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**“Eating the Other”: Invisibilities and Inequalities Within Culinary
Cosmopolitanism**

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ABSTRACT

In this study, I interrogate culinary cosmopolitanism, or food consumption practices reflecting an appreciation for cultural diversity, tolerance, and exploration. Culinary cosmopolitanism has grown increasingly popular amongst consumers, alongside the implicit assumption that society is genuinely moving towards acceptance of all cultures and people. However, I argue for a more critical perspective on the consumption practices of culinary cosmopolitanism. Using interviews and survey data with students at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota, I also extend current theory on culinary cosmopolitanism, which has focused on older professionals, to an understudied age group. At Macalester, a small Midwestern liberal arts college that invests in a reputation as multicultural, diverse, and inclusive, *cosmopolitan capital* and *authenticity negotiation* emerged as strategies students took to align their experiences as emerging cosmopolitans with core tenets of cosmopolitanism: worldliness, exploration, and authenticity. Through these strategies, however, class inequality was reinforced and kept invisible, despite the importance of resources in how individuals explore food. Furthermore, a White American and European center of food culture was reproduced as a standard marker by which all Other cuisines and cultures are measured. Furthermore, ideals of culinary tourism espoused by students justified the exoticization and commodification of racial Otherness. Thus, despite assumptions that multiculturalism and egalitarianism are norms of today's food consumption, culinary cosmopolitanism in practice obscures the role of class

privilege in our food consumption and serves the racial project of colorblindness by reinforcing whiteness as central yet invisible.

INTRODUCTION

A quick scroll on Netflix reveals titles like “Street Food: Asia” and “Taco Chronicles” calling on fares around the globe for viewership. This fixation on global eating permeates popular culture, generating discourse on what makes food authentic—especially as “fusion” restaurants and the dissemination of recipes via social media proliferates. As this mode of cosmopolitan eating increasingly structures consumer culture, the incentive to appear worldly and culturally tolerant through consumption grows. As anthropologist and food scholar Sydney Mintz (2002:26) succinctly wrote, “Food is essential as sustenance and a form of group membership, yet it is frequently taken for granted.” This paper will explore how engagement with culinary cosmopolitanism (abbreviated as CC onwards) in practice shapes group boundaries— in particular, how food consumption aimed towards egalitarianism and multicultural acceptance translates into consumption practices that ironically reproduce inequality. I also call into question the principle of authenticity by highlighting its deployment in ways that essentialize the cultures of racially marginalized groups as static reservoirs of knowledge to harvest in the quest to be cultural omnivores.

Cosmopolitanism has traditionally been theorized as a mode of governance that “refers to a philosophy of world citizenship” (Bookman 2013:57) and an acceptance of heterogeneity. However, its application to the mundane has imbued activities like eating and grocery shopping with the potential to be public displays of how much we value

diversity and multiculturalism. CC aligns more with cosmopolitanism defined as an “intellectual or aesthetic disposition” (Bookman 2013:57) towards food consumption demonstrating “openness towards divergent cultural experiences” and a “search for contrasts rather than uniformity” (Hannerz 1996:103). Amongst young adults, spaces like higher education can reinforce the social desirability of being cosmopolitan. Despite this, studies of CC neglect young adults, who are at a prime moment in their social lives as they break away from familial consumption patterns, make autonomous spending decisions, and form social groups based on criteria like consumer identities. Furthermore, when we fail to account for unevenly dispersed resources in our appraisals of others’ multiculturalism as consumers, we maintain the invisibility of inequalities- despite the fact that resources like money and time deeply shape access to culinary knowledge and experiences. Ultimately, this paper contributes to current literature linking race- namely, contemporary colorblind ideologies- and class to food consumption through an interrogation of multicultural consumption and the merits of authenticity amongst college students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Elite Consumption

In his seminal theory of distinction, Bourdieu (1984) argues that those of the same social group and position in the social hierarchy share tastes across all forms, from music to food. According to Bourdieu, these tastes constitute part of habitus, or the ways we respond to the world around us based on our cultural and economic structural positions and “classificatory schemes, preferences and inclinations... such as taste” (Bookman

2013:57). This theory lays a foundation for the understanding that our lifestyles are expressions of our class positions (Warde, Martins, and Olsen 1999). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986) describes three forms of capital- economic, social, and cultural, that can be used to understand how some tastes are afforded more legitimacy than others. In further sections, I define cosmopolitan capital as a “toolbox” of resources and knowledge students use to frame their consumer experiences as cosmopolitan, similar to cultural capital, which encapsulates one’s “familiarity with the dominant culture in a society” (Sullivan 2001:893). Through the deployment of capital, ingroup members legitimize the criteria of who belongs in their group, a process by which some culinary tastes come to be more acceptable within certain spaces while others are pushed to the margins.

Lamont and Molnár’s (2002) work on boundary construction which distinguishes between symbolic and social boundaries expands upon how tastes are legitimized. Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made between objects, people, and practices; for instance, distinctions between cosmopolitan and provincial food practices. When symbolic boundaries become widely accepted, they take the form of social boundaries- or the tangible ways that social differences manifest. One way social difference materializes in daily life is through exclusion. Bourdieu and Passeron (1972:4) defined a certain type of exclusion as “symbolic violence,” or a privileged class’s ability to impose legitimacy while maintaining the invisibility of the power dynamics that initially enable such privilege. Bourdieu and Passeron argue that through this process, the elite succeed in legitimizing their culture as superior to the cultures of the lower classes. Thus, “having an extensive vocabulary, wide-ranging cultural

references, and command of high culture” (Lamont and Molnár 2002:172) becomes meritorious, but the mechanisms that produce such privileges remain invisible.

Later scholarship investigates the malleability of symbolic boundaries. Peterson and Kern (1997) argue that “omnivorousness” is replacing Bourdieusian exclusion-based taste profiles, asserting that “lowbrow” culture, or cultures traditionally excluded from upper- to middle-class taste profiles, are now selectively drawn on by elites. Thus, the socioeconomically privileged appear to have more eclectic tastes while still maintaining control over group boundaries (Peterson and Kern 1997). A prime example of this in recent gastronomic discourse is the fixation on “no frills” or “hole-in-the-wall” establishments (Gottlieb 2015, Hirose & Pih 2011). Bryson (1996) and Warde et al. (1999) highlight how a performance of tolerance through consumption has become valuable for group membership amongst those with socioeconomic privilege. Essentially, cultural tolerance has become a hallmark of elite taste because it demonstrates a liberal commitment to openness, showing one’s true global citizenship (Warde et al. 1999). Using the concept of multicultural capital, Bryson (1996) argues that the performance of omnivorous values and competence with a diverse spread of cultures has become a new criterion for exclusion, as access to such knowledge is shaped by one’s stocks of capital and privilege (Bryson 1996).

Culinary Cosmopolitanism

Scholars have used the term “cosmopolitan” to describe the cultural turn to openness and diversity under “a condition of respecting difference, appreciating cultural

heterogeneity, and questioning Eurocentrism” (Johnston and Baumann 2014:92). The embeddedness of cosmopolitanism in food consumption has made the quest for diversity part of our experiences as individual consumers (Bookman 2013, Johnston and Baumann 2014). While cosmopolitan consumption could demonstrate a genuine turn to cultural diversity and appreciation (Bookman 2013, Hannerz 1996, Johnston and Baumann 2014), scholars also approach CC with skepticism. Johnston and Baumann (2014:153) suggest that “dominant cultural schemas about wealth, poverty, and inequality are reflected and reproduced” in the pursuit of CC. They found that middle- and upper-class cosmopolitans tended to romanticize poverty, downplay differences in the experiences of disparate socioeconomic classes, and normalize the possession of wealth and privilege. These authors posit that within elite consumption that increasingly looks towards diverse cultures, poverty is simply an external condition or accessory to their culinary experiences.

Some scholars have taken a similar approach to the current study, seeking to expand definitions of CC beyond elite taste. Namely, Cappeliez and Johnston (2013:447) argue that “pragmatic CC” is a “distinctly rooted variety of cosmopolitanism [...] that is available even to those with limited economic and cultural resources, as well as minimal geographic mobility.” Moving beyond elite configurations of cosmopolitanism in practice and focusing on exchanges of culinary knowledge “rooted in global flows that pass through local places, and [...] not exclusively linked to elite food experiences or tastes, but rather to food experiences obtained and shared with others” (Cappeliez 2013:451). Pragmatic CC provides a jumping off point for the current study, which conceptualizes CC as a gradient of participation, open even to college students with limited capacity to explore food.

The Search for Authenticity

Other work on CC highlights its intersectional dimensions and how cosmopolitans make sense of authenticity. While not all foodies are “White, middle-class, First World citizens” (Molz 2007:78), these individuals disproportionately constitute today’s cosmopolitans and wield power in discourses that only validate exclusive tastes, stocks of knowledge, and culinary experiences. Gottlieb (2015:39) argued that upwardly mobile culinary cosmopolitans establish their identities by distinguishing themselves from mass-market consumption, searching for “the unvarnished, the artisanal, the seasonal, the handmade.” However, in this search, consumers reproduce stereotypes of racialized Otherness (Gottlieb 2015, Heldke 2003, Hirose and Pih 2011, Long 2004, Lu and Fine 1995). Gottlieb (2015) found that consumers expected an “authentic” restaurant- usually one serving food of a nonwhite culture and owned by nonwhite people- to be dirty or have little to no decorations as a reflection of its refusal to pander to White comfort.

As restaurants are deemed “authentic,” an assumption that cuisines and cultures coded as nonwhite exist free from modern influence is reinforced, and perpetual primordiality is imposed onto these cultures (Heldke 2003, Wilcox and Busse 2017). Without a critical lens on CC, its practices reproduce a White center of culture against which all other cultures, cuisines, and people are deemed “ethnic,” a sweeping generalization that ultimately exoticizes bodies and items like food that are coded as nonwhite (Heldke 2003, Hughey 2010, Wilcox and Busse 2017). Similarly, Hirose and Pih (2011) argued that predominantly White Yelp reviewers discussed Asian

establishments in ways that conflate authenticity with racial Otherness, identifying the bodies of racialized Others (like staff or clients) as markers of a restaurant's authenticity; when consumers claimed seeing a cook who they assumed to be Asian, they found the Japanese restaurant to be more authentic. Scholars of race, like Bonilla-Silva (2011) and Lipsitz (1995) would argue that this unquestioned valorization of nonwhite food and its supposed authenticity reproduces a broader current of white supremacy that dominates social life. Put more succinctly, bell hooks (1992:21) writes: "Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture."

Colorblind Ideology and Multicultural Consumption

Multidisciplinary literature on colorblind ideology provides a link to multicultural food consumption and colorblind ideology, which is built on the misunderstanding that race has become irrelevant in our social world. Bonilla-Silva (2010:9) defines racial ideology as "racially based frameworks used [...] to explain and justify, or challenge the racial status quo." As narratives are used to make sense of the current racial hierarchy, ideologies like colorblindness are collectively reproduced through daily interactions. Thus, a colorblind frame can be applied to our interactions with and evaluations of cultural products, such as how we talk about restaurants and dishes. Since colorblind racism purports that we are living in a "post-racial" society, it obscures the role of structural racial injustice baked into institutions and norms. Thus, scholars attribute colorblind racism to the dominating White racial frame, or the way our social world functions to uphold whiteness as a standard, while remaining unnamed. Feagin (2013:12)

describes the White racial frame as “a comprehensive orienting structure, a ‘tool kit’ that whites and others have long used to understand, interpret, and act in social settings.”

The White racial frame seeps into language, everyday interactions, and our institutions, yet remains invisible. This invisibility, as discussed by Lipsitz (1995), is what gives whiteness its enduring power during a presumably “post-racial” age. Because whiteness has been accepted as a social standard by which all racial matters are appraised, it has become increasingly hard to explicitly address and critique- especially for those who benefit from this system of domination (Bonilla-Silva 2011, Feagin 2013, Lipsitz 1995). Importantly, the invisibility of whiteness justifies apathy from those who benefit from the White racial frame- often elite White people, yet people of any race can be similarly invested in upholding the racial status quo, even if these efforts are implicit. As Belew and Gutiérrez (2021:5) suggest, whiteness “requires a body politic that is not curious about its own history, doesn’t understand the long and deep roots of its inequalities.” This inaction towards the dominance of whiteness is also reflected in language- more precisely, the ways explicitly racial matters tend to be discussed in implicit, seemingly neutral terms (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Bonilla-Silva (2011) points out a common example of how the White racial frame manifests popular culture by discussing how movies featuring an all-White cast are never called “White movies,” while movies featuring Black actors are almost often demarcated as “Black movies” and assumed to be only for Black audiences, reflecting an assumption that whiteness is universal. This notion of whiteness as universal is crucial to understanding how culinary cosmopolitanism and colorblindness might be related, as both define difference based on an assumed center of White American or European culture and people.

Lipsitz (1995:370) refers to this assumed universality of whiteness as “an imagined community [...] called into being through inscribed appeals to the solidarity of white supremacy.” This imagined community does not exclude as overtly as segregation of the Jim Crow era- a time period that racial injustice, under colorblind ideology, is thought to be exclusive to. Instead, “colorblind racism otherizes softly” Bonilla-Silva (2010:3) under an egalitarian ideal that we are all human and equal despite enduring histories of systemic racism and inequality. Since colorblindness is classified by an insistence that race is irrelevant, it is also underlined by a fear of appearing racist by simply naming race. Instead, those invested in colorblind ideology may call on political liberalism in the abstract, citing ideals like equal opportunity and individual agency as proof that an individual is not racist. Thus, colorblind ideology and corresponding discursive maneuvers that enable avoidance of race enables White privilege to exist- without naming who it disadvantages and who reaps its rewards (Bonilla-Silva 2010).

These ideologies underlying the White racial frame and colorblindness manifests in what Omi and Winant (1994) call *racial projects*: the ways that race as a dynamic social category is deployed and represented. Most importantly, since they are interpretations of the current racial hierarchy, racial projects do not always espouse the dominant, White ideology. There are race-conscious racial projects, like activism against systemic injustice, or colorblind racial projects, like attacks on affirmative action because its policies are supposedly “unfair” to White people or account for racial inequality that is assumed to be obsolete. It is within this literature on contemporary colorblind ideology and the colorblind racial project that I situate my contributions. Specifically, I propose that this case of CC among students positioned to become upwardly mobile

cosmopolitans demonstrates how we might expand colorblind ideology to food consumption. Namely, CC's maintenance that crossing cultural boundaries through consumption suffices as proof of an anti-racist or otherwise egalitarian and tolerant attitude aligns with the racial project of colorblindness that suggests we have truly achieved racial equality.

MACALESTER COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY OF EMERGENT COSMOPOLITANISM

Macalester College is a small liberal arts college in Saint Paul, Minnesota, with a student population of 2,142. Like many other institutions of higher education, Macalester publicly espouses multiculturalism and global citizenship, making this school a fitting site at which to investigate how students perform multiculturalism through food consumption. Despite the school's public investment in diversity and inclusion, Macalester College's Class of 2025 and Class of 2024 (juniors and seniors as of 2023, respectively) are over 50% White. The dissonance between the student body's racial makeup and the school's espoused values of diversity reflect the "corporatization of higher education," or strategies taken by institutions to sell higher education to students and their families as potential customers, often through superficial diversity tactics that do little to genuinely increase the accessibility of higher education and diversify institutions (Bell and Hartmann 2007, Giroux 2002, Pascoe 2023, Warikoo 2014, Yu and Nguyen 2018). Schools across the nation position themselves as institutions where the future's global citizens are primed with the cultural capital necessary to succeed in other elite spaces. With its small student population and investment in the display of such

ideals, Macalester College serves as a microcosm through which students are more easily connected than at large, state institutions, and the ideals of multiculturalism and diversity are diffused throughout a much smaller student body, raising the incentive to at least perform some kind of alignment with these principles.

College students in particular occupy a unique, intermediary social position that allows for the potential to expand how we conceptualize CC. As consumers, college students occupy a social position in limbo; some are financially independent, while some rely on familial wealth to some extent for costs of living and leisure, including travel and going out to eat. At the same time, college is underscored by physical distance from families and established modes of consumption; as many interviewees described, college necessitated learning how to cook and do groceries. In this way, food as a necessity or a matter of convenience can take precedence over its novelty or authenticity; many interviewees discussed preferring nearby, cheaper restaurants and saving upscale, farther away locations for special occasions. In this context of food consumption practices governed largely by convenience and necessity, the privilege to explore food beyond Macalester's boundaries becomes more pronounced as students establish quasi-independent consumer identities while still drawing on the cultural capital garnered during earlier years through family.

My interrogation of CC within this unique context enables an expansion of current theory, which has previously focused on older, upper middle-class adults as established cosmopolitan consumers. As a case study of students at a small, liberal arts institution, I broaden previously narrow definitions of CC in practice that focus on elite consumption and suggest that students in college have potential as *emergent*

cosmopolitans. Though not fully-fledged cosmopolitans with the privileges of graduate education and upward mobility (Gottlieb 2015), many college students regularly seek to conform to some iteration of CC, drawing on resources and knowledge from past experiences. At the same time, students at college have differential access to experiences like travel and eating at upscale restaurants, bolstering their repertoires of cosmopolitan capital. Thus, the aim of this paper is not to assess whether students are cosmopolitan by previously accepted definitions; instead, I aim to elucidate the ways students build the foundations of a cosmopolitan consumer identity, and the pivotal role of race and class privilege in hierarchies of taste on college campuses.

METHODS

As a college senior at the time of this paper, I was well-situated to collect data amongst peers. Additionally, my father's lifelong career has involved cooking; my connection with the topic allowed me to comfortably conduct interviews as an individual equally interested in food, generating casual conversations with peers. At the same time, my low-income background enabled me to understand the nuances of balancing financial needs with a desire to identify with CC. Finally, as the process of gathering interviewees consisted of two-step recruitment starting with a voluntary survey, most students I spoke to were happy to share anecdotes and experiences of food, which allowed for a general theme to emerge: food was important to every participant in some way.

Data collection occurred in two phases during the 2023-2024 academic year, beginning in the fall of 2023, and resuming in the spring of 2024. Juniors and seniors were selected for sampling since these students were more likely to be familiar with local

food after attending Macalester College for three or four years. In collaboration with Macalester College's Institutional Research Office, a survey was sent to a simple random sample of 500 domestic or permanent resident status Macalester College from the Class of 2024 and the Class of 2025 (juniors and seniors), once during October 2023 and once during February 2023, making for a total sample size of 1000 students.¹ The survey received a 39% response rate. Questions on the recruitment survey included demographic questions, which mirrored Macalester College's categorizations of race/ethnicity² and gender used for institutional data. I also provided free-response questions for students to enter more information about their ethnicity if they wished to do so. Respondents could indicate their gender as male, female, non-binary, prefer not to say, or other. Respondents could enter more information regarding this in a free-response box. For students who indicated "prefer not to say," I use gender-neutral pronouns in interview excerpts. Additionally, survey respondents indicated the highest level of education completed by either parent/guardian, as one indicator of socioeconomic status.³

The recruitment survey included free responses, such as students' favorite restaurants in the Twin Cities. Then, students were asked to rate these statements on a scale of 1 (not accurate at all) to 5 (most accurate): I often go out to eat, I often try new foods, and I often eat foods from cultures other than my own. With students interviewed, I referred to these questions to ask for elaboration or a rationale for their choice. In this

¹ While many students in this study referred to international experiences, and many Macalester students are international, I focused on recruiting domestic students to place this study in the context of American gastronomic discourse.

² Race and ethnicity are conflated in Macalester institutional data.

³ While the highest level of education achieved by either parent/guardian is not a conclusive measure of socioeconomic status, interviews allowed for more comprehensive discussion of how students convey their socioeconomic status and experienced food exploration as a product of their social positionality.

survey, students were given the option to participate in an interview. The interviews were held in person or on Zoom. Interview questions centered on the students' upbringing with a specific focus on the role of food in their lives, their perceptions of food both on and beyond campus (including the restaurants they chose to list as their favorites), and their consumer habits, including how often they go out to eat. 37 interviews were conducted in total, lasting between 20 minutes and one hour. These interviews were recorded and the audio files were transcribed using Otter.ai. Using Atlas.ti, I began with open coding to identify themes and connect recurring themes to the literature review, then shifted to focused coding once I had established a coding scheme. To preserve participant anonymity, I use pseudonyms when referring to interviewees and refer to their hometowns using American regional descriptions.

RESULTS

Of the survey results, Class of 2024 and Class of 2025 were equally represented. 36% of respondents had parents with a Master's degree, while 30% of respondents had parents with a Doctorate degree. While parental education attainment is just one element of socioeconomic status, the fact that over half of the survey respondents came from households where at least one parent had postgraduate education is important to consider when considering who elected to do this survey, which solicited opinions on the local food scene and going out to eat. 64% of the survey respondents were White, 2% of

respondents were Black/African American, 10% of the respondents were Asian, 7% of respondents were Hispanic/Latinx, while 16% of respondents were one or more races.⁴

Of the 37 interviewees, 40% were White. No respondents identified as monoracially Black/African American, though within the “one or more races” category, 3 students listed Black/African American as at least one racial identification. 14% of respondents were Asian, and 16% were Hispanic/Latinx, and 30% of the interviewees identified with one or more races.

Finally, to reflect how the cosmopolitan values of food exploration and tolerance are highly performed amongst Macalester College juniors and seniors, I highlight that the majority of students who responded to the survey rated themselves a 4 on a scale of 1-5 (5 being the highest) on the accuracy of the statement “I often try new foods.” Similarly, a majority of survey respondents (36%) rated themselves a 5 on the accuracy of the statement: “I often eat foods from cultures other than my own.” In contrast, only 13% of students ranked themselves with a 3 or below on this statement. Together, these results reflect the social desirability of one’s food consumption being perceived as cosmopolitan, or at the very least, indicative of tolerance of diverse cultures and willingness to explore.

FINDINGS

I frame my findings as CC in *practice*, focusing on how students from diverse socioeconomic and racial backgrounds actually engaged with central tenets of

⁴ Disaggregating the “one or more races” category could lead to a more robust analysis of how racial groups are represented in this study. However, for the purpose of this paper, I mirror Macalester College’s institutional data protocol of having one category for all students who indicate one or more racial identification.

cosmopolitanism identified throughout interviews: worldliness, exploration, and authenticity. Then, I outline the strategies students took to assert their fulfillment of (or failure to fulfill) these tenets through consumption.

To claim that their food consumption habits align with the cosmopolitan values of worldliness and diversity, I have named *cosmopolitan capital* as a toolbox of experiences, resources, and knowledge based on a students' socioeconomic status and corresponding stocks of capital. Students with more experiences and resources in a combination of economic, social, and cultural capital were better positioned to leverage cosmopolitan capital as proof of their worldliness and capability for gastronomic exploration. At the same time, however, these students discussed experiences like international travel and frequenting upscale restaurants in a privilege-neutral manner that erased the role of socioeconomic resources in their ability to participate in CC.

Authenticity negotiation was the process by which students constructed authenticity and positioned their culinary experiences relative to conceptions of authenticity. Authenticity was often defined in ways that solidified nonwhite food cultures as products to draw on in our quests to be multicultural. Students described authentic food as an entry point to “knowing” a presumably foreign group, reflecting assumptions that the Other can be consumed or consolidated into one culinary experience. For many, the danger of consuming an inauthentic taco or Americanized sushi was the loss of the most accurate experience of cultures seen as foreign and distant. Furthermore, students generalized authentic establishments based on “environmental signs—decorations, music, clientele” (Gottlieb 2015:43), with some even expecting that authentic restaurants should be dirty or less polished and modern than a restaurant

traditionally coded as White. Together, authenticity negotiation and cosmopolitan capital reveal how the colorblind racial project also contains food consumption during an age where multiculturalism is the norm.

Finally, before discussing my findings, I clarify my use of the term “ethnic food” and similar terms, like “ethnic-coded food.” Ethnic food has traditionally been used to describe association with any ethnic ancestry (Narayan 2016). I believe that “ethnic food” is an insufficient term to address the diversity of all food beyond American and European cuisine, as do Ray (2016) and Heldke (2003), who argue that the label “ethnic food” generalizes non-American, non-European cuisines as virtually the same against a backdrop of normative whiteness, while also assuming that non-European cuisines are incapable of becoming part of the amalgamation of what we consider American cuisine. However, for this paper, I often use “ethnic food” to reflect how respondents actually framed their food consumption in a dichotomy between a culinary canon consisting primarily of European cuisines and a select few non-European cuisines, and everything else.

Cosmopolitan Capital

Cosmopolitan capital entailed how students employed classed resources to align their food consumption with exploration and worldliness as two central tenets of CC in practice. I first highlight how students leveraged novel experiences, such as traveling to eat food in countries other than the U.S. and eating at restaurants across price gradients, reflecting Peterson and Kern’s (1996) omnivorousness. Underlying these novel experiences, however, were class-based resources of excess time, money, and even

connections or previous experiences. Next, I outline how students leveraged institutionalized or official knowledge, like cookbooks, cooking classes, and media geared towards cosmopolitan lifestyles as a source of their verified cosmopolitan knowledge, which was demarcated from culinary knowledge seen as unofficial, such as family recipes, entailing a devaluation of knowledge produced beyond the confines of exclusive culinary spaces. Furthermore, many students sought to establish themselves as cosmopolitans by discussing gastronomic exploration as an intellectual pursuit, in contrast with students who understood the social desirability of CC but experienced barriers to engaging with food in exploratory ways, reflecting how the principles of CC emphasize acceptance of difference and the breaking of symbolic borders while its practices remain generally class-exclusive.

Novel Experiences & Culinary Tourism

Claiming cosmopolitan capital entailed expenditures of time and money that granted access to certain experiences of food as a realm of tourism and exploration. The exploratory motive embedded within CC in practice often defined consumption as a point of entry to knowing assumed racial, cultural, or ethnic Others. For instance, Lee, a White junior from South Dakota, described eating food as “the first step to getting to know a different place and what the people value.” Lee’s desire to understand the values of perceived Other cultures through consumption evokes culinary tourism driven by a desire to “satisfy [...] curiosity about otherness” (Long (2004:22). Many students participated in this ideal of culinary tourism by emphasizing unique, expensive opportunities, like travel, that enabled their knowledge of cuisines they perceive as external to their identity.

Underlying this touristic value of exploration was an assumption that “‘culture’ is a representation of a racialized being” (Hirose and Pih 2011:1449), and that by consuming food from around the world, we are truly gaining a full perspective of the Other. The assumption that food brings us closer to people who we presumably would otherwise never interact with reflects how

To further exemplify how food culture is accepted as a representation of racial or cultural otherness that can be consumed, George, a Hispanic/Latinx junior from California, discussed traveling during high school on an educational tour of Germany, France, and Spain. George named Japanese cuisine as one of his favorites on the recruiting survey, and when asked to explain more about his connection with Japanese food, he cited travel: “My first proper exposure [to Japanese food...] was when I took a trip to China. That was when I first started actually caring for the food.” By describing this trip to China as his first “proper exposure” to Japanese food, George demarcates experiences of Japanese food outside of Asia as less legitimate despite the lack of universal access to travel. At the same time, George groups Japan and China together by assuming that eating Japanese food in China suffices as an experience that enables one to learn about Japanese food, culture, and people. The desire to learn about food often entails a very literal connection of food to a single place of origin that consumers must see for themselves. Similarly, Josh, a male White junior from the Southeast, says: “I’m a better judge of what French food is supposed to be like, because I’ve been to France and eaten food from France.” Here, John expresses the link between culinary knowledge and the opportunity to travel and eat food within a country outside of the US, while stressing that “real” French food can only exist in France.

Even without leaving the US, students found ways to display their dedication to cosmopolitanism by latching onto the experiences of family members or friends who influenced their appreciation for food. Jason, a White male senior from the Northeast, discussed how his father's travels informed his perception of food as a gateway to exploring other cultures:

My dad [...] travels all the time. So he's all over the world. And I mean, I think seeing him travel and go to these places makes it a little more like, 'Oh, he's there? I'll try the food that's there.' Or if he really likes a country [...] try the food [...] a little more of an opening to it.

Meanwhile, Eve, a White female junior from the Midwest, discussed her father's presumably high-profile job that enabled travel to multiple countries as an explanation for both her and her father's appreciation for foods around the globe:

He works for a global company currently, but he used to work for Coca-Cola [...] so he'd go to China a lot for business, and also Japan a lot [...] He goes to France more than anything else right now [...] and he'd just get introduced to a lot of different foods and everything like that.

Both Eve and Jason draw on the cosmopolitan capital of their fathers as an influence on their alignment with the tenets of CC. At the same time, students reinforce the assumption that travel is a prerequisite to claiming a cosmopolitan consumer identity. Jason also echoes food as a representation of a foreign country and its people, as he discusses trying the food from a country his father particularly enjoyed as an "opening" to the country. Together, these implicit and explicit links between travel and exploration to new knowledge of a presumed Other reflect classed assumptions that cosmopolitanism entails a certain threshold of monetary expenditure to reach an acceptable level of multicultural competence, or Bryson's (1996) multicultural capital. Ultimately, the

pursuit of culinary tourism supported an assumption that diverse cultures and people can be consumed and known simply by purchasing a meal.

Institutionalized Knowledge, Ironic Exclusivity

Cosmopolitan capital also entailed food exploration as an intellectual pursuit. Students sought knowledge from institutionalized sources of culinary knowledge produced by those accepted as culinary experts, like chefs or food critics, many having been primed by their families to value culinary diversity and tolerance. As cosmopolitan a repertoire of experiences and knowledge, cosmopolitan capital also equips students with competence in multicultural culinary discourse and practice.

One of these advantageous experiences included coming from a family with the resources to expose their children to different kinds of food. Students tended to classify their consumption during childhood in a dichotomy between pickiness- which was always discussed negatively- and openness or adventurousness, without necessarily commenting on resources that increase the likelihood of an individual being open to a diverse array of foods. Lara, an Asian female senior from the West, discussed her father's intent to raise a gastronomically adventurous child. When I asked Lara why she decided to give herself a 4 out of 5 (5 being the highest) to rate the accuracy of the statement "I often try new food," she reasoned:

My dad definitely didn't want me to be a picky eater growing up [...] I tried to think of foods that I didn't like, and I couldn't really think of whole cuisines or dishes that I've tried and didn't like, so I feel like I'm always open to try new restaurants.

Similarly, Ella, a White female senior from the Midwest, pondered her upbringing as a gastronomically tolerant child:

I feel like my parents raised me to be very adventurous with foods [...] they wouldn't make me eat anything. But they definitely were very encouraging of being adventurous. I think they didn't- they didn't want to raise picky kids.

The dichotomy of tolerance and pickiness was used to define the desire to learn about food simply for the sake of learning. By framing food as an intellectual pursuit, the necessity of food to survive, which was much more relevant for students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds, was simply absent. For instance, Nora, a White and Asian female junior from Massachusetts, explained her value of food exploration: “It just feels like a way of increasing my knowledge base, if that makes sense. Like, why do you seek out learning? [...] I want to know more.”

Within this pursuit of gastronomic knowledge for the sake of knowledge, certain sources of culinary knowledge were valued more than others, creating an ironic exclusivity despite culinary cosmopolitan's supposed values of egalitarian openness and acceptance. For instance, many students drew from expertise-based culinary knowledge, like cookbooks, magazines, and other media, where authorities in the culinary field, like chefs, food writers, and elite consumers delineate the right ways to eat and explore. Emmett, a White and Asian male senior from the Northwest, discussed his reluctance to identify with cosmopolitanism due to his lack of free time and excess money as a college student, but credited his parents' passion for exploring food for his experiences with culinary cosmopolitan in practice:

My dad is super into [...] the Eater magazine, and stuff like that [...] I think that's where he gets most of his restaurants. I wouldn't say right now there's a spot that we

revisit a ton. It's a lot of turnover, and then like, 'okay, the Eater of the Month dropped. Here's the top five restaurants.' And then when I'm in town, we'll knock off three of the five or whatever [...] I don't think we have comfort restaurants in that way. It's like if we're going out to eat, let's try a new place.

The Eater is a food website focused on local restaurants and restaurant industry news. It is well known for its restaurant maps and city-specific recommendations, and it boasts personalized streams of food news for different metropolitan areas, including the Twin Cities, New York, Boston, and Chicago. As a media platform through which culinary authorities wield the power to dictate which cuisines and restaurants cosmopolitans should add to their arsenal of experience, the Eater is an institutionalized, expert-based source of culinary knowledge. Meanwhile, the trend-oriented nature of food media, as reflected by the Eater of the Month that Emmett discusses demands that one constantly spends money in pursuit of the next best restaurant or up-and-coming chef. The importance of a continuous collection of culinary knowledge is reflected in Emmett's observation that he and his family have no "comfort" restaurants. The ability to forgo comfort, convenience, and familiarity in pursuit of trends reflects the centrality of novel experiences and amassing culinary knowledge as a source of distinction within the realm of cosmopolitanism. Further discussing his parents' value of culinary exploration and knowledge collection, Emmett says:

They'll learn the name of a renowned chef [...] and there's a lot of chefs that are based in Portland. So they will be opening and closing new places left and right [...] like new places will pop up and you can try them and then they'll close and then you'll be like, 'Yeah, I tried it before it closed.'

This excerpt reflects how adding an exclusive restaurant marked by universally recognized prestige bolsters one's repertoire of culinary experiences and knowledge, or cosmopolitan capital.

Blake, a White male senior from the Northeast, similarly described the relevance of prestige within culinary cosmopolitan when describing Owamni, a local, upscale restaurant in the Twin Cities known for its North American indigenous cuisine. “Owamni, I went to, and that [...] got a bunch of accolades and was in the newspapers and [...] it was just a lot of people making a big deal about it.” Referring to Owamni’s awards and media attention as a restaurant highlighting indigenous cuisine encapsulates the irony of omnivorousness, by which the expansion of the culinary canon beyond the mainstream still occurs by rules of distinction and official markers of merit.

Other institutionalized sources of culinary data included cookbooks. As sources of culinary knowledge produced by trained chefs and restaurateurs with technical culinary training and awards to reflect their expertise, cookbooks serve as one representation of the high value of institutionalized knowledge within cosmopolitan capital. However, even cookbooks from less legitimate sources can be rationalized to fit into the framework of cosmopolitan consumption. Lucas, a White male junior from the Midwest, discusses his travels to Turkey and how one particular visit yielded a cookbook that became a family staple:

We bought a cookbook from a truckstop that was run by this woman and her mother who had been cooking for like, I don't even know, 40 years or something like that, running this truckstop. It's all homemade- like family recipes basically [...] We bought the cookbook [...] and we started making recipes from it when we got home, we literally ordered the spice mixes and stuff so that we were able to do it right.

By describing the location as a “truckstop” focused on “homemade,” “family recipes,” Lucas evokes provinciality and humbleness, reflecting the omnivorous value of the elite and exclusive as well as the “unvarnished,” “artisanal,” and “handmade”

(Gottlieb 2015:39). Johnston and Baumann (2014) critique how consumers seeking omnivorousness can romanticize poverty or be unaware of the material conditions of food producers whose labor we depend upon to establish our worldly consumer identities, as if our willingness to eat diversely changes the structural inequalities that those without such privilege experience. The above excerpt precisely reflects how CC is often accompanied by a fetishization of otherness or marginality that renders socioeconomic inequality a mere accessory to one's food adventuring. Furthermore, Lucas' description of his family quickly ordering specialized spice mixes to make the recipes from this cookbook the "right" way re-emphasizes the strict rules of cosmopolitanism in practice- here, there is an assumption that if one has no access to special spice mixes and other specialized ingredients, their culinary exploration is less valuable or valid.

To further reiterate the boundaries of legitimate culinary knowledge and exploration, Jay describes a cookbook he received as a gift from his parents that has influenced his recent culinary adventurousness:

Last Christmas, my parents got me a really big cookbook called *The Joy of Cooking*, which is like [...] 1000 pages that basically tells you how to cook just about anything you can think of. And it has a lot of technical knowledge on how the cooking process works and how to do more general things like [...] the smoke points for different oils, how you deep fry, you know, how you clean a fish, or what have you.

Jay's mention of the technical elements of this cookbook reflects the relevance of standardized techniques and expectations within the culinary world. As with Lucas, who cites the example of learning from a cookbook as evidence of his participation in CC, knowing such culinary standards and techniques and the ability to explore (in the "right" way, as Lucas mentions) become intrinsically linked, and it is assumed that those who

might not have the time or money to seek out specialized ingredients and replicate recipes from culinary experts (or humble, local spots in foreign lands) are simply not as cosmopolitan.

The divide between acquired technical knowledge and innate knowledge is described by Karen, a Hispanic/Latinx and White female junior from the Midwest who identified as Mexican. Karen differentiated between what she learned about Mexican food through her upbringing and what she learned while taking a class abroad:

I took a gastronomy class when I was in Mexico, and like, obviously grew up eating Mexican cuisine, but there was like, some things [...] I hadn't tried before [...] If I made this and spent four hours in this class, making this in 100-degree weather, I'm gonna eat it.

While Karen discusses the existence of her knowledge of Mexican cuisine as “obvious” given her Mexican identity, the gastronomy class was marked as an experience that opened a door to a wider range of Mexican cuisine than what she grew up eating. This excerpt reflects how some culinary knowledge is seen as natural or expected of one’s upbringing given their racial, ethnic, or national background and culinary knowledge gained through expert-verified routes like classes. Due to this divide, the latter mode of knowledge is often constructed as more of an achievement than culinary knowledge assumed to be natural to growing up with a certain identity; I revisit this notion in the next section on authenticity negotiation.

Finally, the role of social media and the Internet in the surge of CC within popular culture demonstrates how students draw on knowledge from an array of sources that are much more public and accessible, reflecting how the dissemination of culinary knowledge via the Internet may render these divisions between official and unofficial

knowledge less distinctive in the future. Explaining how their desire to engage with CC is owed to their media exposure, Lee said:

I grew up with a lot of media around food, like travel documentaries, food shows, cooking shows, all of that sort of stuff. And like, it was almost all focused around food, or at least that's what I kind of enjoyed most about it.

Furthermore, Cecilia, a White female junior from the Southeast, cites YouTube videos and cooking websites as a source of her culinary exploration:

I love cooking YouTube. I'm always watching YouTube shorts and YouTube videos explaining how to cook stuff. And then sometimes I find something that's a real jam. So I'll cook a bunch from that site or like, YouTube channels.

She even cites one of her favorite websites, Hot Thai Kitchen: “The recipes are so well written, like you actually get a good result. And also, it's like [...] you learn how to do it. And then you can mess around with it yourself.” Here, Cecilia notes how through this Internet-based source, she has gained some form of culinary competence alongside the value of experimenting, as opposed to strictly following a recipe verified by a chef or food critic. Informal routes of learning, such as through YouTube videos or social media, are gaining popularity as values of CC infuse themselves into popular culture. While the main focus of this paper is not the effect of the Internet on the dissemination of culinary knowledge, it is still important to highlight that the distinctions between official versus unofficial food exploration and knowledge may become more fluid in the future. Furthermore, this new availability of culinary knowledge on more accessible platforms may affect consumer expectations of what it means to engage in gastronomical exploration.

Naming Privilege

I have argued that students often discussed their engagement with CC in ways that conceal the role of socioeconomic privilege in our ability to explore food and collect culinary knowledge simply for the sake of knowledge. As Calhoun (2008) argues, the cosmopolitan value of universality often obscures how material conditions can constrain one's participation in lifestyles accepted as cosmopolitanism. Yet, some students highlighted the relevance of material conditions, even if they themselves did not experience such limitations. Additionally, most students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, understood the social desirability of engaging with CC and professed a value of worldliness and exploration as principles. However, those who acknowledged the role of financial strain brought forth a rare perspective that unmasks the class privilege demanded by cosmopolitanism.

Anne, for instance, expressed valuing food exploration but attributed this value to "being [...] low income and just being like, you know, food is valuable [...] You have to eat everything on your plate." Anne discussed several experiences that have broadened her culinary knowledge as a young adult, such as school programs that covered the costs of meals at restaurants serving cuisines she had never tried before. However, she ultimately attributes her tolerance and willingness to explore new foods to her desire to avoid wasting food, especially because she describes her family as much less gastronomically adventurous than what is the current norm.

To further exemplify how students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds valued cosmopolitanism in principle but experienced barriers to actually participating, Sarah, an Asian female senior from the Midwest, discussed whether or not her family raised her to

be gastronomically adventurous: “Not really. I feel like food growing up [...] was very half and half of survival. And then the other half is like it's nice [...] for family to get together.” Food as survival was something pointedly absent from other students’ discussion, especially when food was a matter of tourism or knowledge collection. However, for Sarah, the significance of food arose more from its social function as a family activity than a way to explore or broaden knowledge. Similarly, Evan, an Asian male senior from the Northeast, said: “Growing up... my family [had] been very poor and [...] food [insecure]. The ability to have food [...] it's something to be appreciated.” For students like Anne and Evan, food was defined by its scarcity or necessity, not its novelty. Despite his experiences with food insecurity, Evan discussed his favorite restaurants and offered critiques on places that serve food from his home country of China, reflecting that socioeconomic status does not necessarily solidify a student’s position as cosmopolitan or not.

Conversations of socioeconomic privilege also arose as students discussed how being in college restricted their access to their family’s financial resources, which in turn constrained their employment of cosmopolitan capital. For instance, Ella said:

I don't try as many other foods necessarily, because I'm buying my food. And when I was growing up, my parents were buying my foods [...] I'm financially not going to spend as much as I would theoretically have spent within my family on that sort of new cuisine.

Similarly, Lucas says: “I am not eating out as much because [...] I can't do it [...] it's not like my grandparents are taking me out and taking care of the check every time so, um, that's definitely different.” Next, I revisit Emmett to describe how his involvement in the local food scene is more of his “dad’s thing;” Thus, the physical distance from family

while Emmett is in college also entails a distance from that source of cosmopolitan capital. When discussing why he eats out much less at college, he says:

It's more of like, a budgetary thing than anything else. I think my dad does enjoy the novelty of it [...] they're usually more upper-scale places that I personally don't have the budget for. But when I'm there on their dime, yeah, I enjoy it quite a bit.

Similarly, Jason says when asked to explain why he listed Mara, an upscale Mediterranean restaurant within the Four Seasons Hotel of Minneapolis as his favorite:

I think there is a subconscious part of it, where I do only go there when my parents are in town. So it makes a little more of an event, a little more special, because they're on the pricier side of things [...] I don't really want to spend that. If I'm here on a Tuesday night looking for dinner, I'm not gonna go into Minneapolis for one of those restaurants.

Lucas, Jason, and Emmett's statements explicitly acknowledge that their parents (or other family members, like grandparents) finance the food adventuring that initiated their gastronomic exploration. Importantly, the role of familial financial resources became highly relevant only as students discussed how their physical distance from their families, and thus, their families' financial resources, rid them of the *choice* to participate in CC.

While all students in this section identified financial barriers to engaging with practices of CC, Lucas, Jason, and Emmet's situations are not exactly the same as Anne, Sarah, and Evan's. The latter three students and their citation of circumstances like instances of food insecurity or valuing food as a necessity not to be wasted reflect how the chance to eat diversely and truly learn from food was not always feasible or practical. Meanwhile, for students like Lucas, Jason, and Emmett, food exploration was a norm taken for granted until students needed to navigate culinary exploration without the funds that supported their culinary journeys until college.

Ultimately, cosmopolitan capital consisted of a toolbox of knowledge, experiences, and resources students drew upon to claim alignment with the exploration and worldliness

through food consumption, following a definition of CC as culinary experiences “beyond one’s immediate horizons” (Appadurai 2013:198). By claiming novel experiences of travel or culinary tourism- which frame everything beyond American and European cuisine as foreign- or drawing upon institutionalized sources of culinary knowledge that reinforce the boundaries between official and unofficial (thus devalued) knowledge, students established their food consumption practices as cosmopolitan, while demarcating the experiences and knowledge repertoires that are not. Finally, many students, especially from relatively privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, would discuss their food exploration in privilege-neutral ways. However, conversations became more open as students discussed their experiences of distance from resources, such as familial money, that enabled their exploratory food consumption, placing them in temporary positions of inability to fully participate in CC.

Authenticity Negotiation

Aside from the central tenets of worldliness and exploration, experiences and knowledge of authentic food were highly sought after. Notably, authenticity was difficult to define for most participants. When asked to define authenticity, interviewees defaulted to essentializing people and groups coded as ethnic as static sources of authenticity, or conflating Otherness and authenticity. In this way, “ethnic” foods were more subject to appraisals of authenticity than White-coded foods, like German or Italian food. I first outline the three ways students attempted to define authenticity: firstly, authenticity was constructed in opposition to Americanness. Secondly, authenticity was equated to how well a dish or establishment was thought to represent a vast and diverse racial, ethnic, or

national group. Finally, authentic foods were often thought of as only existing in their places of origin, although cuisines travel with people through migration.

Defining Authenticity

The first element of authenticity negotiation was defining authenticity; while authenticity was difficult to define for participants, interviewees found it easy to affirm what authenticity is not. Namely, authenticity was seen as non-American. At the same time, authenticity necessitated representation of some kind of racial, ethnic, or cultural outgroup- which demonstrates how through food, Otherness and un-Americanness become intrinsically linked.

When asked what authenticity meant to her, Eve hesitated, but then provided the example of Panda Express, a well-known American fast food chain serving Chinese-style recipes in cafeteria-style chain establishments:

Panda Express isn't authentic [...] it's more Americanized, I think is more the correct term [...] common examples would be like Panda Express, like Chipotle [...] I don't know how to exactly describe it.

Here, Panda Express and Chipotle are designated as Americanized versions of Chinese and Mexican food, respectively. This emphasis on “Americanization” reflects how what is authentic could never be “American,” although many dishes within the category of Chinese food have risen to ubiquity within the amalgamation of dishes that constitute American cuisine (Pilcher 2012). Panda Express comes up again with Alex, a Hispanic/Latinx male junior from the West:

I've seen international students from China critique Chinese food from here and be like, ‘Oh, this is not Chinese food. Like, what's orange chicken, right?’[...] And being very critical of like, Panda Express.

He connected the critiques of Chinese international students to his own experiences: “Places like Taco Bell [...] I suppose I can relate to the international students in their hate of Americanized Chinese food. For me, it would just be Americanized Mexican food, with Taco Bell.” Alex refers to Chinese international students as authorities of authentic Chinese food, reflecting the expectation that racialized groups affirm their Otherness through culinary knowledge. In the above quote, Alex also names himself, a 1.5-generation immigrant⁵ and Mexican-American, as an authority on the distinction between authentic and inauthentic Mexican food. In this statement, the mere fact that these students are Chinese, as well as the fact that Alex himself is Mexican, warrants belief in their unquestionable knowledge of authentic Chinese or Mexican food. Ultimately, authenticity was discussed as inherently linked to ethnicity and nationality in ways that reinforced the divide between so-called ethnic and non-ethnic foods.

Finally, I discuss how students strictly attach authenticity to place. Lee critiques the way that they and their White American parents cooked Chinese food:

The Chinese food I have had in the past is like, very Americanized [...] We'd have like, HyVee Chinese, which is like the grocery store Chinese food, which is like sesame chicken and that sort of stuff where it's just not really what's actually cooked in China.

Lee's comparison of their family's meals to “what's actually cooked in China” reflects an assumption that so-called “real” Chinese food cannot exist anywhere outside of China, despite the role of immigration in the movement of foods, recipes, and cuisines (Johnston and Baumann 2014, Heldke 2003). Overall, the scrutiny given to the authenticity of foods eaten in America that are coded as “ethnic” or nonwhite reflects my assertion that ethnic foods are the focal point of authenticity negotiation. While

⁵ Rumbaut (2004:1162) defines 1.5 generation immigrants as “foreign-born youths who had immigrated to the United States before age 12.”

authenticity was difficult to define, describing dishes or establishments that were either detached from American-ness, assumed to represent a racial, ethnic, or national group, and represented a place seen as foreign and distant enabled students to parse out some kind of definition of authenticity. In the next section, I discuss how students positioned their culinary experiences relative to their defined standards of authenticity- which, as I described, were often inconsistent and fluid.

Whiteness as Neutral

Highlighting the ways whiteness was constructed as antithetical to being truly cosmopolitan and authentic demonstrates how CC reproduces the White racial frame, despite the illusion that whiteness is worth less because of the accompanied inaccess to multicultural competency. Importantly, I highlight that simply being White did not automatically entail that a student would negotiate authenticity in an essentializing manner; students across racial and ethnic backgrounds participated in authenticity negotiation in ways that reified food as a representation of racial, ethnic, or national Otherness that can be consumed. Put more succinctly, “Whiteness cannot be fully represented by actual individuals classified as white, but... should be seen as a free-floating elusive capital” (Hirose and Pih 2015:1498). As students across backgrounds defined whiteness as cultureless, thus reinstating its universality, authenticity and otherness were increasingly conflated in what Hirose and Pih (2011:1490) call “racialized authenticity,” or the way that “racial beings are identified as a source of authenticity.” Taking this definition, I outline how students claimed authenticity using strategies of authenticity negotiation while also naturalizing the

exoticization and tokenization of “ethnic” food and reproducing a division between whiteness and an indistinctive “everything else.” As Heldke (2003:15) writes, when “unfamiliarity is the measure, other cuisines become interchangeable insofar as they are all equally unfamiliar to me.”

When students discussed whiteness, whether they were White or talking about other White people, an inability to appraise authenticity or properly “experience” other cultures often arose. White students often deprecated their racial identities as boring and bland, deferring to the food cultures of marginalized groups as better evidence of culture. However, this deprecation of whiteness evoked an obliviousness to the privileges of being White. As Heldke (2003:xxi) argues, treating whiteness as a deficiency within the realm of CC in conversations like this can be a harmful form of obscuring the power of whiteness in our social world. Framing whiteness as a-cultural also renders it placeless (yet at the same time everywhere), while “ethnic” food is relegated to places rendered exotic, with America and Europe remaining at the center. As a principle that prizes “being able to fit anywhere” (Warde et al. 1999), being White was often *misunderstood* as a disadvantage, despite the fact that such universality has never applied to nonwhite identities (Bonilla-Silva 2011). Below, I discuss a few excerpts from interviews reflecting how whiteness was seen as a-cultural and neutral, while its centrality in all other social spaces remained unnamed.

Jason, a White senior male from the Northeast, identified German and British family members yet felt as unqualified to claim such heritage because of the absence of German and British food in his life: “I don't even know what, like, British food is. My grandparents are from Germany, we don't eat schnitzel. We have pretty [...] I don't know. Normal. General food.” Similarly, Brandon, a White male senior from the Northeast, said:

“because I'm American, and I'm white, and like, my white American food culture is pretty like I don't know, kind of like, generic. I would say, like French and Italian American stuff.” Here, I emphasize the use of terms like “normal” and “generic” to describe the food Jason and Brandon’s families typically eat. In Jason’s case, what makes food normal and generic food remains unnamed; however, he draws a contrast between German food and British food as cuisines attached to places and nationalities. By nature of this contrast, Jason’s “own” food is place-less. Meanwhile, Brandon names French and Italian-American cuisine, but also conforms to the pattern of calling these European, White-coded cuisines as generic, relegating everything else beyond general European cuisine as immutably different.

To further illustrate how whiteness was framed as a disadvantage to cosmopolitanism despite its central position in the American racial hierarchy, I highlight Eve, a White female junior from the Midwest. When asked what she ate growing up, she quickly took the opportunity to clear up her perceived deficiency of culture: “My family is a mix of White European people [laughs]. So, we didn't exactly have any, like, cultural meals or like, anything like that.” Though Eve eventually discussed some German and Polish ancestry, her initial answer to my question was to discuss her upbringing as completely a-cultural, by her being a White person. By connecting a vaguely White, European identity to a lack of “cultural meals,” the term “cultural meal” itself becomes a generalizing proxy for “ethnic food.”

Jay comments on this a-culturality, as well as how engagement with CC can be a proxy for identifying with a certain food culture:

I think a bit of the issue is one that a lot of Americans have, which is not really having a real cultural identity. And just kind of having to glue yourself to one and go like: ‘okay, I think this is what I am.’[...] So I guess learning to make and trying different foods is a way of discerning [...] Which one do I feel like I belong to the most?

Jay’s description of the absence of a “real cultural identity” for many Americans reflects Eve’s comment; both use the term “culture” as a proxy for “nonwhiteness” or ethnic identity. Thus, everything that is “cultural,” (i.e.; nonwhite) is conflated into one general category purely defined by its difference from an invisible, White center of culture.

In the following section, I discuss how whiteness was also unquestionably inauthentic. Perceived whiteness, whether it be through a restaurant’s clientele or staff, the environment of the restaurant, or even in a dish’s ingredients automatically negates the possibility of authenticity.

“White People Food”: Whiteness as Inauthentic

Within authenticity negotiation, whiteness was framed as a deficiency, as it barred many students, especially those with White identities, from claiming their culinary experiences and knowledge as authentic. White students discussed themselves as outsiders to authenticity, an ever-elusive attribute of some dishes or establishments. Despite leveraging stocks of cosmopolitan capital to engage with CC through classed acts like eating upscale restaurants and traveling, these same students would find themselves at a loss once our conversations turned to authenticity- something attached to immutable identities, and thus, unable to be purchased regardless of one’s socioeconomic status.

Lucas, who leveraged cosmopolitan capital in the form of travels to countries like Japan and Turkey, as well as gastronomic explorations of Chicago funded by his family,

expressed hesitation to be, in his own words, an “arbiter” of authenticity because his a-cultural White identity does not align with normative representations of racial or cultural Otherness that students typically saw as markers of authenticity. Lucas exemplifies how White students perceived themselves as incapable of appraising authenticity: “To be a White boy coming in from wherever [laughs] [...] it's very hard for me to judge [authenticity] because I just [...] don't have that same cultural heritage or family tradition of foods.” For Lucas and many other students with socioeconomic privilege, their food adventures hinged on the possession of cosmopolitan capital. Despite authenticity being important within CC, however, students like Lucas often hesitated to claim any authentic knowledge. Despite Lucas’ in-depth experiences in exclusive culinary spaces like restaurants, the role of his class privilege and cosmopolitan capital is downplayed as Lucas clarifies how, in the end, what matters is that he is incapable of discerning authenticity because of his whiteness. This excerpt demonstrates how the conflation of authenticity and otherness produces a kind of commodification of racial, ethnic, or cultural marginality, while reinforcing expectations that nonwhite people have unquestionable knowledge on authenticity.

Similarly, Kate, a White female junior from the South, describes why she feels unable to judge the authenticity of food. Her statement further reflects how White consumers assume an outsider position in relation to authenticity, a central tenet of cosmopolitanism:

Growing up in the US, and just coming from a very white family, it's like, authentic American food just looks like [...] I don't know, like Kraft mac n' cheese, you know. Your stereotypical [...] white people food, like hot dogs. So I feel like there's just less of a sense of, like, what is authentic to other cuisines and cultures [...] I'm just totally oblivious.

Both Kate and Lucas explicitly name their whiteness as an explanation for their ignorance in appraising gastronomic authenticity. By describing themselves as “oblivious” or lacking a cultural heritage that entails knowledge of authenticity, whiteness comes to be perceived as a detriment in terms of cosmopolitanism despite its supposed neutrality and universality, as detailed in the last section.

As touched on in Kate’s discussion of Kraft mac n’ cheese, another way that whiteness was explicitly linked to inauthenticity was through “White people food.” The trope of “White people food” was frequently mentioned to construct a dichotomy between authenticity and inauthenticity. Importantly, “White people food” and American food were described synonymously, calling back to how authenticity was seen as static and reserved for identities and products accepted as different from a White American/European center. In this way, authenticity was constructed as antithetical to American-ness. At the same time, since students defined authenticity as necessarily equivalent to racial, ethnic, and cultural Otherness, the normative belief in being American as also being of White, European descent was reinstated. By deploying the trope of “White people food” as bland, boring, and conclusively inauthentic, Otherness was increasingly solidified as a resource to draw upon to establish our worldly consumer identities. To illustrate this, Elizabeth described her family’s rendition of “white people tacos”:

Why do I call it white versus authentic taco? As I studied more Spanish culture [...] it's not monolithic, but cultures where tacos actually come from [...] the way we prepare ours is relatively bland, there's not a lot of depth of flavor. It comes from the store, pre-made boxes of things [...] I wouldn't call it an authentic taco because we don't develop the flavors, it doesn't have cultural significance for us.

Here, Elizabeth discusses how Spanish culture has enabled her knowledge of Spanish gastronomy as “where tacos *actually* come from,” (emphasis mine) reflecting the assumption that authentic foods are invariably tied to place. This discussion of education on another culture reflects how authenticity negotiation and cosmopolitan capital permit students to engage in cosmopolitanism. Elizabeth draws on her knowledge collection of Spanish food as a voluntary intellectual pursuit; earlier in our conversation, we discussed how she studied abroad in Chile and developed an admiration for Peruvian gastronomy. Through this undertaking of food as a hobby, Elizabeth professes knowledge of the technical qualifications of authentic tacos, like “depth of flavor,” which distinguishes her from students who value authenticity to some extent yet have difficulty outlining what exactly makes food authentic.

Finally, as previously discussed, when students perceived representations of whiteness in restaurant settings- whether it be in the racial makeup of the clientele and the workers, the items on the menu, or even the ambiance of the restaurant- the establishment was automatically disqualified from being seen as authentic. Alan, a Black/African American, White, and Hispanic/Latinx male senior from the Midwest discussed El Chimborazo, a local Ecuadorian restaurant with rave reviews that he began to doubt as soon as he walked in and saw a primarily White clientele:

When I walked into El Chimborazo, and it was all white people, I was questioning my decision, because I had read reviews and it had 4.8 stars, which is really high. And it had reviews like ‘This is the most authentic Ecuadorian restaurant in the Twin Cities.’ And I was like, really? Because I’m not seeing the evidence.

Alan's immediate doubt of El Chimborazo upon walking in and seeing White customers and referring to the clientele as a lack of "evidence" of authenticity the strength of the link between whiteness and inauthenticity to consumers; eating at a restaurant that is supposedly authentic yet enjoyed by White people is immediately discrediting. Similarly, Kate described her favorite sushi restaurant in her Southern hometown as "whitewashed." When asked to elaborate, she explains:

Like, I go in there [...] looking at who is, like, making the food and serving the food versus who's consuming the food [...] it just gives the perception of being whitewashed because I go into my favorite, like, sushi restaurant, and it's just like, all, you know, all white people consuming that, including me.

Kate and Alan's dismay at the presence of White customers at these restaurants serving Japanese and Ecuadorian food, respectively, demonstrates how consumers across different racial backgrounds expect that an authentic restaurant has presumably nonwhite customers as a verification of its authentic merit. Kate's comment on the contrast between a White clientele and presumably nonwhite workers reflects how whiteness is a benchmark by which unfamiliarity, and thus, authenticity, is measured. The possibility that the workers at Kate's favorite Japanese restaurant are nonwhite, but not Japanese, reflects how consumers uphold an assumption that food made by *anyone* who appears to be nonwhite qualifies as authentic, reinscribing the divide between whiteness and everything else.

Consumers made judgments on restaurant authenticity not just based on perceived race garnered from the phenotypes of workers and clientele, but also took cues from languages heard in restaurants. Revisiting Alan's appraisal of El Chimborazo, he

comments on the clientele he saw, as well as how he heard a White waiter speaking Spanish:

It was very much, like, white hipsters, and white woke⁶ families, you know what I mean [...] And the waiter was white, but was speaking broken Spanish, it was clear she had picked up [broken Spanish] from just working there.

In the excerpt above, Alan notes that the waiter was White, but spoke Spanish. The mere mention of hearing Spanish at El Chimborazo reflects how consumers search for evidence of ethnic or cultural otherness, like hearing non-English languages, to decide whether a restaurant is authentic or not. Hearing languages other than English was an important criterion of authenticity for many; this reflects how when authenticity was equated to foreignness within the process of authenticity negotiation, monolithic narratives were continuously constructed about who is foreign.

To reiterate, John, an Asian and White male junior from the Northeast, discussed why he sees Hamburguesas El Gordo, a local Mexican restaurant with multiple locations in the Twin Cities, as authentic: “You can tell like the workers there are, you know, speak both- are bilingual. People speak both Spanish and English. And, you know, they seem like it's like a family-owned business.” Later on, John went on to discuss how he would prefer supporting local, small businesses instead of chains, reflecting how CC can motivate a genuine desire to engage with and support local communities through consumption. Despite these public-spirited concerns that many students held, however, authenticity negotiation (which is part and parcel of acts of global eating) hinges on

⁶ *Woke* is a colloquial term coined by and primarily used by Black Americans throughout the 20th century, until the summer of 2020 after the murder of George Floyd. During 2020 and beyond, however, the term was increasingly associated with Black activists and the #BlackLivesMatter movement and used by conservative politicians and public figures in a disparaging manner to delegitimize calls for systematic change and anti-racism (Madigan 2023).

generalizations. For instance, John casually suggests “you can tell” that the staff at Hamburguesas el Gordo, a Mexican restaurant, is bilingual, without providing any further elaboration. Here, it can be assumed that a truly authentic Mexican restaurant requires the presence of “ethnic Other[s]” as “a resource [...] to meet [their] expectations, fill [their] own desires, and thereby embellish [their...] identity.” (Heldke 2001:79). Not only that, but the definition of an “ethnic Other” is reproduced with generalizing markers such as language use other than English.

Identifying Whiteness as the Center

While I argue that authenticity negotiation reinforced whiteness as a center of culture while obscuring the role of White privilege within cosmopolitan practices, many students explicitly named the centrality of American-ness or whiteness within gastronomic discourse. Often, these students identified as nonwhite and had salient ethnic identities that shaped their food practices growing up. Many of these students were quickly made aware that the foods they grew up eating were seen as exotic and foreign. This outsider position, often informed by racialized experiences, enabled students to pinpoint the relevance of the racial hierarchy in food consumption. Along these lines, Appadurai (2013) suggests a reconfiguration of cosmopolitanism that prizes the perspectives and knowledge brought forth by those typically excluded from narratives of cosmopolitanism. Similarly, Calhoun (2008:106) urges that we be wary of confusing the “privileged specificity of our mobility for universality.” Thus, awareness of our social positionality- including race, ethnicity, class, and gender- is necessary to understand our

access to cosmopolitanism, as well as what our standards of measurement are for culinary novelty or diversity.

George, a Hispanic/Latinx male junior from the West, notes how Hispanic foods defined his center of food culture growing up. He then cites physical distance from home as a catalyst in his recognition that his food culture is marginal to American/European/White-coded cuisine:

Now that I've left the kind of community that I was in over there and come here to St. Paul [...] I understand that my default cuisine has always been more, like, Hispanic. I'd eat things like *pozole*, which is a kind of soup with hominy in it, or *espinazo*, which is made with [...] neck bones of beef or pork.

When asked whether he perceives the restaurant scene in the Twin Cities as diverse or not, George expresses difficulty answering the question because he recognizes the nature of “American” food as a dynamic construction with blurry boundaries. In particular, he says:

A lot of what determines what I considered American cuisine is what I saw on TV. If on TV, I see breakfast of sausages and eggs and bacon, I say okay, that's the American breakfast. But I wouldn't see on TV a dish of like, salmon or fish [...] and call that breakfast. That might be breakfast for another country, but certainly not here in the United States.

Other students, especially those who identified as White or grew up eating White-coded food, grew up eating foods that directly aligned with normative ideals of typical American food as depicted in media and popular culture. In the above quote, George describes how media consumption definitively marked the Hispanic food he ate as “non-American.” Meanwhile, White American students like Eve, Jason, and Kate described the foods they grew up as plain (without necessarily commenting on their relationship to whiteness) or drew on stereotypes of “White people food” that have been

used to represent Americanness (like Kate's discussion of Kraft mac n' cheese) in ways that naturalized the dichotomy between "ethnic" and "White" foods. Similarly pointing out the contingency of "American food" as a category, Louis, a White male senior from the Southeast, comments:

When I think of American food, I think of like, Fourth of July barbecues, and there's hot dogs and hamburgers and probably French fries [...] And to me, that feels American, but also [...] no one really knows what American food is [...] everything that we might consider American, I can also think of it connected to other cultures as well.

Firstly, I highlight that Louis' comment demonstrates that simply being White does not entail an ignorance of the centrality of Whiteness. As a White American student, Louis does not occupy the same social position as other nonwhite students in this study; yet, he acknowledges what "American" food is in *his* perspective, recognizing that his singular perspective cannot serve as a generalization for the possibilities of what American food could be. To be precise, he clarifies: "*to me*, that feels American," acknowledging the contestable nature of American food as a category with unclear bounds. In the next two subsections, I expand upon how within authenticity negotiation, so-called "ethnic" cultures and people were valorized for their seemingly innate authenticity.

The Naturalization of Authentic Culinary Knowledge

When racialized individuals and their food cultures were seen as undeniably authentic, a commodification of Otherness, exoticization, and tokenization was naturalized. instead of the genuine cultural acceptance and universalism CC is thought to

reflect. Furthermore, framing authentic knowledge as innate to nonwhiteness devalues the efforts taken by primarily nonwhite students to learn about their family's food culture, as knowing authentic "ethnic" food was seen as an expectation, and not an achievement. Ultimately, the examples I highlight in the following section demonstrate how "cultural otherness and racialized otherness are inseparable and conflated in the discursive performance involving cultural consumption" (Hirose and Pih 2011:1499).

First, I discuss how nonwhite students with salient ethnic identities would also participate in the conflation of ethnicity and authenticity, often by calling on their own experiences with their food cultures to assert their experiences and knowledge as authentic. These findings reflect how these assumptions of Otherness and authenticity as one and the same were not exclusively reproduced by White students; as bell hooks (2013:6) writes, "Our daily actions can be imbued by white supremacist thinking no matter our race." To demonstrate this, I highlight how students across racial and ethnic backgrounds participated in the reification of food as a consumable representation of a racial or ethnic group.

Students often negotiated authenticity using anecdotes of their parents' cooking. While describing this culinary knowledge as instinctual or natural, students were not only claiming authenticity, but asserting their ethnic identity through a genuine connection to food. At the same time, however, the association between simply being nonwhite and having innate, authentic culinary knowledge framed the cultural competence of nonwhite students as less of an achievement than demonstrations of knowledge perceived as more official and measurable, such as having knowledge within a culinary canon of primarily European cuisines. In this way, students who negotiated authenticity as part and parcel of

being “ethnic” reproduced the irony of the “disproportionate celebration of culinary products [...] implicitly and explicitly associated with whiteness and the *comparative devaluation* of Ethnic cuisine” (Gualtieri 2022:924, emphasis mine) as it is judged by individual, constantly shifting standards based on amalgamations of lived experiences and stereotypes or assumptions.

First, I turn to a conversation with Ellie, an Asian female senior from the West whose family is from Vietnam. Like many other students in this study, Ellie leveraged cosmopolitan capital by discussing how her family spends time and money to explore cuisines beyond what she grew up eating. However, she also negotiated authenticity by citing her family’s spent time cooking “time-intensive” Vietnamese dishes like pho.⁷ She connects her culinary practices as a Vietnamese person to her repertoire of Vietnamese cuisine knowledge that informs her standards of authentic Vietnamese food. Namely, Ellie cites a Vietnamese restaurant near a local university as her favorite because their “broth is *right*,” evoking authenticity as something instinctual, or as something that simply exists if you can detect it.

When further probed on what a “right” broth might taste like, she describes “the right proportions of the different ingredients and different spices [...] I can, at this point, taste if something is missing [...] I associate pho with my parents making it at home.” In this excerpt, Ellie negotiates authenticity as an intuition linked to memories of her parents making pho prior to her time in college. Her language also conveys authentic Vietnamese food as unmeasurable- for instance, authentic pho broth requires “the right proportions.”

⁷ A Vietnamese soup dish consisting of broth, rice noodles, herbs, and meat, such as beef or chicken (My Tran 2003).

Similarly, Julian, who identified as Puerto Rican, called on this national identity and the foods he was familiar with throughout his upbringing as a strategy to negotiate the meaning of authentic Puerto Rican food. When asked how he decides whether Puerto Rican food is authentic or not, he says:

You really don't even question it sometimes [...] the way that I prepare proteins [...] or the way I prepare my rice, it's just kind of like, I'm just mimicking my mom, the way that [...] She measures portions. The way that she prepares the meat. I don't know. I guess when I got to college, and I started cooking, I just remember talking to my mom. And then like, when I came back from winter break, I paid more attention to how she was doing stuff.

Here, Julian also describes his ability to appraise authenticity as innate and unquestionable. He also emphasizes how measurements, special ingredients, or techniques are not benchmarks of authenticity; instead, familial culinary experiences are a standard for authenticity. However, while families of similar ethnic or national backgrounds may cook similar dishes or use the same ingredients and sharing these culinary hallmarks can strengthen collective identity, the tendency to generalize family recipes and traditions as markers of authenticity reinforce monolithic notions of how certain food cultures should be represented.

One way these monoliths of “ethnic” cultures emerge has been described by Gualtieri (2022:921) as “the mother problem,” or the trope that nonwhite foods should replicate individual familial experiences- in particular, consumers often compare restaurant meals to their mother or grandmother’s cooking.⁸ The mother problem can be summarized by this quote from a chef from Gualtieri’s work who describes the way consumers judge their restaurants’ food based on individualized, unstandardized

⁸ While this is not a focal point of this paper, it is important to note the gendered aspect of this trope. No students cited the way their father or grandfather cooks as a benchmark of authenticity, reflecting an assumption that cooking is only performed by maternal figures.

experiences: “My mom cooked this thing so much better, and you absolutely don’t do what she does, so I don’t like it.” As students negotiated authenticity by citing their family’s cooking as a benchmark for authenticity of all foods, they claimed ethnic or national identities that have been central to their experiences and upbringing. At the same time, however, generalizing their family’s cooking as a representation of a whole cuisine reproduces the touristic notion of food as a consumable representation of a certain racial, ethnic, or national group.

The Commodification of Otherness

Even if students did not have familial experiences to draw upon to assert their experiences and knowledge as authentic, students would also leverage social proximity to ethnicity (or non-whiteness) as evidence of authentic knowledge, citing friends or other social connections as a point of access as a certified source of culinary authenticity. Hughey (2010:1299) warns against diminishing non-white cultures into objects for the sake of our consumer identity, and critiques the practice of “converting relationships with people and objects symbolically coded nonwhite [...] into a kind of credentialing form of capital.” Hughey reminds us that as we negotiate definitions of authenticity, we may also be commodifying Otherness as a product to consume or position to occupy in order to prove how worldly and tolerant we are. In line with colorblind ideology, valorizing proximity with ethnicity or Otherness echoes what Bonilla-Silva (2010:57) refers to as “discursive buffers before or after someone states something [...] that could be interpreted as racist.” He discusses these discursive moves as citations of friendships with people of color that justify that an individual as not racist, often in defense. While claims of access

to an authentic version of a dish or cuisine via a friend of a corresponding cultural background do not necessarily equate to claims that a person cannot be racist because they have friends of color, both actions include calling upon unnamed, simply nonwhite friends or connections to credit individuals. In this case, the mere existence of people of color, or racial, ethnic, or cultural Others in one's social network is assumed to suffice as proof of one's cosmopolitanism, or worldliness.

For instance, to affirm her culinary upbringing as culturally diverse, Elsie, a White female junior from the Northeast, claimed that her family knows "people that have grown up in other countries [...] and they would suggest food and restaurants." To Elsie, her parents' connections with people "from *other* cultures" enables her to identify with CC and define authenticity. This comment reflects an assumption that simply having friends of "other" (i.e. nonwhite) cultures grants one access to their supposedly authentic culinary knowledge. Similarly, Ian, a White male junior from the Midwest, discussed how he discerns authentic Mexican restaurants in his hometown, also calling upon social connections:

I do have a friend who immigrated from Mexico, and he grew up eating Mexican food a lot [...] I always ask him for Mexican restaurant recommendations, and he's like, 'these are your top three restaurants [...] that I would consider authentic.'

While Ian refers to his friends' prior experiences with eating Mexican food growing up as evidence of his authentic knowledge instead of just defaulting to the mere fact that he is Mexican, the assumption that authentic food should somehow be approved by racial Others remains. The need for a person of a corresponding culture to verify our consumption is echoed by Gia, a White female junior from the Northeast. She discusses

how she defaults to others who seem more knowledgeable about whether food is authentic or not: “If somebody close to me [...] knows more about that food, I’ll totally go with a recommendation. I’m like, ‘okay, I believe you.’” In this comment, Gia does not provide criteria on what would prove to her that another person might know more about a different cuisine. However, it becomes clearer when Gia mentions her partner, who is Indian, as a source of authentic knowledge:

I remember one time, me and my partner passed by a really, I don't know, like [...] very modern-looking Indian restaurant and [Gia's partner] was like, ‘That place is probably shit.’ And I was like, ‘Oh yeah.’ And they were like, ‘Yeah, it should not look that fancy [...] It looks like a white people Indian restaurant.’ I was like, ‘Okay, I believe you. I won't go in.’

Again, “white people food” emerges; as discussed previously, the presence of anything that evokes whiteness was an automatic sign of an establishment’s authenticity. Here, Gia’s description of this particular Indian restaurant as “modern” and “fancy” reveals an expectation that an Indian restaurant should never be upscale, lest it be labeled “White,” and thus, less authentic. This comment reveals the implicit assumption that ethnic establishments must be “dirty,” “strange,” “exotic,” even a little “scary,” as Gottlieb (2015:43) writes. These evaluations of ethnic restaurants in contrast with the valorization of ethnic food for their supposed novelty and authenticity reveal the irony of cosmopolitanism. Meanwhile, the fact that French or New American restaurants are judged by completely different standards often based on measurable standards like awards and mastery of culinary techniques reflects how the weight of authenticity in our appraisals of food and establishments solidifies the position of ethnic cuisines beyond the canon of primarily European, White-coded foods. In a similar way, Julian, who identified

as Puerto Rican, discusses the characteristics of authentic Puerto Rican restaurants or Hispanic grocery stores he often went to growing up:

Sometimes [...] if you go to Target or something, and you go to the produce section, and you'd turn over a piece of produce [...] when I was at those [places] sometimes flies would fly out... I don't wanna call it- I was never, like, disgusted [...] It didn't bother me. I just knew it was different [...] In all honesty, the exterior, sometimes the graphics that they would use outside of the restaurant or the produce place that we're going to, would look a little cheaper.

Based on his own experiences, Julian describes flies coming out of produce as something expected from a verifiable, authentic Puerto Rican or Hispanic establishment. Julian hesitates to explicitly call these establishments dirty, though he admits that the exteriors of these establishments appear as “cheaper.” Furthermore, he suggests that he may tolerate the conditions of these establishments more than others without a Puerto Rican and Hispanic background. Together, Gia and Julian’s descriptions of authentic ethnic establishments as unhygienic, cheap, and drab reflect how so-called ethnic establishments are devalued in comparison to restaurants associated with whiteness. At the same time, the ways students engaged with the process of authenticity negotiation reflected how authentic establishments and foods were highly sought after by consumers. Students described a desire to truly “experience” cultures through foods; at the same time, students necessitated that these experiences entail discomfort or crossing of some kind of racial ethnic, or cultural border in order to extract difference and novelty and identify as cosmopolitan. As culinary cosmopolitanism demands unfamiliarity, Otherness itself is commodified, and people whose identities and cuisines are marked as different

continue to be relegated to the margins, as the desire to superficially interact with these very people and cultures proliferates.

CONCLUSION

As hooks (2013:2) writes, “all the theories of border crossing, of finding a way to ‘get a bit of the other,’ did not fundamentally change the nature of dominator culture.” My work with my peers at Macalester College elucidates how race and class inequality play a pivotal role in an era of consumption-based multiculturalism and inclusion. Most importantly, this paper reveals how cosmopolitan principles of equality and tolerance are often lost in practice as consumers vie for class-exclusive culinary knowledge or dictate authenticity in ways that render ethnic-coded cuisines and cultures static.

Moving beyond abstractions of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and diversity, this paper focused on how CC emerged in students’ everyday food consumption. Namely, I frame college students as emergent cosmopolitans who engage with a more accessible iteration of cosmopolitanism with the limited resources and mobility that college life entails. Despite this generalization that college presents obstacles to culinary exploration, many socioeconomically privileged students possessed culinary experiences prior to college to draw on, gaining a head start on building their repertoire of cosmopolitan capital. Conversely, students who described themselves as low-income also valued cosmopolitan ideals of openness and tolerance of difference, yet more often experienced barriers to participating in CC than their socioeconomically privileged peers. Thus, students with economic privilege had more opportunities to explore food, and were thus better positioned to leverage a toolbox of cosmopolitan capital aligned with norms of

adventurous eating. Often, culinary exploration was leveraged as evidence of a culturally tolerant or even anti-racist attitude. Despite the supposed openness cosmopolitanism entails, a stark distinction was drawn between those with access to novel culinary experiences and those without. Furthermore, students' privilege-neutral discussions of culinary exploration reinforced an invisible expectation: to be a truly cosmopolitan global citizen, one needs the economic power to be a culinary tourist.

Additionally, I found that authenticity negotiation reflects the omnipresence of the White culinary canon in discourse and practice, despite CC's emphasis of cultural heterogeneity. In conversations, the perceived authenticity of a restaurant or dish was paramount; yet, the principle of authenticity functioned to systematically Other nonwhite or "ethnic" cuisines, while ironically tokenizing them as a source of culinary novelty. Highlighting the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity, students constructed whiteness as antithetical to authenticity by nature of its a-culturality or lack of ethnicity. At the same time, however, whiteness became neutral, placeless, and thus, universal- the ultimate cosmopolitan way of being. In this way, blandness and a-culturality became vague, implicit proxies for whiteness and the privilege of having a universal identity was obscured, reflecting Bonilla-Silva's (2010) assertion that colorblind discursive maneuvers enable whiteness and its accompanying privileges to remain unnamed and invisible in daily conversation. Throughout conversations, cosmopolitanism in practice was ultimately a quest for "consumable differences" (Bookman 2013:58). By literally consuming racial, ethnic, or cultural difference through class-exclusive resources, privileged cosmopolitans may espouse liberal, progressive commitments while reinstating boundaries between food that is "normal" (i.e. White) and food that is

sufficiently “different,” (i.e. “ethnic” or nonwhite)- without explicitly naming such boundaries.

I emphasize that the reproduction of colorblind ideology through consumption and the White racial frame in culinary discourse is something consumers across races participate in. The intention of my argument is not to frame nonwhite people as absolute victims of White consumers; such a binary would erase the notion that “white supremacist ways of thinking and acting [...] are expressed by folks of all skin colors” (hooks 2013:6). To highlight one case, Hirose and Pih (2011:1498) wrote about Asian Yelp reviewers who defaulted to stereotypes of Asian restaurants and people to determine their authenticity: “The ‘freedom’ [...] enjoyed by Asian reviewers in immersing themselves in racialized Orientalist cultural consumption does not actually free them from the racial hierarchy in which they are embedded.” Together, Hirose and Pih and hooks remind us to be critical of assertions that individual culinary experiences represent certain groups, even if we have a personal connection to these cuisines, meals, or restaurants and an impetus to dictate the bounds of authenticity.

In response to the growing plethora of Yelp reviews and local restaurant maps dictating how to eat in ways that prove cultural tolerance and openness, I call for an interrogation of cosmopolitan consumption, asking what truly motivates the search for the most authentic Chinese cuisine or cheap street taco. I critique the tendency to praise “ethnic” restaurants while also suggesting that authentic “ethnic” establishments must be dirty or cheap- especially when patronage at these restaurants is assumed to challenge the racial hierarchy that shapes our social world. Finally, I call for a re-evaluation of who

benefits from cosmopolitan food practices and who it continues to alienate, despite our best intentions.

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