serve as a convincing representation of reality by exploring how Chicago blues clubs strategically perform authenticity for patrons that desire performances that are perceptually authentic. The presentation of authenticity is orchestrated by having performers who conform to the dominant stereotype of a Chicago blues singer- black, working class, born, and raised in Mississippi, Chicago, or Memphis, and sings about love and life struggles. Race is a big component of this presentation of authenticity and why only black performers are usually hired. Patrons desire performances that are viewed as

culturally authentic, but they also have predetermined expectations about what an authentic performance of Chicago blues should look like. For performers to be successful, they present themselves in ways that align with patrons' expectations, even if it is largely informed by stereotypes.

In a similar vein, a study by Johnston, Rodney, and Chong (2014) explored how cultural ideals of race, class, and gender are reproduced through different types of celebrity chef personas based on an analysis of their cookbooks. They find that chef personas are highly gendered, as well as classed and racialized in ways that “limits who can be seen as an authentic representation of a particular persona type” (pg 20). They find evidence for three types of feminine personas, the homebodies, home stylists, and the pin-ups, and all three personas framed cooking in the context of a domestic and caring activity rather than an activity for creative culinary innovation. For the feminine personas, their authority is linked to their womanhood and their ability to make domestic work appear easy, stylish, and sexually attractive. The male chef personas, the self-made man, the gastrosexual, and the culinary maverick, had more freedom in their ability to be creative, innovative, and are more likely to present themselves as hard working, professional, and cultural producers. Additionally, racial differences were found in that white male chefs have greater flexibility when it comes to occupying high status roles than black food personalities given that only one male persona was tied to black chef, the self-made man. This study shows how race, class, and gender work together to reproduce status inequalities in the food world in ways that impact who can be viewed as an authentic representation of certain personas.

As research suggests, perceptions of authenticity are often linked to certain status characteristics or fixed categories, including ethno-racial identity and gender. There are also interpretive categories such as skills or other traits that play a role in perceptions of authenticity.

Situational authenticity captures cases where someone may not match the perceived fit of a particular group but can still be accepted as an authentic member through a strategic emphasis on interpretive traits that align with the features of the in-group. In a study by Harkness (2011) they examined the underground hip hop scene in Chicago to explore how outsiders (white, suburban, women) negotiate participation within a subculture that is primarily urban, black, and male. When an outsider seeks to participate within a subculture that deems them inauthentic, they will emphasize the more interpretive categories and de-emphasize the fixed categories. Situational authenticity occurs when a person makes claim to realness that emphasizes certain categories within the normative cluster of conditions that govern authenticity, while downplaying others. Harkness (2011) found that when white suburban rappers wanted to fit into a rapper subculture, they downplayed the relevance of race and upbringing and emphasized skills and being true to oneself, often blurring the distinctions within fixed categories. In this study, Harkness was not talking directly to rap fans in Chicago but just observed reactions to the performers and their characteristics.

A lens that can further help us understand how situational authenticity works is understanding cultural tariffing as coined by Oshotse, Berda, and Goldberg (2024). They explore why some acts of cultural boundary crossing are considered appropriation whereas others are not. They argue that perceptions of cultural appropriation formed in response to the rise in omnivorousness that makes cultural boundary crossing a form of capital. They find that people disapprove of boundary crossing if they feel it devalues or extracts value at the expense of the target culture. Boundary crossing is applicable when the adopter is conventionally understood as an outsider. Boundary crossings that are seen as appropriative often are directed at high status individuals, specifically when dominant individuals borrow cultural elements associated with

minority groups. For this study, I aim to explore the extent to which social characteristics are used to create conventional or stereotypical versions of authenticity or how the importance of those characteristics might be challenged or downplayed by creators who deviate from these social characteristics. This set of themes will be captured by the thematic group of codes referred to as *social and situational authenticity*. This refers to how social characteristics can be used to recreate or reproduce assumptions about authenticity based on gender or ethno-racial identity but also noting that these traits do not necessarily have to be present for someone to be viewed as authentic.

### *Participatory Culture, Reviving Culture, and Transnationalism*

Through social media, everyday users are increasingly interacting with food content online. With social media platforms, such as YouTube, the prevalence of food related video content has become one of the biggest subsections of the internet, including recipe tutorials, mukbangs, food tours, “what I eat in a day” videos, among other types of food related content. Social media has created a participatory culture where both foodie content creators and foodie consumers interact in bi-directional ways that have not existed before. Participatory culture, coined by media scholar Henry Jenkins, refers to a cultural environment where individuals actively engage and participate in the creation, circulation, and interpretation of media content (Fuchs 2014). This framework suggests that people are not passive consumers of media, but they are also producers, remixers, and distributors of content which has been facilitated by the internet and social media, making it easier for individuals to create and consume content (Fuchs 2014).

Comments, also referred to as “social information” (Moller et al. 2021) plays a crucial role on social media platforms by providing insight into users' thoughts, opinions, and

experiences. Understanding these comments has been a focus point of several studies that aim to explore the attitudes of users. YouTube has garnered substantial popularity, and as of 2019, with 73% of the US adult population as users, it has surpassed the popularity of Facebook and Twitter (Kanchan and Gaidhane 2023).

Social media and its allowance for users to engage in discussions on various topics and express their opinions has necessitated a need to understand how commenters influence and are influenced by one another. Hsueh et al (2015) conducted a study where participants read an online article and then were exposed to either anti-prejudice comments or prejudice comments. The findings showed that exposure to prejudiced comments, as opposed to anti-prejudice, influenced respondents to post more prejudiced comments themselves. Similar results were found by Shi et al (2014) who found that when shown a smoking related PSA, subjects that were exposed to positive comments perceived the video as more effective than those who were exposed to negative comments.

The literature suggests that comments accompanying a YouTube video will play a significant role in shaping the user's experience and attitudes towards the content, further strengthening our reasoning for seeking a better understanding of how everyday users respond to specific content. Food tutorial content has become a huge part of the YouTube platform as a place to learn about different cultures and understanding the evaluations that everyday users make online will afford a unique type of discourse that is not seen among the typical high status foodie consumer and may reveal a different type of authenticity evaluation that differs from the types of authenticity that high status consumers rely on to determine what's authentic.

While current research on cuisine and the role of authenticity and legitimacy in food is centered around the voices of high-status culinary figures such as gourmet food writers,

restaurant owners, and cosmopolitan/omnivorous foodies, you do not necessarily have to be part of one of these high-status groups to have opinions about food or food creators. A subset that is often disregarded in foodie research is the voices of ordinary people who do not always seek ways to express high status opinions but more so desire familial resonance and cultural comfort.

The internet's ability to disseminate information around the world has prompted several studies to highlight the internet's role in the reviving and preservation of culture (Jang & Ha, 2015). The growing diaspora of people has increased the desire for access to cultural content to “make home materially” (Lee 2018). The utilization of digital media to bridge geographical distances and foster a connection to one's roots is exemplified in a variety of studies. Lee (2018) interviewed Koreans living in the US who ended their cable subscriptions in favor of streaming services and found that Koreans preferred streaming services because they had more access to Korean TV. Similar findings were found by other researchers. For example, Bonini (2011) found that the media connected Filipino migrants in Milan to their “sphere of origin” and “recreated the warmth of domesticity”. Walsh (2006) found that British expatriates in Australia created a sense of home by watching British comedy shows. Marino (2017) explored how migrant Italians living in London use digital media, such as skype, to feel closer to home by video chatting with family to virtually create commensality and food preparation. A prominent example of how YouTube content can resonate with a user and revive culture is with Michelle Zauner, a Korean American musician and author of memoir *Crying in H-Mart*. Here she explores the complicated relationship with her mother and Zauner’s own struggles connecting to her Korean identity. In the book, she has a chapter called *Maangchi and Me* where she talks about how following Korean YouTuber and food creator, Maangchi, video tutorials online helped Zauner create

Korean food that connected her to her culture and bond with her dying Korean mother as Zauner helped care for her.

I expect that while my findings will reflect some of the current research on cosmopolitan consumers and the importance of social characteristics of creators in evaluations of food , I also anticipate that a different type of authenticity may emerge in which users evaluate online food content based on their connection to family and their cultural identity in ways that are more personal and less status seeking than the cosmopolitan user. I use the term *home authenticity* to capture instances where users are not seeking to advertise high-status behaviors but rather are connecting to the content based on family, language, or other personal cultural connections. This is one way to potentially judge authenticity that lies outside of the typical forms of legitimacy and authenticity that research has focused on previously.

My research seeks to answer the question of how online users evaluate the authenticity of online food creators. More specifically I wish to explore how user evaluations reflect the types of authenticity captured through cosmopolitan authenticity, social and situational authenticity, and home authenticity.

## METHODS

### *Cases*

To address the research questions, I selected 4 cases to explore how online celebrity chef content may be perceived and how it may vary based on the identity of the creator. I use 4 chefs who specialize in Mexican cuisine. This sample was chosen for a variety of reasons, namely online popularity, regular online activity, gender, race, English-speaking, and they all cook Mexican cuisine, which makes for easier comparison. My cases include Arnie Tex (Arnie Segovia) who is a Mexican American man of color who resides in Texas who focuses on family home-style recipes. Villa Cocina (Rossana Figueroa) is a Mexican American woman of color who was born and raised in Mexico and now resides in Georgia. While professionally trained, her content focuses on family home-style recipes and self-produced filming. Pati Jinich is a Mexican American woman of European descent whose grandparents immigrated from Poland and settled in Mexico. She is professionally trained and has been recognized for a variety of achievements in the culinary world and hosts her own Mexican food TV program. Her content ranges from family home-style recipes to professional productions that showcase her travels and interviews with people throughout Mexico. Lastly, Rick Bayless is a non-Hispanic white man from Ohio who is self-taught in Mexican cuisine and culture. He has also been recognized for a plethora of culinary achievements and owns restaurants, authored cookbooks, and hosts a Mexican food program on TV. His content ranges from casual family-style recipes to professionally filmed productions that showcase his travels and expertise.

*Table 1: Summary of the 4 cases*

	<b>Nationality /Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Culinary Training</b>	<b>Culinary Focus online</b>	<b>Notable Achievements</b>

<b>Arnie Tex</b>	Mexican, Non-white	M	Home	Family home-style	Previously owned a Mexican restaurant in RGV
<b>Villa Cocina</b>	Mexican, Non-white	F	Home  Le Cordon Bleu of Culinary arts	Family, home-style	-
<b>Pati Jinich</b>	Mexican, White	F	Home  L'Academie de Cuisine	Professional production style videos, Family, home-style recipes and travels through Mexico	James beard recipient, Emmy nominated TV series, resident chef at Mexican Cultural institute
<b>Rick Bayless</b>	Not Mexican, White	M	Self-taught through books and travel through Mexico	Professional production style videos with home style recipes that emphasize his travel and restaurant experiences	James Beard recipient, cookbook author, PBS cooking show host, restaurant owner

### *Data Collection*

Data for this study comes from the YouTube comments section on a particular set of videos posted by each creator. Video selection was determined by filtering out the most popular videos on their channel that were posted within the last 5 years. By choosing the most popular videos I ensure that the videos I choose for analysis will have the highest usership and highest levels of interactions (comments, likes, etc). I chose as many videos as necessary to acquire the desired 1,000 comments per creator, hence why more videos were used for Jinich. I utilize the script editor and embedded YouTube API in Google Sheets to load the desired number of

comments into individual spreadsheets. For consistency, I chose to scrape exactly 1,000 comments for each creator. There are a total of four spreadsheets of comments, one for each creator. Each spreadsheet was converted to a Word document, totaling 4 individual word documents uploaded into NVivo for further analysis.

*Table 2: Video title and total comments analyzed*

<b>Creator</b>	<b>Video Title</b>	<b>Total Comments Gathered</b>	<b>Comments used for analysis</b>
Arnie Tex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Refried Bean Secrets Mexican Restaurants Use</i></li> </ul>	1,000	278
Villa Cocina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Authentic Red Mexican Salsa Recipe</i></li> </ul>	1,000	390
Pati Jinich	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How to make flour tortillas</i></li> <li>• <i>Oaxaca Refried Beans</i></li> <li>• <i>How to Make Carnitas</i></li> <li>• <i>Mexican red Rice (Arroz Rojo)</i></li> <li>• <i>Border Pintos</i></li> </ul>	1,000	319
Rick Bayless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Rick Bayless Guacamole Class</i></li> </ul>	1,000	344

### *Content Analysis*

To analyze my comments, I use NVivo to organize data and conduct manual thematic coding to identify patterns and themes related to perceptions of authenticity. Through inductive and deductive methods, incorporating information from the literature review and a preliminary analysis of the comments, I developed a set of codes for each of the three main categories of authenticity types I capture. This method allows for a deeper understanding of the comments.

### *Thematic Coding Groups*

*Cosmopolitan authenticity* refers to a group of thematic codes that capture users who evaluate the authenticity of food based on their own elevated culinary experiences. When users evaluate food content based on comparisons to grocery store products, restaurants, and travel experiences, they exemplify a knowledge of what is “real” and what is not and it reflects research that supports the notion that higher value is given to foods that are connected to a location or tradition and low status is given to foods that are mass produced and lack a connection to a specific place (Johnston et al 2012; Johnston and Baumann 2010). Additionally, the usage of elevated language to convey a clear understanding of the culinary craftsmanship of the creator mirrors language used by high status culinary figures.

*Social and situational authenticity* captures instances where users assess the authenticity of a creator based on their ethno-racial identity and gender. I explore the role of social characteristics in recreating gendered and racialized perceptions of authenticity but also, I how these social characteristics can be “situational” (i.e., allow for those who do not fit those characteristics to be seen as authentic) or be challenged as a result of not fitting the expected characteristics.

*Home Authenticity* encompasses a collection of thematic codes that depict how users personally connect with video content and assess its authenticity. This section explores how users recall their upbringing and family background to evaluate food-related content. Users frequently prioritize familiarity, comfort, and nostalgia in their assessments, often influenced by ingredients and cooking styles that resonate with their childhood and familial traditions, evoking memories of home and culinary heritage. This aspect sheds

light on a dimension of food evaluation often overlooked, revealing not only personal connections to food content but also highlighting the internet's role in cultural revival and connecting transnational people to their home cultures.

*Table 3: Individual codes associated with the 3 types of authenticity*

<b>Cosmopolitan Authenticity</b>	<b>Social and situational authenticity</b>	<b>Home authenticity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Restaurant comparison</li> <li>● Store bought comparison</li> <li>● Travel comparison</li> <li>● High praise/ high skill words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Accent or linguistics</li> <li>● Voice</li> <li>● Appearance</li> <li>● Gendered family roles</li> <li>● Food made with love</li> <li>● Nicknames</li> <li>● Gringo</li> <li>● Like a real Mexican</li> <li>● Recognition of the creator being white</li> <li>● Passion and knowledge</li> <li>● Cultural appropriation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Comparison to another culture</li> <li>● Comparison to family or other significant other</li> <li>● Self-comparison</li> <li>● Transnationalism</li> <li>● References to home or growing up</li> <li>● Self or other person approved</li> <li>● Non-English</li> </ul>

## FINDINGS

*Table 4: Code counts by authenticity type and creator*

Codes	Arnie Tex	Pati Jinich	Rick Bayless	Villa Cocina	Total
<b>Cosmopolitan Authenticity (Total count)</b>	45.00	15.00	77.00	22.00	159.00
Restaurant comparison	33	6	6	5	50
Store bought comparison	8	1	3	11	23
Travel Comparison	2	3	7	4	16
High praise/ high skill words	2	5	61	2	70
<b>Social and situational authenticity (Total count)</b>	44.00	75.00	63.00	100.00	282.00
Accent or linguistics	0	15	12	2	29
Appearance	17	28	2	46	93
Cultural Appropriation	0	0	5	0	5
Food made with love	0	7	1	10	18
Gendered Family roles	0	13	0	17	30
Gringo	1	1	8	3	13
Like a real Mexican	0	0	7	0	7
Nicknames	23	0	0	7	30
Passion and Knowledge	2	0	19	5	26
Recognition of the creator being white	0	5	9	0	14
Voice	1	6	0	10	17
<b>Home Authenticity (Total count)</b>	151.00	165.00	97.00	119.00	532.00
Comparison to another culture	1	2	4	28	35
Comparison to family or significant other	57	22	15	32	126
Comparison to self	10	1	27	6	44
Non-English	3	95	18	23	139
References to home or growing up	62	28	5	10	105

Self or other person approved	10	16	23	10	59
					24
Transnationalism	8	1	5	10	
<b>Other</b>					
Affectionate	0	16	0	0	16
Comparison to a location	2	0	1	0	3
Compliments about sharing heritage	1	9	0	17	27
Ingredients, methods, or tools	12	1	4	42	59
Negative comments	10	23	68	8	109
Personality	7	4	2	3	16
Reference to teaching style	0	1	15	23	39
Unsure	0	1	4	21	26
Vague references to authenticity	6	9	13	32	60
Total	278	319	344	390	1331

Table 5: Code counts by authenticity type and creator

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Pati Arnie Tex</b>	<b>Jinich</b>	<b>Rick Bayless</b>	<b>Villa Cocina</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Cosmopolitan Authenticity</b>	28.30%	9.43%	48.43%	13.84%	100.00%
<b>Social and situational authenticity</b>	15.60%	26.60%	22.34%	35.46%	100.00%
<b>Home Authenticity</b>	28.38%	31.02%	18.23%	22.37%	100.00%

Table 6: Code counts by authenticity type and creator

Codes	Arnie Tex	Pati Jinich	Rick Bayless	Villa Cocina
<b>Cosmopolitan Authenticity</b>	18.75%	5.88%	32.49%	9.13%
<b>Social and situational authenticity</b>	18.33%	29.41%	26.58%	41.49%
<b>Home Authenticity</b>	62.92%	64.71%	40.93%	49.38%
<b>Total</b>	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

### *Cosmopolitan Authenticity*

#### *Restaurant comparison.*

There were a total of 49 references of *restaurant comparison* and Arnie Tex was the recipient of 33 of them. However, this is because Arnie Tex's video is titled "The Refried bean secrets Mexican restaurants use", so most of these references are not random. Other than Arnie Tex, Jinich, Bayless, and Villa Cocina all had 5 references each. The thematic code *Comparisons to restaurants* reflects an aspect of cosmopolitan authenticity where users evaluate the video tutorial against their own dining out experiences. When users reference their own restaurant experiences, it signifies a desire for a particular type of food and a particular culinary experience. Users who engage in such comparisons are motivated either to replicate a dish akin to what they have enjoyed in restaurants or to seek out something outside of Restaurant quality, or what they perceive as a "better" or possibly more authentic rendition. These activities align with the characteristics of cosmopolitanism, where individuals embrace cultural differences and actively seek out opportunities to engage with diverse cultural practices. For example, one user felt positively about Villa Cocina's recipe resembling a dish that the user had eaten at a local

Mexican restaurant that she describes as authentic, “This food takes me back to a restaurant run by a Mexican. There was a local restaurant chain that made authentic salsa and I loved it.”

Another user made a positive restaurant comparison by stating “That’s almost exactly like they make it at Pepe’s in Puerto Vallarta. Yum!!!” Alternatively, some users were glad that the creator's dish did not resemble the restaurant equivalent, stating things such as “Made this recipe today and oh my. Better than any restaurant I've had” and “Better than Del Taco fish tacos!”

#### *Store bought comparison.*

There were 23 references to *store bought comparison*, which refers to instances when users evaluated the video tutorial against the store-bought versions. This code reflects cosmopolitan authenticity because when users purchase cultural ingredients or dishes from their local grocery store, this demonstrates a desire to engage with a particular type of cuisine. Users' comparisons between the video tutorial and its store-bought equivalent illustrate their desire for a specific culinary experience. Some users viewed the video tutorial as a resource that enabled them to forgo purchasing the store-bought version exemplified by comments such as "I will never buy canned refried beans again" and "no more buying canned store-bought beans thank you so much for the recipe." Users also expressed evaluations regarding the inauthenticity of store-bought versions when compared to the "authentic" homemade versions showcased in the video tutorials. For example, one user highlighted the distinction between homemade salsa and commercial alternatives, stating, "Yes, ladies, this is actually Real homemade salsa and no it's not Pace or something similar of the sorts, but this is the best authentic way of doing it." Another user expressed fatigue with store-bought salsa and eagerness to try fresh, authentic salsa, indicating a preference for homemade versions over commercially available ones, a key aspect of

culinary cosmopolitanism, stating “I’m really tired of buying store bought salsa and really want to try fresh authentic salsa so thank you.”

*Travel comparison.*

Like the above thematic codes, *travel comparison* refers to when users make comments relating the video tutorial to a culinary experience, they had on a temporary travel excursion or vacation to Mexico. Users who have traveled to Mexico and can make evaluations of its food demonstrate a willingness to engage with diverse cultural cuisines and an elevated degree of cultural competency. Comments such as “Patti, you did justice to those Baja Fish Tacos! I had that very salsa in Yucatán last month. it was divine!” and “From my trips to Mexico and living in San Diego, most of my life guacamole needs some cumin in it to taste authentic” make direct comparisons between their travel experience and the video version. Whereas other comments that mention their travel experiences are more so to share a relevant experience, not to make explicit judgments of the video tutorial, such as “Just got back from our honeymoon in Mexico, I absolutely LOVE the culture. Traditional Mexican food is the BEST” and “I was vacationing in los Cabos, and I had salsa every morning with breakfast. Yumm.”

*Usage of high praise or high skill words.*

This thematic code refers to any instance where a user used high praise or high skill words to describe the creator and/or the dish itself. There are a total of 70 references and Bayless was the recipient of 61 of them, demonstrating a clear difference between how users evaluate Bayless compared to the other three. For Bayless, there were 35 coded instances of users referring to him as “Chef”, a title that carries the implication of culinary expertise and authority.

The other 3 creators had less than 5 coded instances of being called “chef”, suggesting that users do not hold the same level of high authority and expertise as they do for Bayless.

Additionally, users used other high skill or high praise words to describe Bayless. Words such as *culinary genius*, *legend*, *master*, *national treasure*, *hero*, *professional*, and *epic* were frequently used to describe Bayless. One comment expressed amazement at Bayless stating “Simple perfection! Every detail has been thoughtfully worked out by one of my favorite culinary genius’s Rick Bayless! Even the way he scoops the guacamole into its presentation bowl is well thought out! Scooping it on top of itself and not touching the sides. I bet it would be fun to work in one of his kitchens in Chicago!” A few comments also compared Bayless to professionals outside of the culinary world, likening Bayless to the culinary version of Bob Ross and Elon Musk, “This guy is the Elon Musk of guac” and “This guy is the Bob Ross of cooking.” The comparison of Bayless to other renowned professionals suggests that at least some users see him as one of the best, if not *the* best, in Mexican cuisine.

### *Social and Situational Authenticity*

#### *Accent or Linguistics.*

Accent and linguistics refer to users who make remarks about a creator's distinct way of pronouncing words that are characteristic of a particular group of people or region, which in this case, refers primarily to the presence or absence of a Hispanic accent or the proper pronunciation of Spanish words. With 21 total references, 15 of these comments were about Jinich. For example, comments such as “Your accent is so cute” and “I very much enjoy your accent” reflect both gendered and cultural notions that a woman's accent is something to be enjoyed. Additionally, comments such as “The way she talks literally made me want some taco”

associates her accent with stereotypical Mexican cuisine. There is also blatant sexualization of her accent with comments such as “Your accent is muy sexy” and “haha listen to her, reminds me of Sophia Vergara”, reducing her to an attractive woman and disregarding her culinary knowledge.

Rick Bayless received 4 of the comments about accent and linguistics, but these comments were devoid of mentions of his gender. There are no overt mentions of Rick's pronunciation of Spanish words being evaluated based on gendered norms or expectations. Rather, comments about Rick's pronunciation were focused solely on whether he pronounced guacamole correctly, such as one comment that states, “I'm surprised he is pronouncing the G” (Because the G in guacamole is silent) and another comment complimenting him for his ability to speak fluently saying, “Rick, I loved to hear you speak fluent Spanish.”

#### *Voice.*

Like *accent and linguistics*, the thematic code of *voice* refers to comments that focus on the sound of the creator's voice, with no specific mention of their accent. There were a total of 17 references and Pati and Villa Cocina are the targets of 16 of them. Arnie Tex received only one isolated comment about his voice and Bayless received none. For Pati, comments about her voice were like the comments about her accent where users feel enjoyment from her voice, saying, “I love your voice” or “I love listening to you talk”. This reflects a gendered idea that women's voice should be entertaining and enjoyable.

For Villa Cocina, users described her voice as “soothing” and “warm”, and while no explicit mentions of her gender were mentioned, these comments imply feeling a sense of comfort from her voice, which align with traditional gender expectations of women as gentle and

caring. Where Villa Cocina significantly differs from Pati is that users also associated Villa Cocina's voice with an appreciation of her cultural background. Comments such as *Loved the recipe and especially your warm voice as you talk of your past and culture and your soothing voice and stories about how you relate to each dish*, describe how users associate Villa Cocina's accent with an authentic tie to Mexican culture.

### *Appearance*

Jinich received 28 comments about her appearance calling her beautiful, sexy, pretty, cute, but no connection was made between her physical attractiveness and her Mexican identity. Villa Cocina received a total of 46 comments about her appearance. Some of these comments directly tied her attractiveness and her Hispanic woman identity to the perceived authenticity of her food, with comments such as

- "Nothing like a beautiful authentic Hispanic woman that cooks like this!"
- "I appreciate that the very 1st video in my 'salsa recipe' search features a Hispanic woman rather than a colonizer lol"
- "Girl thank you I needed a Latina type salsa so I can make this for my whole familia"

These comments suggest that being a woman is a critical aspect of Mexican cooking in ways that were not the case for Jinich. Alternatively, Arnie Tex received 17 total comments about his appearance, but they are devoid of the sexualization evident in the comments directed at the women because they are all objective comments that observe how Arnie Tex resembles Super Mario as they both share prominent mustaches. And Bayless only received two total comments out of the 93 total observations.

### *Gendered Family Roles.*

*Gendered family roles* refer to when users call attention to the creator's familial position or identity, such as making explicit comments about the creator's role as a mother, wife, father, son, etc. While all 4 creators are married and have children, Villa Cocina and Jinich are the only ones who received comments on their family roles as parents and spouses, with a total of 43 coded references. This suggests a gendered expectation that associates their culinary talents with their roles as mothers and wives. For instance, comments such as "What a great chef and mother" and "Love this lady, so humble, so sweet, her family so wonderful" were directed at Jinich. Villa Cocina similarly received comments like "Mexican cooking feels like a full-time job for the mother" and "Your husband is a lucky man. A beautiful wife who can cook and she's humble, priceless."

### *Food made with love.*

There was a total of 18 comments where users remarked that the food in the video was "made with love" or was visually "beautiful" and Pati and Villa Cocina were the recipients of 17 of them. Comments such as "You cook with love from the heart" and "your beautiful, delicious food" are used to express fondness for the effort and perceived deliciousness of the dish. The absence of similar comments on the men creators' channels suggests a gendered expectation that a woman's cooking is not just about taste but also the emotions and care she puts into the dish.

### *Creator Nicknames.*

*How the creator is referred to* refers to any nicknames or labels that users use to refer to the creator. While the gendered implications of the findings are unclear, there are distinct racial

differences in how the creators are referenced by the users. Notably, Villa Cocina and Arnie Tex, are the only Hispanics of color in the study. Villa Cocina is referred to as “sister” or “Mija” a total of 7 times, whereas Arnie Tex is referred to as “brother”, “bro”, or “dude” 23 times. For Villa Cocina and Arnie Tex, the informal familial nicknames that their users use to reference them can be seen as a way for users to express kinship and affinity for the creators and may also perpetuate stereotypes about familial relationships within Hispanic communities. Jinich, a Hispanic white woman, is not referred to by anything other than her first name “Pati”. Bayless, the only non-Hispanic white man in the study, is repeatedly referred to as “Chef”, a formal and professional designation, suggesting a different level of respect for his culinary skills.

*Passion and knowledge.*

Among the 23 comments praising the creators for their culinary passion and expertise, Bayless garnered 17 of them. While Villa Cocina and Arnie Tex received some compliments acknowledging their dedication and knowledge, such as “Thank you so much for sharing your knowledge and skill” and “love your video and your passion!”, Bayless garnered more elaborate praise. Comments directed towards him extended beyond mere acknowledgment, with expressions like “Your creativity relies on years of food knowledge”, “Your love for Mexican ingredients is palpable and I always look forward to another one of your videos! Thank you for all the hard work and passion”, and “I can see that your creations come from real knowledge of Mexican food, and a lot of respect.” Although Bayless was not the sole recipient of praise for his passion and comprehension of Mexican culture and cuisine, users seemed particularly impressed by his depth of understanding, likely because Bayless did not grow up within Mexican culture, unlike the other creators, whose knowledge and passion is more personal and inherent. Users

placing greater emphasis on Bayless's passion and knowledge for Mexican cuisine to validate his outsider position is supported by research on situational authenticity that suggests outsiders will emphasize interpretive categories, such as knowledge and passion, and de-emphasize fixed ones, such as his ethno-racial background.

*Like a "real" Mexican.*

*Like a real Mexican* serves as a thematic code encapsulating the concept of situational authenticity, highlighting instances where users acknowledge Rick Bayless as an outsider to Mexican culture yet embrace him as an insider. There are 7 coded references of users who jokingly suggested that Bayless "is" Mexican, to praise his adoption of Mexican cuisine and culture. Comments such as "This guy is more Latino than most latinos" and "I consider Rick Bayless a fellow Mexican!!!" and "This guy is Mexican born outside Mexico. We Mexicans are born wherever the fuck we want!!!", all recognize that Bayless is not literally Mexican but accept him as a fellow insider anyways. The latter two comments come from Mexican users themselves, showing that Mexicans themselves are accepting Bayless as an honorary insider.

*Gringo.*

The thematic code, *Gringo*, is a Spanish word used to describe a non-Hispanic or non-Latino person. While there were only 8 total references of *gringo*, Bayless was the target of 7 of them. The way users refer to Bayless as a gringo varies, as some used it to express admiration for Bayless's talents, whereas others used the term gringo to delineate clear boundaries that Bayless's food is inauthentic and inferior. For example, the comment "not really authentic guacamole after this... hard to trust a gringo to make Mexican food..." suggests that Bayless is

inherently untrustworthy to teach users how to make guacamole because he is a white non-Hispanic. Alternatively, the comment “I am Mexican this is the first time I see a gringo making real guacamole” expresses positive surprise that Bayless made “real” guacamole, and the viewer identifies themselves as a Mexican, to validate their point. Jinich received one gringo comment, “You lost me when you add in the leche condensada. Carnitas gringas”. However, this comment was only meant to express inauthenticity and disapproval for Jinich adding condensed milk to her carnitas, rather than to suggest she is a non-Hispanic person.

*Recognition of the creator being white.*

Like the *gringo* code, the code *Recognition of the creator being white* captures instances where users emphasize the white identity of the creator. While one can be racially white and culturally Mexican, like Jinich, users brought attention to a creator's whiteness only when they were trying to discredit the quality and authenticity of the food being made. While there were only 6 total comments in this thematic code, Bayless received 4 of them and Jinich received 2 of them, and all 6 were negative. Bayless received comments such as “A white guy teaching how to make “Mexican” yeah sorry won't catch me” and “Nothing better to teach Mexican cooking than a boring average pink guy...”. These comments express distaste for Bayless Mexican cooking primarily because he is white. More vaguely, Jinich received a comment “It's 1:27 AM and Bella Thorne is teaching me how to make carnitas”, which compares Jinich to a white, half Cuban, Hollywood actress. Whether this comment was meant as a neutral comparison or a negative comparison, is unclear. Jinich also received a few comments asking why she, as a Jew, is eating pork, but again, whether these comments were meant to question her authenticity as a Mexican creator, I am unsure.

### *Cultural Appropriation.*

There were 10 direct and indirect references to *cultural appropriation* all directed at Bayless. Accusations of cultural appropriation are direct challenges to his authenticity, conveying a sentiment that Bayless, as an outsider to Mexican culture, is perceived as an unwelcome figure who has exploited Mexican cuisine and cultural elements. Among these comments, only two directly used the term "cultural appropriation." One commenter wrote, "Appropriation of culture in its maximum expression with Mr. Rick," while another simply stated, "cultural appropriation." The remaining comments did not explicitly use this term but conveyed similar sentiments, stating things such as "Next Master Class "How to keep stealing shit from Latinos" FOH" (FOH, acronym slang for F\*\*\* outta here) and "It sure is nice of ol'Rick to share these recipes, especially since he sends his chefs to work for competing family owned Mexican restaurants to steal their cherished recipes and then quit and report back". These comments accuse Bayless of harmfully stealing from Mexican culture and using them for his own personal gain.

### *Home Authenticity*

#### *Comparison to another culture.*

*Comparison to another culture* is a code that captures when users compare the dish in the video to another cultural dish outside of Mexican cuisine. There are 35 coded instances of this, and Villa Cocina captured 28 of them. This is because Villa Cocina's salsa recipe has similar versions in Trinidad, Indonesia, Romania, and India, according to the users' comments that stated comparisons such as "I'm Romanian and I have something similar to the molcajete. We

call it mojar and we mostly use it to make garlic sauce.” and “Just add half inch ginger and check it out in India, we call it chutney.” Here, users are not necessarily making evaluations of the dish, but rather are expressing resonance with the dish by comparing it to a different cultural dish that is personal to them.

*Comparison to family or other people.*

With 125 total references, this code refers to when users make evaluations of the dish in the video based on how significant others in their life, such as family, friends, or other close persons, prepare the same dish. This code has the highest number of references, even more so than any of the cosmopolitan or social authenticity codes. Users often make evaluations of whether a dish is “real” or “authentic” based on how they know the dish to be made, drawing from their own personal experiences and observations. Some comments make it clear that the viewer themselves is Hispanic, their cultural identity acting as a label that tags them as an authorized opinion on the matter, but other comments are not explicit in what their cultural background is. Comments such as “Perfect! .....Just like my dad and mom made for many years!” and “Awesome. Like grandma used to make it” exemplify comments where users validated the quality of the video tutorial because it reflects their own family methods. Comments such as “My mother-in-law is from Jalisco Mexico, and this is how to make beans” and “I am a Chicana. And my OG relatives swear by the Casserole brand frijoles. So, when I heard you say that you use the same brand I was like “Oh yeah! This is going to be good!” both reflect users who expand their authority on the matter even more by sharing that they are part of a Mexican family.

*Self-comparison.*

Similar to *comparison to family or other person*, the code *self-comparison* refers to when users evaluate the video tutorial based on how the viewer themselves prepares the dish. These comments overwhelmingly come from users who explicitly identify themselves as Mexican. For example, comments such as “think you’re wrong with too much lime as a Mexican speaking” and “Let me teach you idiots a secret use chicken broth on your beans, I am Mexican, trust me” both exemplify how users use their own Mexican identity to tout their opinions as valid and trustworthy, making critiques and suggestions.

*Transnationalism.*

This thematic code captures instances where users share their own transnational experiences, moving from place to another. Specifically, users of Mexican heritage describe their immigration from a Hispanic majority area to a non-Hispanic area, somewhere in the United States. For some users, this means immigrating from Mexico to the US, whereas others talk about moving from San Diego or Texas to an area where Mexican communities are scarcer. There are a total of 23 references. Users who share their own transnational experiences do so to justify their resonance with the video tutorial and express gratitude that the creator made the video. A comment that exemplifies this code best is stated under Pati Jinich’s video;

“Growing up in the states, I often felt so ashamed of being Mexican. It's not until my adulthood that I began to love and appreciate our culture through our cuisine and your videos are super inspirational. Thank you for your work.”

*References to home or growing up.*

With 105 references, this code refers to users who remark that the creator or the dish itself reminds them of home, growing up, family, or other personal experiences. Users who relate the video content to a positive personal memory is a compliment to the video by suggesting that it resonated with the viewer. Users who are self-proclaimed Hispanic themselves and who feel a personal connection to the dish further verifies that the viewer sees the video as an authentic representation of Mexican cuisine and/or culture. Comments such as “It’s like seeing a childhood memory of my mom teaching me how to make tortillas and making them herself come to life” and “Awesome video, reminds me of home as I am a Native American from New Mexico” and “I watch Arnie when I’m homesick. Reminds me of San Antonio and familia” exemplify this. Of the 105 total references, only 5 were from Bayless’s video, suggesting that users did not feel the same level of familial resonance with him and his content as they did with the other creators.

*Self or other person approved.*

With 59 total references, this refers to positive comments from self-identified Hispanic users that express approval for the YouTube tutorial based on the opinion of themselves or a trusted personal other of the viewer, such as a friend or family member. Users who identify themselves or a trusted other as Hispanic to validate their positive opinion on the YouTube tutorial are exemplified in comments such as “By far one of the best capirotada recipes I’ve seen, now to make it! My Colombian mom is going to love the plátano macho in this recipe” and “I made these tonight and my Mexican son in law almost cried. So so delicious!” By identifying themselves as Hispanic, they are indirectly implying that their opinion is valuable. Also,

Hispanic users who validate the quality of the video also signify to others that the dish is authentic.

*Non-English.*

With 137 total references, non-English refers to any comments that are in Spanish. All the 4 creators speak English in their videos, and while there may be occasional Spanish spoken, the videos are targeted to English speaking audiences, making non-English comments significant. While I cannot translate the overall sentiment of these comments due to my lack of fluency in the language, comments left in Spanish suggest that Spanish-speaking users feel a sense of comfort and camaraderie with the creator. All creators had users who left Spanish-speaking comments, but Bayless received the fewest Spanish comments at only 16 references.

## DISCUSSION

The goal of this study is to explore how everyday users evaluate the authenticity of online culinary creators and how their evaluations both reflect and differ from our current understanding of existing gender and racial hierarchies and how they differ from our current understanding about legitimating discourse about food. This study aims to explore how discourse on YouTube from everyday users reinforce our current understanding of who is viewed as an authentic food creator but to also explore how this may differ from what we know about high status consumers and the different types of authenticity perceptions. Additionally, I seek to understand how these perceptions are influenced by users' own background, experiences, and interests. Looking at everyday users revealed findings that differ from what is often captured by literature related to cosmopolitan authenticity and social and situational authenticity. What we found is that the types of authenticity evaluations users make can be divided into three categories: 1) *Cosmopolitan authenticity*, 2) *social and situational authenticity* and 3) *home authenticity*.

### *Cosmopolitan authenticity*

*Cosmopolitan authenticity* captures instances where users rely on cultural experiences to make comparative evaluations about the authenticity of the chef's content. Cultural experiences include travel experiences to Mexico, going to Mexican restaurants, and shopping for Mexican ingredients at the grocery store. Users who engage in such comparisons are motivated either to replicate a dish akin to what they have enjoyed in restaurants, grocery stores, or travel experiences or to seek out something different; what they perceive as a "better" or possibly more authentic rendition. These activities align with the characteristics of cosmopolitanism, where

individuals embrace cultural differences and actively seek out opportunities to engage with diverse cultural practices. These findings are relevant as people are increasingly becoming more omnivorousness with their tastes and thus seeking out foods that are exotic, new, and authentic and an omnivore interest in authentic foods is partly demonstrated by displaying distrust of mass-produced foods and fetishizing foods that are connected to a specific location or tradition (Johnston and Baumann 2010). Moreover, users who rely on their own experiences to make determinations about the authenticity of a cuisine reflect Gualtieri's study that found that restaurants who specialize in non-white cuisines are unfairly judged by customer perceptions that are formed outside of the dining context and do not allow for standardized rules by which to be judged. Additionally, users' usage of elevated language to describe the craftsmanship of the creators, such as referring to the creators as “chef” and elaborating on their technique, presentation, and knowledge, are characteristic of cosmopolitan behaviors.

#### *Social and situational authenticity*

*Social and situational authenticity* focus on how users draw on gender and ethnoracial stereotypes and schemas when making evaluations of the creator's content. This section is associated with the ethno-racial identity and gender of the creator. The findings reveal that gendered schemas significantly influence users' evaluations of creator authenticity, particularly concerning accent, voice, gendered family roles, and emotional expression. The analysis indicates a clear reliance on gender stereotypes in users' assessments, as evidenced by the differential treatment of the male and female creators. Female creators, such as Jinich and Villa Cocina, received the brunt of comments regarding their accent, voice, and appearance that sexualize and stereotype them as attractive Hispanic women. Comments such as “Your accent is

muy sexy” and “the way she talks literally made me want some taco”, demonstrates a clear sexualization and fetishization of their voice. Users also associated the women's culinary expertise with their roles as mothers and wives, with comments such as “Mexican cooking feels like a full-time job for the mother” whereas no mention of the men's roles as husbands or fathers were evident.

For Bayless and Arnie Tex, they received far fewer gender-related comments. For both, user comments tended to only focus on their linguistic proficiency and culinary skills. Comments about their appearance were limited; Bayless only received 2 comments about his appearance and Arnie Tex received a portion, but they were devoid of sexualization (unlike the women) since they were mostly about how his mustache makes him look like Super Mario.

Additionally, the nicknames users use to refer to the creators reflect gendered and ethno-racial dynamics. For Villa Cocina and Arnie Tex, the two Mexicans of color, they were often referred to by users as “brother” or “sister” (or hermano/hermana in Spanish). By using familial terms for Villa Cocina and Arnie Tex but using the professional title of “chef” for Bayless, users may unintentionally reinforce societal norms that associate white men as higher status.

These findings reflect the findings found by Johnston, Rodney, and Chong (2014) in their study on celebrity cookbooks and culinary personalities where they found that culinary personas are highly gendered and racialized in ways that reinforce social hierarchies and existing gender expectations. They found that feminine personas circumscribe their culinary expertise to the domestic sphere and feminize their cultural authority in restrictive ways that are not applicable to the masculine personas. They argue that personas indirectly perpetuate status inequalities in the culinary field by limiting the number of legit categories women and people of color can authentically occupy and use to resonate with users. This is important given that as culinary

boundaries shift, it is important to understand how users respond to culinary content online and how perceptions of what is authentic are affected by the creator's race and gender.

For Bayless, who is conventionally understood as an outsider to Mexican culture as a white, non-Hispanic man, the codes of *passion and knowledge, like a “real” Mexican, gringo, recognition of the creator being white, and cultural appropriation* capture instances where users suggest that the creator is an outsider and how Bayless counters his outsider status through his de-emphasis on his ethnoracial identity and emphasis on his passion and knowledge of Mexican cuisine. Because Bayless cannot rely on his ethno-racial identity to convey membership to Mexican culture, he strategically showcases his expertise through demonstrations of culinary history, use of Spanish, and open discussions about his travels in Mexico and interactions with Mexican natives to show users that is he not just a typical white man, but that he is an exception to the status quo. This also acts to blur distinctions between himself and Mexican culture, by adopting the language and immersing himself in the country and history. The emphasis on such interpretive categories helps to de-emphasize fixed categories such as his ethno-racial identity. This finding aligns with Harkness (2012) who examined how white, women, and/or suburban rappers, who traditionally are deemed inauthentic by insiders, negotiate cultural boundaries within hip-hop culture to be viewed as authentic by emphasizing interpretive categories, like their skills, and downplaying fixed categories like their gender or race. Whether users were accepting of Bayless being situationally authentic or if they perceived his boundary crossing as inauthentic and transgressive varied on the user. Some users recognized Bayless as an outsider to Mexican culture but received his guacamole recipe positively. Self-proclaimed Mexican users expressed camaraderie with Bayless stating things such as “I consider Rick a fellow Mexican!!!”

suggesting that they did not think Bayless was contributing to the devaluation or unfair extraction of Mexican culinary culture.

Alternatively, other users did not approve of Bayless' cultural boundary crossing and in addition to accusations of cultural appropriation, he received 67 negative comments about how his guacamole recipe was incorrect. As is evident by recent media coverage on cultural appropriation cases, accusations tend to be directed at high status individuals who borrow cultural elements associated with a minority group (Oshotse, Berda, and Goldberg 2024). Comments such as "A white guy teaching how to make "Mexican" yeah sorry won't catch me" reaffirm that, at least for some users, being a non-Hispanic white man is inherently transgressive, possibly due to the power imbalance that white men historically hold over those of Latin American descent. Other users were more explicit in their view that Bayless is appropriating Mexican cuisine. One comment state "It sure is nice of ol'Rick to share these recipes, especially since he sends his chefs to work for competing family-owned Mexican restaurants to steal their cherished recipes and then quit and report back." This comment accuses Rick of extraction, disproportionately benefitting from Mexican culture in ways that are not afforded to those of Mexican heritage (Oshotse, Berda, and Goldberg 2024). However, despite Bayless being the recipient of the highest volume of negative comments about either himself as a Mexican food creator or specifically his guacamole recipe, it is important to note that he is still perceived as a very high-status creator whose status remains largely unaffected by the negative comments.

### *Home Authenticity*

*Home authenticity* is a collection of thematic codes that capture how users make evaluations of how the creator's content is or is not authentic based on their own upbringing and

experiences within Mexican culture. While authenticity based on cosmopolitanism or social characteristics was evident, codes associated with home authenticity were the most common. This is significant because how ordinary users rely on personal connections to make evaluations about what is authentic in the culinary world has seldom been explored since most research in food rely mostly on high status figures. With comments coming from users who either suggest they themselves are from Mexico or have a close familial connection to locations where Mexican culture is predominant (such as Texas, California, Arizona, etc), users make comparisons to how the creator and their dish compares to their family versions (including from themselves or significant others). This is often accompanied with personal stories that talk about the significance of the dish and memories from their childhood that show how they have resonated with the creator's content, such as one user who said "I watch Arnie when I'm homesick. Reminds me of San Antonio and familia." and another who elaborated and said

"Memories of our beloved mother using lard, refried n runny one's beans plain or alongside dishes like fideo or arroz con pollo. I enjoyed your demonstration of fixing the frijoles. The TRUE authentic and traditional ways."

This shows how the internet can be used as a form of cultural revival or cultural preservation, especially for transnational people who may be physically distant from their home or country of origin. This was expressed by one user who stated

"Growing up in the states, I often felt so ashamed of being Mexican. It's not until my adulthood that I began to love and appreciate our culture through our cuisine and your videos are super inspirational. Thank you for your work."

When users perceive food tutorials as resonant with their own identities or understanding of Mexican cuisine, they are more likely to embrace the content as authentic and meaningful. This

is demonstrated by Childress and Nault (2018) who found that cultural matching of the publisher and the author is very important in determining which authors get published versus not. Cultural and personal familiarity with the topic of a manuscript is considered a crucial selection criterion for intermediaries due to the prioritization of manuscripts that resonate with their own background. This suggests that the content by culinary creators needs to resonate with users to be perceived as more valuable, which can be done by sharing similarities with users in terms of social characteristics, cultural upbringing, experiences, and knowledge. Users who pull from their own familial backgrounds to determine the value and authenticity of a dish reflects research by Gualtieri's (2021) study where they found food products of non-white restaurants were unfairly judged by perceptions of authenticity that were formed outside of the dining context and are based on customers' past encounters with cuisine of the same culture, such as through home cooking. This results in non-white cuisines being uniquely constrained in ways that maintain cultural hierarchies. The themes captured by home authenticity is a dimension of authenticity and legitimacy that has seldom been recognized or explored in the typical literature on legitimacy, food, and online discourse.

## CONCLUSION

This study exemplifies how online culinary discourse underscores the various factors influencing perceptions of authenticity. While most research on authenticity and food focus on high status perspectives, this study looks at the perspectives from ordinary users on YouTube. Using the specific case of Mexican food creators, I examine how everyday online users respond to culture-specific content and how findings reflect our current understandings of how food and creators are scrutinized through evaluations of authenticity in food and how findings may differ. Through the lens of cosmopolitan authenticity, we discerned how users leverage their cultural encounters to assess the genuineness of culinary content. Moreover, our scrutiny of gender, race, and situational authenticity revealed the pervasive influence of societal norms and stereotypes in shaping evaluations of food creators. Additionally, our exploration of home authenticity elucidated the significant role of personal experiences and familial traditions in delineating authenticity criteria. This study only looks at a few cases of Mexican food creators who are primarily located in the US and whose audience is majority American due to the established place and relevance that Mexican cuisine has in America. However, the findings suggest that future research could explore user perspectives more in-depth through interviews. Future research could also explore different cuisines that are more relevant to others around the world or whose cuisines may be in more flux and that are moving upward in status.

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## APPENDIX: Coding Themes

Code	Definition
<b>Cosmopolitan authenticity</b>	
restaurant comparison	when users make any comparative remarks about the dish in the video to the restaurant equivalent
store bought comparison	when users make any comparative remarks about the dish in the video to the store-bought equivalent
travel comparison	When users compare the video content to a travel experience, they had in a particular country. This often refers to users who have traveled to Mexico or a nearby or similar place.
high praise/high skill words	This includes users who refer to the creator as "chef", "master", "genius" etc
<b>Social and situational authenticity</b>	
accent or linguistics	Remarks on the accent or linguistics used by the creator, such as having a Spanish accent or an American accent to validate or invalidate the authenticity of the creator
appearance	This refers to comments that focus solely on one visual appearance
cultural appropriation	These are user comments that specifically call creators out for cultural appropriation of Mexican culture and cuisine. This is used to call him out for not being a “real” member of the Mexican community and is a negative term to say that as a non-Hispanic person he is wrong for using Mexican food on his online platform
food made with love	users who remark that the food was "made with love" or "looks beautiful" to express fondness for the effort and perceived deliciousness of the dish
gendered family roles	Gendered family roles refer to when users call attention to the creator's familial position or identity, such as making explicit comments about the creator's role as a mother, wife, father, son, etc
gringo	These are comments that refer to Rick Bayless as a “gringo”, which refers to a non-Latino or non-Hispanic person. User comments that refer to Rick as a gringo are used to call him out for being white and not an “authentic” member of Hispanic culture. This is used either as a compliment or as an insult, depending on the specific

	comment
Like a real Mexican	This can be used to certify the authenticity of white creators. This is a figure of speech used to convey admiration for their culinary skills to suggest they cook so well they could be mistaken for someone who is culturally connected to Mexican cuisine. It also is an expression of camaraderie that Rick is properly appreciating Mexican cuisine, despite being non-Hispanic
nicknames	This is meant to capture any nicknames or unofficial words that users use to refer to the creator. While Rick dominates the “chef” title, this is meant to capture any names used for the other 3 creators
passion and knowledge	compliments about the creator expressing great passion or knowledge for cooking and/or Mexican culture and cuisine
recognition of the creator being white	Comments that identify/accuse a creator of being a white person
voice	This refers to comments that focus solely on one the sound of one's voice, this is not the same as accent and linguistics
<b>home authenticity</b>	
comparison to another culture	When users compare the Mexican cuisine in the video to another cultural cuisine, such as comparing Mexican guac to an Indian dish
comparison to family or sig. other	When users compare the methods of the creator to the methods of the user's own family or to someone else they personally know, regardless of whether their family member or other person is also Mexican
comparison to self	When users compare the methods of the creator to the methods of themselves. This is not the same as the code “approved by self or others”.
Non-English	These are comments in Spanish, despite all creator videos being made in English, the presence of Spanish comments implies that the creator has reached its original audience

references to home or growing up	users who remark that the creator or the dish itself reminds them of home, growing up, family, and other personal experiences. This exemplifies that the creator content resonated with the user in some way
self or other person approved	When users themselves say they approve of the recipe, either based on opinion, their own Hispanic identity, or some other reason that they feel gives them the authority to verify the quality of the creator's food tutorial. OR if the user says that someone they know/trust enjoys the recipe, therefore the tutorial is good
transnationalism	This refers specifically to users who talk about moving from one location to another and finding comfort in the video's content. This is primarily from users who are Hispanic or Latino descent who have moved away from south America or from family, who find comfort in watching Mexican cooking videos to connect them with their culture and remind them of family and their own upbringing
Other	
Affectionate	these are comments made about creators where users have expressed love or exaggerated desires to marry the creator
Comparison to a location	This is when users attach the realness or authenticity of a dish to a specific location, such as saying "That's a real Oaxaca dish" or "I loved this recipe and found out you're from the Rio Grande, now I know why!"
compliments about sharing heritage	When users compliment the creator for sharing their culture with "us" (the users ). This can include the creator simply sharing recipes to sharing personal stories related to the food.
ingredients methods or tools	Compliments that praise the creators on the "correct" usage of ingredients, cooking methods, or cooking tools and equipment. this is used to denote the "real way" of cooking a dish
Negative comments	Comments about the "incorrect" way of using certain ingredients, methods, or tools, or mispronouncing words
Personality	This refers to comments that focus solely on personality
Reference to teaching style	users who compliment the teaching style of the creator
Unsure	comments that feel valuable but in an unclear way

vague references to authenticity	When users specifically remark that a recipe is "true", "authentic", "real" or "right" but without expanding on why
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