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## Mindful Persistence: Literacies for Taking up and Sustaining Fermented-Food Projects

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## Mindful Persistence: Literacies for Taking up and Sustaining Fermented-Food Projects

### Authors

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## Mindful Persistence: Literacies for Taking up and Sustaining Fermented-Food Projects<sup>1</sup>

*Christina Santana, Stacey Kuznetsov, Sheri Schmeckpeper, Linda J. Curry, Elenore Long, Lauren Davis, Heidi Koerner, and Kimberly Butterfield McQuarrie*

Almost by definition, resisting the insidious convenience of the mainstream food supply requires persistence. This is especially true for food projects requiring fermentation—projects that unfold over days or weeks and require day-to-day science in kitchens where variables can be hard to control and where some degree of periodic failure is almost inevitable. In this article, a team of writers—scholars and community members—dramatizes a joint inquiry from which emerged a composite portrait of what we have come to call *mindful persistence*—an existential yet collaborative engine that drives our food literacies. Dialogic text features highlight the situated insights of individual writers, indicating that while this team shares an interest in fermentation, this interest does not require or assume identical understandings of the science of fermentation or similar positions in the probiotic debate surrounding contemporary fermentation practices. Instead, what is shared is a mindful persistence that scaffolds reflective action in this dynamic problem space.

### Introduction

Sheri: Six years ago a neighbor's boy was born allergic to food. He literally could not eat conventional food. He subsisted on nutrients fed through a feeding tube, and any attempt at feeding him solids or adding food to his tube would cause him great pain. At the age of four, the many doctors who had worked with his family said he would be gone within a year. Through research and reaching out, the parents learned about the GAPS (Gut and Psychology Syndrome) elimination diet and the benefits of an organic, non-processed diet. Within three months, he was off his feeding tube and eating seven solid foods. He is now a healthy boy who drinks cultured raw milk and eats organic meat and vegetables. He only exhibits symptoms when he eats foods produced in the traditional food chain.

Stories like Sheri's demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the current food system and how food-related literacy interventions can literally keep us alive. Not everyone shares a commitment to food literacy, but for my co-authors and me (Christina), our various food projects (i.e. fermenting,<sup>2</sup> pickling, urban farming, composting, bread making) have served as the impetus for several gatherings where we've shared what we know. We gathered together recently to share strategies for several food projects that involve fermentation: sauerkraut and kimchi, German and Korean techniques for fermenting cabbage with companion vegetables (see figure 1); kombucha, a fermented tea (see figure 2); and dairy kefir, milk fermented with a special culture (see figure 3). Experiences sharing fermentation projects have also prompted us to write together in a group that includes both academics at Arizona State University interested in fermented-food practices and community members (holding a range of academic degrees) engaged in a host of food projects, which in some cases form the foundation of our livelihoods.<sup>3</sup>

Persistence moves food-related knowledge into action, but persistence isn't often reflected upon in relation to food literacy. Consider, for instance, food-themed service-learning courses that embed students in "community-centered food service initiatives" for the purpose of engendering "powerful learning experience[s ...] that [are] emotionally and intellectually complex" (House 4). In a recent article for the *Community Literacy Journal*, Veronica House describes a course where students read food-themed texts (i.e. Holly Bauer's *Food Matters* or Brooke Rollins and Lee Bauknight's *Food*) to learn about issues related to the food movement (i.e. "relocalizing the food system" against the current delocalized food system). The course asks students "to think critically and to deeply explore, challenge and subvert the systemic, root causes of the manifested problems they see" (7). Such a course prepares students to answer the question, "Now what?" or "What will I do because of it?" (8). However, readers may wonder how, after the course, these students might persist in what they've learned about food as they live out their adult lives. Our paper asks what persistent food literacies may entail.<sup>4</sup>

Disciplinary commitments have propelled scholars to theorize persistence in the face of community-literacy projects that falter, for this is the nature of work with dynamic communities (Clifton 251). As scholars engaged with communities, we are primed to situate—"adapt" and "shape"—our best practices (Restaino 261). Fragile, provisional and responsive, community literacy requires persistence; such engagement mirrors the stamina, grit, and tenacity necessary to practice the food literacies of fermented-food projects. What's often missing from food-related peer-reviewed articles is attention to the work of everyday individuals who participate in local publics and circulate new knowledge within their spheres of influence (Higgins, Long and Flower 32). In response, we articulate mindful approaches that allow us to persist in taking up and sustaining food projects in the face of a broken food system.<sup>5</sup>

## Methods of Joint Inquiry and Co-Authorship

In this article, we present findings from a two-part community conversation on food projects involving fermentation. Phase one began as a quotidian food science study that asked participants to allow Stacey and Christina to interview them in their own homes to understand their individual food-related practices, and culminated in a larger food workshop hosted by Stacey, Christina and Elenore. During the workshop, ten practitioners demonstrated techniques and shared expertise while making three fermented foods: sauerkraut, dairy kefir and kombucha. (See figures 1-3.) Sufficient supplies and elbowroom allowed all of us—even those in the group least familiar with food projects that involve fermentation (Christina and Elenore)—to participate in this first phase.



*Figure 1: Participants share practices for making sauerkraut and kimchi—German and Korean techniques for fermenting cabbage with companion vegetables.*



Figure 2: Bottles of a fermented tea called kombucha invite sampling during the first phase of a community conversation on fermented foods.



Figure 3: Participants add fresh fruit to dairy kefir—milk fermented with a special culture.

At the end of the food workshop, participants were invited to return the following week to meet as potential co-authors for *The Community Literacy Journal's* special issue on food literacy.<sup>6</sup> For this second phase, four of the community members who had participated in the food workshop gathered for the express purpose of co-authoring this essay. To consider our purposes as co-authors, we—Stacey, Christina, Elenore—devised flexible, informal questions to prime the pump for our conversation:

- Why do you invest your time in food projects? What motivates you?

- What is the biggest challenge you face as someone experimenting with food? How do you persist beyond challenges?
- In interviews, nearly everyone mentioned reading other people’s experiments with food projects--on blogs, discussion boards, and scholarly articles. When do you most often turn to these, and what do you gain from reading about other ideas and experiences with food projects?

To begin writing together, we each chose one of the above questions and drafted written responses for ten minutes. Then, adapting Kathy Charmaz’s approach to grounded theorizing to our collaborative inquiry, Christina led the group discussion. Taking each of the above questions in turn, those responding to a given question took the first crack at articulating key points to map on the whiteboard. (See figure 4.) Before moving to the next question, the rest of us also contributed insights of our own—each of which was recorded in a different color on the whiteboard. (See appendix for Christina’s second phase plan.) Afterwards, we consolidated insights around the themes we identified from the conversation (See figure 5).

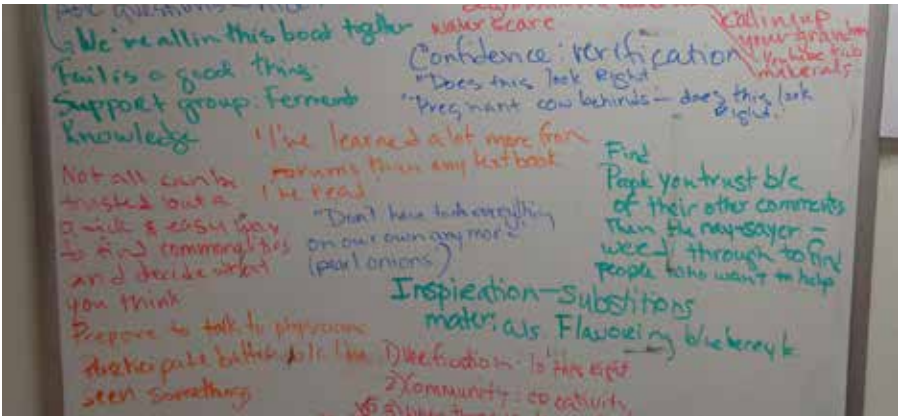


Figure 4: At the second phase of the community conversation, participants fill six whiteboards with responses to a set of key questions concerning their food practices.



Figure 5: Colored sticky notes identify themes emerging from the conversation.

What emerged was a portrait of *mindful persistence*, a concept that has become the focus of this paper and, thus, dramatized at length below. To be clear: some came to the group talking of mindfulness, and that term gained further resonance across the group as we talked. Also, one of the discussion questions focused explicitly on persistence, particularly persisting in one's food projects in the face of challenges. But the larger concept of *mindful persistence* emerged over the course of our sustained conversation. The dark sticky notes on the poster board in figure 5 highlight this concept emerging from the range of responses to the conversation's three key questions.<sup>7</sup>

## Food Literacy as *Mindful* Raising, Growing, Preparing, and Eating

Many of us did not grow up with food literacies. We instead developed them as adults, as Lauren demonstrates below:

Lauren: When it comes to food, like most others, I have inherited eating habits from my family. As a child, I believed that if doctors and dentists and my mother were giving me candy and treats when I was uncomfortable or in pain, they [these snacks] must have been safe and good for me. These inadvertent acts conditioned me as a child to seek such soothing with food for any unacceptable situation, and thus set the stage for what became a love-hate relationship with food. As an adult, I struggled to change food habits that I thought were the only ones available to me - after I began to experience my body and health breakdown. When I found myself overcome with food allergies, I realized that the food corporations I trusted would neither help me nor educate me. That was when I knew it was time to change my deeply ingrained conditioning—to know my food and own my choices.

Lauren's story demonstrates how *mindless* relationships to food can become ingrained unless they are consciously shifted by *mindful* decisions made in adulthood. In the vice of personal responsibility, Lauren was faced with a harsh reality which led her to investigate the deep-running and socially embedded roots of her thinking about food, especially the normative emotional connections she had accepted, to form a new foundation in which to cultivate a mindful approach to food that would inform the rest of her life.

In Western cultures, mindfulness is often thought of as a type of Buddhist meditation, which privileges "diligen[t] aware[ness ... ] to (1) the activity of the body, (2) sensations or feelings, (3) the activities of the mind, (4) ideas, thoughts, conceptions and things" (Rahula 48).<sup>8</sup> As secular practitioners, we are drawn to the concept of mindfulness as a mode of intervention that implements "a very particular mental state which is both wholesome and capable of clear and penetrating insight into the nature of reality" (Cullen 1). For us, *mindfulness* resists dominant society's *mindless* approach to food—the expectation for perfect, sanitized foods, created to be the best looking with the fewest and cheapest inputs. Seen in this way, mindfulness springs from the



work of being hands-on and present with our food and the relationships we recreate every time we sit down for a meal.

Also, we emphasize mindful persistence as a distinct and experimental way of knowing and doing food projects. An experimental way of knowing conjures a host of literacy scholars committed to wise action, scholars ranging from John Dewey to Paulo Freire to Linda Flower to Paul Lynch.<sup>9</sup> By practicing the food literacies we describe here, we persist in our practice of mindfulness in three ways: changing habits, sharing and collaborating, and managing risk in order to cultivate conditions for safety regarding our own food. These modes of engagement allow us to persist in our engagement with food. Below, food experts in our group bear witness to the unique dimensions of persistence enacted as mindful fermented-food literacies.

## Changing Habits

As Lauren's above experience illustrates, when food becomes a motivating factor for change, it is no longer simply something that soothes the stomach and tickles the taste buds; rather, it becomes a resource for the functioning of a full life and for personal well-being. This means that our attitudes necessarily shift, sometimes dramatically, as we take up the experimental processes inherent in relocating food expertise from the seat of societal authorities to our individual kitchens. Changing habits cannot be expected to be comfortable. In the excerpt below, Kimberly explains how the consequences of her family's food choices outweighed the prior emphasis they'd placed on the taste or appearance of food. This shift in orientation gave Kimberly and her family the impetus they needed to persist in reorienting their food habits:

Kimberly: Fermenting first began to change how we [Kim and her family] ate food. Processed foods began to dwindle from our diet. Eventually my whole family began to crave whole foods. As we added more fermented foods, our views rapidly changed. Now we see food in a new way. I no longer focus on how food tastes, smells or looks. I spend time researching what a food does. I enjoy knowing how foods react to one another. Often meals are prepared for how they will make me feel internally instead of mentally.

Kimberly's experience shows that by deliberately introducing a variety of fermented foods over time, her and her family's food habits have changed. Her current perceptions (i.e. her reactions to the tastes and sights of particular foods) and conceptions (i.e. what food should be doing for her) have become highly developed as a result of her commitment to food-related substance over form. This commitment reflects core aspects of Buddhist mindfulness: attention to body (habit), attention to sensation, attention to perception, attention to conception (Rahula 48). Because she is most attentive to what food is good for, at a conceptual level she is less perturbed by the unfamiliar sensations of taste, smell, and sight that her food projects introduce her to such as the Symbiotic Colony Of Bacteria and Yeast (or SCOBY) used for making the

fermented tea called kombucha – and she is able to take full ownership of her food choices. (Images of SCOBY are below, figures 6 and 7.)



Figure 6 (left): Symbiotic Colony Of Bacteria and Yeast (or SCOBY) used in making the fermented tea called kombucha. Figure 7 (right): A piece of SCOBY culture is added to tea.

Kimberly's experience also indirectly points us to a second component of changing habits: the importance of rethinking the role of expertise in the context of our own lives. As Sheri explains below, recognizing contradictory or muddled arguments that circulate in society's authority systems can spur us to change food habits and to develop a greater sense of self-reliance when it comes to the food we eat:

Sheri: Over the decades I've listened to the experts as they flip-flopped about what is good and what is bad for us, always stating their theories with great authority and presenting them as facts only to contradict themselves later. All this caused me to delve deeply into what and whom I really believe. How can I know what is right or wrong? I've learned about bacteria, yeasts, fungus, and molds. I've learned that only 1% of all bacteria are harmful ("Bacterial Infections"), yet listening to the words of the health experts and media, a germ is a germ, and it must be destroyed. This fear-based thinking has reinforced my resolve to question everything and to make choices intentionally, according to my unique needs and those of my family. My understanding of traditional food evolved into a belief system, a set of values, and as such, lifestyle changes are relatively easy. We now raise and produce 80% of our own food, including meat, dairy, and produce, and help others do the same comfortably, emphasizing freedom to explore within the boundaries of caution.

Sheri's experience shows that she was able to advance new food habits only after interrogating the logic of expertise, which she realized too heavily influenced the logic of her own thinking. For her, the fallibility of experts underscored that outside experts weren't the best or only decision-makers to rely on. By stripping away untrustworthy ideas, she was able to rely on her own logic and intuition. Now, Sheri rests assured in

the revisable expertise she has developed by doing her own reading—expertise she has cultivated for herself, her family, and her students.

The family-oriented nature of Kimberly and Sheri's experiences shows how creating new food environments in the home can support changing food habits. Heidi's experience below goes further to show how new practices cultivated in our homes can support learning:

Heidi: My biggest challenge is that I fail sometimes. I think that as I'm getting older, I have had a few birthdays, I'm ok with failing. My first sauerkraut failed miserably. But, you know? I just put it in the compost pile. Now, I set my house up so that there really isn't waste. When things go bad, I either feed them to the worms, or compost them. And my chickens will eat all kinds of mistakes—then give me poop that goes back into the ground. So I feel that if I fail, it's ok. It's ok.

Heidi's experience shows that as we start to do things differently, those activities might not go as well as planned. To allow for more intentional experimentation, Heidi reconfigured her home to productively reuse what otherwise would have been wasted. Her changed attitude toward waste is more attuned to ways that her multiple food projects can reinforce "an *ecology*, or things and forces joined together in dynamic coexistence, sustainable over time" (Rickert 248). By paying attention to and discovering the links of the food chain as they exist in her own home, Heidi manages the challenge of failure efficiently.

Habits that are deeply ingrained in the body and mind are difficult to change, but that change becomes possible, even inevitable, when the mindset about food (its creation, its processing and preparation, and its effect) becomes personalized. Often, food habits don't change on the basis of averages, norms, dictates or expert opinions. Rather, as food becomes a personalized component of an individual's life, her choices result in consequences she experiences first hand. Now habits become more than involuntary responses; they become intentional behaviors, the available means for mindful persistence.

## Sharing and Collaboratively Constructing Mindful Practices

At least in Western paradigms, mindfulness can evoke hyper-individualism; in contrast, we use *mindful persistence* to invoke a relation *with* others. Regarding participants' fermented-food projects, the mind, as a metaphor of the individual, gets rewritten as a source of collective wisdom.

Linda: My teaching program will in fact focus on convenience, but it still means spending more time in the kitchen. Preparing whole foods, however you chop it up, is still going to take longer than popping open a bag of potato chips. This is where mindfulness comes in. When we truly clear our minds

and are present with what our body needs, preparing a salad becomes a moving meditation. Teaching mindfulness is not always easy however. The way I move in the demonstrations and how I sit to sample each food item with the class is key. My voice slows. I put my fork down after I take a bite, and I set the stage for the energy at the table. Students quickly feel the pace and partake in the nourishment. My students often feel refreshed and better about food in general. Small experiences like this give them tools to take home and are key to slowly integrating new healthier habits.

Linda shows how she conducts herself during her “From Processed Foods to Whole Foods” classes in order to show that whole foods affect more than the palate. By modeling a way of being with food that is punctuated, she enacts what she knows, instantiating abstract concepts about health with a mindful approach to healthier alternatives. Because she explicitly calls this work “teaching mindfulness,” she makes it a point to thoughtfully demonstrate to her students exactly how to “pay attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn 4, qtd. in Cullen 2).

In contrast, Lauren experiences mindful sharing and collaboration online and informally in groups of peers. Sharing affinities for particular food projects, participants encourage one another to explore food and to share successes and failures non-judgmentally as a means of developing the group’s social cohesion. Below, Lauren explains how her participation with these forums encourages her to persist in her food projects:

Lauren: I belong to fermentation groups, vegetarian groups, trade/swap groups, and chicken-keeping groups on Facebook. There, I’ve met others who support my successes and failures. They are “support groups” that give advice freely and share from their experiences. They allow you to pick and choose from suggestions comprising a wealth of knowledge. Learning from other’s failures makes you realize you are not alone, and if there is a mistake to be made, someone else has already made it and is very willing to share the outcome with you. Reading a book is one thing, but being able to ask questions in real time from someone more experienced is like being able to ask your great-grandmother that same question.

Above, Lauren describes sharing her mistakes in supportive groups, thus highlighting two features of mindful persistence. First, group participation lets her transform private information about an error she’s made into something potentially valuable to others—something that others, as well as she, herself, can learn to avoid more efficiently by collaboratively naming and theorizing what went awry. Second, Lauren characterizes food-orientated online affinity groups as highly accessible stores of collective wisdom. As Lauren puts it, the invocation of an idealized great-grandmother organizes and informs persistence against mind-less food practices.

Lauren's experience begins to show us how mindful persistence seeks others as resources for wise practice. Below, Linda narrates cultivating this orientation upon moving to Phoenix—a harsh environment that required her not only to rethink her approach to gardening but to retool her repertoire as a gardener:

Linda: Sharing garden harvests with neighbors is a great way to not only trade produce, but to learn from each other as well. Neighbors that have been in your area a while tend to know what the critters may like or leave alone. Moving into a desert area, I had to re-learn gardening by learning from the critters (rabbit, quail, javelina) as well as my neighbors who saved me a lot of heartache, trial and error.

The wisdom of others, including both animals and people, enlivened Linda's adjustment to the desert. Expertise in this context is not dogmatic but rather nuanced, experimental, and situated in terms of what food projects work for individuals within the affordances and constraints of their own lives. This nuanced and shared approach to information permits people to persist in pursuing a mindful approach to food.

## Managing Risk, Cultivating Conditions for Safety

Introducing microbes into the human body—as fermented foods do—requires an experimental way of knowing. On the one hand, this work behooves us to understand as best we can the conditions in which we are working, in this case, the status of our physical bodies. Along this same vein, this work also behooves us to understand our interventions, in this case, fermented food projects, well enough to know the changes they introduce. On the other hand fermented-food literacies embrace sometimes highly complex experimentation in our own kitchens, so outcomes can thwart our best predictions. Figuratively speaking, managing risk and cultivating conditions for safety do not mean that if you are allergic to bees you cannot be a beekeeper, but they do mean that you must know how to manage the risk of and response to being stung.

Part of what makes managing risk so difficult and so important is that different people experience the risks associated with fermentation differently. Below, Linda and Sheri explain:

Linda: One challenge for me is making sure that we're not making people sick. If I share this with my family, say, someone who WILL take antibiotics every time they get sick, they may not have the gut to handle a little bit of mold where I might be able to handle it. People do have concerns for some good reasons because in our society today, they're all on antibiotics if they're eating meat from a factory farm, so they might not be able to handle raw dairy or some bacteria.

Sheri: The liquid in sauerkraut is a lactobacillus bacteria that preserves the cabbage. Anything above the liquid level may become moldy (start to decay) and can be removed. However, when it comes to the mold on sauerkraut, more than likely it will taste and smell so bad that a person will not consume it.

Schemas can cultivate unfounded fear about molds, and they inhibit mindful persistence. In fact, some of us participating in this community conversation on food fermentation grew up with mothers practicing (largely out of the necessity not to waste food from the weekly trip to the grocery store) a healthy respect for mold in their fridges and breadboxes. But the lure of sanitized, sterile pre-packaged food led us to build our own schemas about mold that inhibited an interest in or a willingness to experiment with fermentation until learning about the need to engage the science of contemporary food practices for ourselves.

Below, Linda and Sheri enter into a dialogue about experimentation. The juxtaposition of their two approaches to experimentation is an argument for mindful persistence, illustrating that food literacies need not insist on conforming to a single ideology or set of practices. Rather, mindful persistence in the domain of fermented-foods is attentive to risk, including the risk of exposing ourselves, friends, and clients to bacteria and other organisms that their intestinal systems may have difficulty adjusting to, considering all bodies are different. First, Linda describes how she cultivates conditions for safety without discouraging experimentation or fearing the inevitable failed experiment:

Linda: Preparation techniques are critical with fermenting foods as you need the right environment, equipment and quality ingredients to make it work. For example, when making cultured vegetables or fermented pickles that use a closed system (i.e. mason jar), it is essential that no air will get in the jar. Also, carbon dioxide needs to escape. There are special jars for this that do not let oxygen in—that could create mold. In addition, if you are not using organic non-GMO [genetically modified organism] ingredients, you may be doing more harm to your health than good. Temperature and light also play a part in fermentation. As the seasons change, you may need to make adjustments to the duration of your project or place the mason jars in warmer/cooler locations. In addition, covering mason jars with a towel to avoid sunlight is pertinent. Because fermentation deals with bacteria and yeast, things can go south if you're not on top of the food experiments happening in your kitchen. Mold and bad yeasts can easily develop in your food without your knowing it. Simply scraping mold from food is a dangerous practice that some currently practice. Understanding the science behind fermentation and finding the best methods are important measures to ensuring we are adding to our health, not hindering it. Besides understanding the science, sniffing food experiments has become a ritual in my household for additional confidence. I have first-hand

knowledge of how to explode a jar of sauerkraut and smell up the kitchen. Constant research and experimentation is part of the journey to creating amazing nutritionally rich foods.

Next, Sheri dramatizes a mindful approach that re-sees microorganisms as contributors to health:

Sheri: I think we can all relate strongly to Linda's explosive experience! Explosions, in my case, a spray of carrot juice foam fountaining all over the kitchen, are both memorable moments and learning opportunities. The truly dangerous failures are rare events. More often, we find ourselves with unexpected outcomes. I recently tried preserving radishes in kombucha. Rather than preserving them, it consumed them, and I ended up with a liquid that was filled with radish particles and skins. I've made batches of cheese that tasted like bread because bread yeast was still in the air when I pressed the cheese. With those outcomes, we find alternative uses—dog and chicken food, compost, etc. Safety can mean anything from using glass containers to avoid leaching of BPA's [synthetic compounds found in plastics] or contaminants that might have been absorbed into plastics, while taking precautions to avoid breaking fragile glass containers, to being cautious about consuming any questionable foods. Botulism and other foodborne illnesses are not to be taken lightly. Cultures that are strange in behavior or appearance should be questioned. A body that has been stripped of natural microbes must introduce new ones with care.

As Linda noted, smelling becomes part of the process. In fact, all senses become attuned to what characteristics food should present. Touching, tasting, smelling, observing, and even listening for the right crunch or the right effervescence becomes second nature. A healthy environment has to ensure that the microbes are happy and there is no cross-pollination between cultures or between an intended culture and an undesired infiltrator. We cannot eliminate yeasts, fungi, or bacteria because food experiments depend on these microorganisms for success.

Linda's and Sheri's approaches to safe experimental practices aren't about eradicating microorganisms from food but rather about wisely approaching their roles in food preservation and digestion. Sheri explains an appeal she employs to reorient others toward risks that fermented-foods introduce:

Sheri: I emphasize in my classes that we must remember that we would be without life if it were not for these little organisms breaking down the larger components of dead matter into smaller ones, ultimately creating building blocks for new life. In my world, I intentionally grow bacteria and yeast

cultures. I consume them to strengthen my body. In the process of working my cows' manure and other decaying matter that brings life naturally to my garden, I expose myself to unknown numbers of microorganisms. I compost vegetation, intentionally growing bacteria, enzymes, and little creatures—all species working hand-in-hand as they have done for millennia. I do this because I believe in it.

As members of this informal food collective, we have talked a lot about the ways that convenience has taken over in our country; as a consequence, basic knowledge about food, digestion, and immunity is being lost. Part of what is lost is an experimental approach to food that acknowledges legitimate concerns—i.e., concerns that some bacteria can be harmful—while cultivating a healthy respect for experimentation in the kitchen that is attentive to practices that keep food safe. Such an orientation is mindful about not only our own health, here and now, but also the well-being of our future generations' health and the health of our planet.

## Conclusion

We may not be able to convince every person that store-bought chicken eggs also come out of the back of a chicken, or that kombucha SCOBYs are worth celebrating, but mindful persistence can rhetorically orient us toward becoming living examples of health. In the context of food literacy, mindful persistence is an individual journey travelled within a community. This journey is an intentional quest to build ongoing health and to address individual and familial health problems by practicing culinary techniques not necessarily acknowledged by conventional expertise. While fermented-food projects may appear to some as a potentially dangerous game, when done well, they can transform what we consume into medicinal gifts that are healthy and nutritive. At its best, mindful persistence—as a way in the world practiced with others—provides the guidance, structure, and cautions needed to experiment safely, whether or not the experiment results in failure or success. This one-to-one and one-to-many communication fosters the mindful persistence that fermented-food literacies demand.

## Endnotes

1. We'd like to thank the following contributors for their participation in the first phase of the community conversation: Kris Bullock, Katie DiBenedetto, Riley McPherson, Bob Schmeckpeper, and Carrie Weldy.
2. Fermented foods are sometimes referred to as cultured foods.
3. As everyday food scientists, we turn our kitchens into grassroots laboratories in an effort to approach food as a deliberate practice that includes observation, experimentation, explication, and documentation.



4. In collaborating as a group of community and university scholars as we do here, we seek to contribute to a growing body of scholarship that emerges from the community and is considered valuable for the work it does, not for the institutional engine that has produced it. For example, in *Reclaiming our Food: How the Grassroots Food Movement is Changing the Way We Eat*, Tanya Denckla Cobb describes many things “[w]e are moving away from” and “toward” as a way of “rebuilding local food systems” (8). She argues that food and community are in fact intertwined, that “a community can grow a more sustainable and resilient economy by growing its local food system, and a healthy local food system will nurture and grow community spirit” (9). Though Cobb’s text is not peer-reviewed, her work has been cited 20 times according to Google Scholar by scholars writing about sustainable, community-based urban practices.

5. Here, we foreground mindful persistence in response to *Community Literacy Journal’s* call for papers on community food literacies. This decision means that other relevant domains of knowledge about fermentation—including the science and public controversy concerning probiotics—remain in the background of this article.

6. This opportunity came as a surprise to participants who had only expected to share their food related knowledge with like-minded others willing and able to attend the food workshop (hosted at 1:00 p.m. on a Thursday).

7. With an outline generated at the end of the workshop in hand, Christina moved the working draft to Google Drive where participants had access as co-authors. The analysis constructed a dynamic and dialogical “we” from claims about mindful persistence that participants articulated together over the course of the co-authoring workshop, which was audio recorded, and the Google Drive drafting space. The majority of insights about mindful persistence conveyed in the commentary were jointly constructed over the course of our community conversation and work online regarding this paper; thus, these insights belong to the group more than to any individual. In contrast, specific names are ascribed to particular individuals’ experiences and situated knowledge, and, in the case of Christina, to her efforts to frame, launch, and sustain this writing project.

8. Special thanks to Robert LaBarge for providing us with access to his collection of Buddhist works.

9. Metaphorically speaking this “experimental way of knowing” can be said to support a kind of intellectual fermentation. However, our focus here is on the more literal practice of sustained inquiry with fermented foods.

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## Appendix: Food Co-authoring Community Conversation (Phase 2)

### Christina: Welcome and introductions

- Ask *everyone* to briefly explain their own food projects, and what made them interested in attending the food writing workshop.
- Introduce the three questions, and explain that we're going to talk about all of them together: "For starters, please pick one question and take 5 to 10 minutes to prepare your thoughts with some notes."
  - Q1: Why do you invest your time in food projects? What motivates you?
  - Q2: What is the biggest challenge you face as someone experimenting with food? How do you persist beyond the challenge?
  - Q3: In interviews, everyone or nearly everyone mentioned reading other people's experiences with food projects—on blogs, discussion boards, scholarly articles. When do you most often turn to these, what do you gain from reading about other ideas and experiences with food projects?

### Christina: Initiate and facilitate sharing

- Ask someone to start the conversation: "Did anyone take up the first question?"

### Elenore and Stacey: Write ideas on whiteboards in three "question columns"

- Listen and ask before writing: "Where would you like this on the board *top right?* *bottom left?*"
  - The goal here is to create initial spatial relationships even though the first few people may resist this prompt. We should assist in grouping like ideas with placement, circles, lists ...
- Ask *everyone* - in turn - to contribute answers to the first question.
- Wait in silence before moving on to the second question and ask: "Is there anything else we want to add up here?"
- Ask someone to start the conversation about the second question then the third.

### Christina: Review CLJ Call for Papers (CFP)

- Call attention to specific lines of text to explain that our ideas (on the whiteboards) will give us what we need for the journal article, i.e.: "What role does food literacy play in our communities?"
  - or—How or why does what you and others do (read, write, teach, learn or share) with food matter?: "What role does community literacy play in local and global food movements?"
  - or—How do local and global food movements impact what you do (read, write, teach, learn or share) with others?

**Christina: Show example of collaborative article w/annotation (Bowen et al.)**

- Explain that the article is written by a professor and her graduate students: “This is a class where students learn about what it takes (practically and conceptually) to work with people outside of the university” (19).
- Explain that the article is largely structured by themes they’ve identified in their context - a good model for us: “The hands-on experiences allowed them to ‘critically reflect’ on their experiences and identify themes with which to draft their own sections ” (19).
  - The themes show *some* of what is scholarly-relevant to community literacy studies: Reciprocity, Problem-solving Pragmatics, Ethics, Sustainability

**Christina: Move the conversation back to the white boards**

- Ask someone to start identifying themes by way of the model text: “Let’s try to identify or construct some themes *together* by looking back at our responses to the three questions we started with.”
  - The goal here is to let people speak back to what one another ventures when they’re naming things by writing ideas on whiteboards at the bottom of the three “question columns”, assisting in identifying relationships among themes, and consolidating themes on the poster board to articulate possible emerging logics.
- Ask everyone to think about drafting: “Is there one of these themes that *anyone* would like to commit to drafting?”
- Ask section managers to invite participation (via email) and commit to deadlines.

**Author Bios**

**Christina Santana** is a PhD Candidate in the Writing, Rhetorics and Literacies program at Arizona State University. She is currently working on her dissertation, entitled *Deliberating the Future of Driving in an Intentionally-Mediated Space*, a project which offers the literate practice of “framing”—inspired by Kenneth Burke’s frames of acceptance and rejection—for the purpose of fostering productive speculation. She is also interested in the behind-the-scenes work of community writing for scholarly purposes.

**Stacey Kuznetsov** is an assistant professor at the School of Arts, Media, and Engineering (AME) with a joint appointment at the School of Computing, Informatics, and Decision Systems Engineering (CIDSE) at Arizona State University. Her research explores the role of technology in collective efforts to construct knowledge and address issues. She is interested in low-cost tools and hands-on making for citizen science, community activism, and DIY biology.

**Sheri Schmeckpeper** lives on a 1.25 acre family farm, where she and her husband, Bob, produce nearly 80% of their food, including vegetables, fruit, meat, and dairy. Since completing her career in higher education, Sheri has been able to pursue her passion for teaching,

writing, and coaching others about food production, processing, and preservation. Sheri acknowledges the wisdom inherent in nature, and thus emphasizes the use of natural methods and sciences in her classes and her life.

**Linda J. Curry** is a plant-based cooking instructor and health advisor. She teaches individual and group instruction in Mesa, Arizona. In addition, she manufactures a natural skin care line called *Simple Nature Skincare*.

**Elenore Long** is an associate professor of community literacy at Arizona State University. With Lorraine Higgins and Linda Flower, she co-authored the lead article for the inaugural issue of *Community Literacy Journal*. She is currently working on a book project entitled *Makahda: Are we still in this: A Responsive Rhetorical Art for Local Public Life*. She serves on the Board of Directors for the Nile Institute for Peace and Development, a transnational consortium responsive to historic trauma, a globalized economy, changing demographics, and shrinking public resources.

**Lauren Davis** belongs to fermentation groups, heritage turkey groups, vegetarian groups, trade/swap groups, and chicken-keeping groups on Facebook.

**Heidi Koerner** received a BS in Psychology from Arizona State University and a Doctorate in Naturopathic Medicine from Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine. She is currently enrolled in a concurrent nursing program with Northern Arizona University and Gateway Community College.

**Kimberly Butterfield McQuarrie** is a mom, wife, sister, cancer survivor, and fermenter. As a mother of three boys, she especially tries to eat and live clean. Surviving cancer has inspired her to keep fighting and to teach those around her to live better with less.