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Keila Denise Taylor

“Errybody Gotta Eat”: Black Queer Food Geographies and the Politics of Refusal

Keila Denise Taylor

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Reading Committee:

Dr. Shirley J. Yee, Co-Chair

Dr. Bettina Judd, Co-Chair

Dr. LaShawnDa Pittman

Dr. Sonnet Retman

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Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies

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Abstract

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Keila Denise Taylor

Co-Chairs of the Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Shirley J. Yee
Department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies
University of Washington

Dr. Bettina Judd
Department of African American Studies
Emory University

‘Errybody Gotta Eat’: Black Queer Food Geographies and the Politics of Refusal is a critical study of food, space, and survival that centers Black queer life. This dissertation utilizes Black feminist thought, Black feminist geographies, Black food geographies, queer of color critique, critical trans politics, digital food studies, and ethnographic methods to examine how Black queer people create nourishment, belonging, and care within food systems structured by racial capitalism, heteronormativity, anti-Blackness, and uneven access to resources. I approach food as a spatial and relational practice through which Black queer people negotiate safety, pleasure, memory, intimacy, and refusal. Drawing on four years of fieldwork in Seattle, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, digital ethnography, informal conversations, and autoethnographic reflection, this dissertation asks: What becomes possible when Black queer food practices are understood as theories of place-making, survival, and world-building? How do

Black queer people feed themselves and one another in cities that celebrate diversity while reproducing exclusion? What forms of knowledge emerge in kitchens, restaurants, gardens, digital platforms, chosen-family gatherings, and everyday acts of cooking, eating, sharing, and withholding food? I develop the concept of Black queer food geographies to describe the spatial and relational practices through which Black queer communities produce nourishment and belonging within hostile food landscapes. I also theorize queer food refusals as quiet, embodied, and often partially visible practices that reject dominant food justice frameworks organized around visibility, inclusion, nutrition, access, and institutional recognition. These refusals create alternative food worlds rooted in care, pleasure, opacity, self-definition, and collective survival. Across its chapters, this dissertation moves from Seattle's public health and food policy landscape to the intimate food practices of Black queer Seattleites and finally to Instagram as a digital food geography. I argue that Black queer food practices challenge dominant understandings of food justice by showing that access is about safety, dignity, intimacy, memory, joy, and the ability to experience community on one's own terms. Ultimately, this project reimagines food as theory, method, and critique, demonstrating that Black queer foodways offer vital blueprints for more nourishing and liberatory futures.

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DEDICATION

For all of the Black queer people refusing erasure, making nourishment from the margins, and living otherwise anyway.

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Introduction: Red Velvet and Black Queer

Survival

Mixers, Memories, and Motherhood

Red velvet cake has always been a staple in my mama's household. On Christmas, she would wake up early while my brothers and I were still asleep and create spreads of our favorite desserts. Chocolate chip cookies, banana pudding, brownies, and of course, cake. We would eat until our bellies and our hearts were full. This happened most years of my life until I moved to Seattle in 2017. I make it a point now that I'm on my own to bake red velvet as often as I can. Sometimes it's for others and some days, like today in particular, it's just for me when I'm craving a taste of home. Now that I am on my own, solely responsible for feeding myself, and in full swing of adulthood, I understand that although my mother's love and support may have appeared effortless when I was a child, as a working single mother of five children, she was exerting a significant amount of care and kinship labor to create these core memories. Watching her my whole life, she made baking look easy, as if it was as natural as breathing to me, so I followed suit, putting on her apron, playing the smooth soulful songs of Anita Baker, and doing my impersonation of the best chef I knew.

A week prior to relocating my best friend and I stood in my parents' garage trying to figure out how I was going to fit all my belongings in my Mazda (which is funny because I did not have much). During our dilemma, I kept suggesting we remove the stand mixer then change my mind. I wrestled with this idea about three or four times. Every time I considered removing it from my car, I would hear my mother's voice in my head urging me not to leave it. "I can't ship

it to you if you leave it, Keila. I can't ship it to you if you leave it. I can't ship it to you if you leave it," echoed on repeat. We eventually made it work. I managed to find a snug spot in the corner of my trunk for my 20-pound mixer. Upon my arrival at my new home, I placed it in the corner of a cupboard. Momentarily, I forget its presence as I adjusted to life on my own in a new city. Months passed and I slumped into a depression. The shock of being out of my comfort zone in a new city weighed heavy on my mind, body, and soul. I cried myself to sleep many nights and felt a new type of loneliness I was unprepared to cope with. The holidays were approaching which only made the depression worse. It was about to be my first Thanksgiving away from my mom, away from my family. As the date approached, a classmate of mine invited me to her place for "Friendsgiving." I was not thrilled but at least I was not spending it alone. I told her I would contribute macaroni and cheese and sweet potato pie. The next day a distant cousin also invited me to her place and asked me to make her a red velvet cake.

The week of Thanksgiving I went to the grocery store, purchased the ingredients, and tried my best to emotionally prepare for a day I was absolutely dreading. Wednesday morning, I woke up, gathered my ingredients, and pulled my mixer out from the cupboard. I placed it on the counter and began to make something out of nothing. I creamed the butter and sugar. I slowly added the eggs, listening to the hum of my mixer, stirring the ingredients while simultaneously stirring up feelings of nostalgia from the many Thanksgivings I spent in the kitchen with my mom making red velvet cakes for her customers. When I finished adding the flour, baking soda, and salt, I tasted the batter and smiled. It tasted like home. It tasted like comfort, like a hug from a long lost friend. I slid it into the oven, started on the cream cheese frosting, and waited for what I knew was a masterpiece to finish in the oven. The house filled with the smell of baked goods and for the first time in months I recognized myself and felt the spirit of my mother. The timer went

off and I opened the oven. It was burnt. My red velvet is burnt. The oven was a gas stove and apparently it had some quirks I needed to familiarize myself with. To ease my frustration, I called it a night and decided to start over in the morning. Thanksgiving Day came, and I maneuvered my way around the kitchen correcting the previous night's mistakes. I spent time with my cousin during the day and later on headed to my colleague's house that night where there was delicious food, fun board games, and to my surprise, much needed laughter.

As I reflect on my first holiday away from home, I gravitate towards my unacknowledged intimate relationship with my mixer and the possibilities that arise every time I use it. I reflect on how I almost left it behind. I think of Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic" and empathize with the freedom she dreams of¹. I reflect on the comfort my mixer provided when sadness took over. I think about how it grounded me when I felt disconnected and detached from my life. This seemingly mundane household appliance brought me back to myself and continues to do so during my hard days. It has helped fortify new relationships here in Seattle, yet it still connects me with the most important woman in my life back in Texas; my mother. It reminds me of coming downstairs in the mornings to the hum of its engine watching my mom dance and bake as if she had no care in the world. My mixer reminds me of who I am, it reminds me of my roots, my childhood and it reminds me of who I can be, conjuring hope and new possibilities.

It reminds me that I am worthy and deserving of existing in places and spaces that were never meant for a chunky Black queer femme like myself. It reminds me that I am valued, powerful, and talented and I am a part of a lineage of women who embody those same characteristics. My mixer is a vital creative outlet and reminds me how the process of cooking, baking, and eating have come to signify acts of love towards myself and my community. The

¹ Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power, Out & out Pamphlet* (Crossing Press, 1978).

more I contend with how influential a baking tool has been in my own self-actualization process, the more questions arise about my own mother's identity, her relationship to foodways and food, and how she passed that passion onto me. Food granted me the space to see my mother's agency in how she empowered and defined herself on her terms. Food acted as a form of resistance against stereotypical narratives about single Black motherhood entrenched in misogynoir. Characterizations of a poor unmarried Black woman raising five children in the South does not usually conjure images of a person who is also an artist, who is also innovative and incredibly creative. Within that construct, there is a hyperfocus on the trauma she endured. And while my mother's life has been shaped by violent incidents of racism, classism, and sexism, food became an avenue through which she could understand herself and the world differently. It offered her a food geography where her own knowledge and reality were honored and celebrated. It is what inspires me to do the same in my own life.

Before my life as a scholar, before I could afford to dine at "foodie" restaurants, before my introduction to feminism and queer theory, before I read any Black Feminist writings this project began. It began with my mother, her mother and her mother's mother. It began when I honored how my desires, my dreams, my creativity are informed by a powerful reverence for food and what it can do. Long before I had the language, this project yearned to be heard and as I discovered the grammar that breathed life into my internal social consciousness, this project found its voice. This project begins as a deeply personal exploration of what becomes possible when we listen to and affirm Black people's food (hi)stories outside of the oppressive systems in which we operate. Rather than beginning with deprivation, pathology, or lack, I begin with the knowledge carried through my own body, family, and memory. I turn to the kitchens, tables, cravings, refusals, and acts of care that shaped me in order to ask a question that is both

intimate and theoretical: What does my Black queer life and lineage reveal about the power of food as a way of Black being?

From Memory to Theory

Rooted in nostalgia for the food memories I share with my mother, this project turns to Black feminist, Black queer, and critical food scholarship to place food's affective qualities in conversation with bodies of knowledge that have long theorized Black life, space, and survival. While my story inspires the questions that animate this dissertation, the literature that follows provides the language and frameworks through which those questions are sharpened and expanded. The scholarship reviewed in the next section does more than contextualize this study. It reveals how food, geography, affect, and power have been unevenly theorized, where Black queer lives have been rendered peripheral or invisible, and where alternative epistemologies have already begun to materialize. By tracing these conversations, I situate what I call Black queer food geographies within and against homonormative inclusion politics ², racial capitalist food systems ³, and human geography's treatment of space as abstract rather than lived and felt. ⁴ I use Black queer food geographies to describe the spatial and relational practices through which Black queer people produce nourishment, belonging, and care within food systems structured by racial capitalism, heteronormativity, and uneven access to resources. Rather than locating food

² Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*, Revised and expanded edition (Duke University Press, 2015).

³ Psyche A. Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Psyche A. Williams-Forson, *Eating While Black: Food Shaming and Race in America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Ashanté M. Reese, *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access Washington, D.C* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Jerry Shannon et al., "More Than Mapping: Improving Methods for Studying the Geographies of Food Access," *American Journal of Public Health* 111, no. 8 (2021): 1418–22, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306339>.

⁴ Kemi Adeyemi, *Feels Right: Black Queer Women and the Politics of Partying in Chicago* (Duke University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478023319>; Priscilla McCutcheon, "Food, Faith, and the Everyday Struggle for Black Urban Community," *Social & Cultural Geography* 16, no. 4 (2015): 385–406, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2014.991749>.

solely within kitchens, restaurants, or markets, this framework attends to how everyday acts of cooking, eating, sharing, and withholding food become practices of placemaking, survival, and worldmaking.

Situating my work at the intersection of these fields clarifies the intellectual terrain in which this project intervenes and the possibilities it opens for reimagining food as a site of Black being, refusal, and worldmaking. This project moves from abstraction to embodiment by insisting that the questions raised by Black queer food geographies must be felt as much as they are analyzed. By abstraction, I refer to the dominant ways food, space, queerness, and Blackness are often made legible within scholarly and policy discourse. Food access research, for example, often renders food through the language of insecurity, affordability, assistance, and consumption patterns, offering necessary accounts of material inequity while leaving less room for the sensory, intimate, and affective meanings of food in Black life.⁵ Critical food geographers push this further by showing how maps and demographic measures can reveal spatial disparities while also flattening the lived experience of food access, including mobility, memory, cultural acceptability, safety, and resident expertise.⁶ Black feminist and Black geographic scholarship similarly teaches me that space is never a neutral surface, but is produced through racialized histories, power relations, and embodied struggle.⁷ Queer of color critique and queer theory help me refuse the reduction of queerness to a stable identity category, instead framing it as a relation

⁵ JJ Otten et al., *Food Security and Food Assistance in the Wake of COVID-19: A 5th Survey of Washington State Households*, Washington State Food Security Survey (University of Washington/ Washington State University, 2025), https://foodsystems.uw.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/WAFOOD_Brief16_20250212-1.pdf; Natalie Vaughan-Wynn and Jin-Kyu Jung, “Digital Food Apartheid: The Uneven Food Geographies of Seattle in the Era of Amazon,” *Environment and Planning F* 3, nos. 1–2 (2024): 81–105, <https://doi.org/10.1177/26349825241234430>.

⁶ Shannon et al., “More Than Mapping.”

⁷ Camilla Hawthorne, “Black Matters Are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-first Century,” *Geography Compass* 13, no. 11 (2019): e12468, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12468>; Katherine McKittrick, “On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 8 (2011): 947–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2011.624280>.

to normativity, power, deviance, discipline, and possibility.⁸ Finally, Black feminist work on affect, embodiment, and survival allows me to approach Blackness not only as a structural condition shaped by violence, but also as a lived, sensory, spiritual, and intimate practice of making life otherwise.⁹ These bodies of work clarify structure, but my project asks what becomes possible when structure is read through sensation: through taste, fatigue, hunger, pleasure, risk, withholding, and care. Black queer food geographies acknowledge and exceed these discourses by turning toward the everyday and the intimate, toward the ordinary acts through which Black life is sustained and reimagined. Within this terrain, eating and cooking are not neutral practices, but deeply political, personal, and historical acts where memory, affect, and power intersect.

Recent Black feminist scholarship insists that affect is neither incidental nor secondary to political life but constitutive of how Black subjects inhabit and contest space. In *Feels Right*, Kemi Adeyemi demonstrates how Black queer women's navigation of nightlife reveals the entanglement of race, vulnerability, and the pursuit of "feeling right" within neoliberal urban geographies in Chicago, showing that communal joy is always negotiated through exposure, exhaustion, and risk¹⁰. Bettina Judd's *Feelin*, by contrast, turns inward, theorizing emotion as sacred knowledge produced through Black women's creative practice; for Judd, feeling is not mere affective response but an embodied epistemology, what she names "affective sedulity",

⁸ Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997): 437–65, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-3-4-437>; E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2001): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930128119>; Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, ed. Inderpal Grewal et al., Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies (Duke University Press, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822390442>.

⁹ Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity* (Duke University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373575>; Bettina Judd, *Feelin: Creative Practice, Pleasure, and Black Feminist Thought* (Northwestern University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv34dm7bc>.

¹⁰ Adeyemi, *Feels Right*.

through which pleasure, grief, shame, and anger become modes of knowing.¹¹ Adeyemi and Judd's interventions reframe vulnerability as a site of intellectual and political labor. Building on their insights, this project approaches Black queer food geographies as an affective move between interior sensation and collective space: cooking, tasting, feeding, and withholding become ways of negotiating exposure, cultivating pleasure, and managing emotional risk in a food system structured by racial capitalism and neoliberal governance. Eating and cooking cannot be separated from the political, personal, or social conditions of our lives. Nor can the craving for or creation of specific dishes be divorced from history. What Adeyemi locates on the dance floor and Judd traces in the studio, I follow into the kitchen.

Within this project, affect names the felt intensities through which food becomes meaningful: sensations, attachments, embodied memories, moods, cravings, aversions, pleasures, and refusals. I use affect to track how power is registered in the body through desire, care, creativity, and longing. Affect is both analytic and material. It helps me interpret how racial capitalism, gendered violence, and spatial displacement are metabolized through everyday food practices, while also revealing how Black queer people quietly enact refusal by choosing what to cook, what to share, what to remember, what to withhold, and what to make pleasurable. The intimacy produced each time I turn on my mixer becomes legible as more than sentiment in Black feminist and Black queer methodologies. In these moments, my mother and I are connected across time and space through inherited embodied knowledge that lives in muscle memory, taste, rhythm, and repetition. My standing mixer and red velvet cake illuminate how affect travels: how recipes bind us not only to one another, but also to ancestors and to other Black women who have long used food as a site of creativity, livelihood, and survival. The

¹¹ Judd, *Feelin*.

memories of baking are less about my mother's victimization as a Black woman. They invoke resilience, intellect, and agency. It also reveals how, as a Black queer woman, I inherit and rework these capacities in ways that feel authentic and sustaining. The poetics of Black queer food geographies shift the focus from sustenance to soul, from the physical to the metaphysical, from food apartheid to food liberation, from pain to joy.

This dissertation, “‘Errybody Gotta Eat’: Black Queer Food Geographies and the Politics of Refusal,” examines the everyday lives of Black queer culinarians in Seattle to trace the placemaking strategies embedded in food consumption and creation amid neoliberalism, anti-Blackness, and symbolic inclusion. Drawing on semi structured interviews, participant observation, and informal conversations collected over the past four years, I argue that Black queer food practices enact quiet, embodied forms of refusal and worldmaking that reshape how nourishment, belonging, and justice are understood across physical and digital food geographies. I name these practices “quare food refusals.” Each chapter traces how these refusals unfold across distinct spatial terrains, from public health institutions and urban food systems to digital platforms such as Instagram, revealing how Black queer communities cultivate care, creativity, and survival beyond the limits of neoliberal inclusion. Methodologically, I map geographies of self-reliance that make Black queer life visible on its own terms, refusing both erasure and incorporation into dominant food justice narratives. Ultimately, this project advances a Black queer food relational framework that understands Black queer food as theory, method, and critique for navigating the U.S. culinary system, by which I mean the interconnected regimes of food production, distribution, public health regulation, media representation, and culinary

authority that determine whose food is valued, whose labor is exploited, and whose bodies are disciplined.¹²

Rather than treating quare food refusals only as resistance, this dissertation approaches them as a distinct landscape of knowledge production that reflects the everyday resilience, creativity, and relational practices of Black queer communities. In doing so, the project refuses epistemologies rooted in colonialism, whiteness, and patriarchy and instead centers Black queer culinary knowledge across professional and home spaces. This methodological orientation values food writers and culinary workers outside the academy, holding their knowledge in conversation with, rather than subordinate to, academic scholarship. It also entails theorizing through both the tangible and intangible dimensions of cooking and eating. Recipes, ingredients, restaurants, cast iron skillets, aprons, and other material practices of food making become critical sites through which Black queer people cultivate care, meaning, and survival within and beyond dominant food geographies. At the same time, the intangible dimensions of food, memory, desire, pleasure, grief, longing, intuition, improvisation, ancestral presence, and the atmosphere produced around a table are equally central to how Black queer food geographies take shape. Attending to these practices opens analytic possibilities grounded in greater agency, humanity, and care for Black queer survival and the stories that sustain it. When Black queer lives are centered, food geographies are reconfigured to reveal how Blackness, queerness, and food intersect in the ongoing negotiation of identity and community, particularly among queer, trans, and communities of color.

¹² Michael Twitty, *The Cooking Gene: A Journey through African-American Culinary History in the Old South*, First edition (Amistad, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2017); Monica M. White, *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*, 1st ed. (University of North Carolina Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.5149/northcarolina/9781469643694.001.0001>.

This project understands the value of thinking of Black queer food narratives beyond ones of suffering. This project highlights the affective nature of food; the pleasure, the love, and the healing that happens because of food before, during, and after a dish is served. I turn to the subtle ways Seattle's residents are creating blueprints for Black queer food futures in a city whose geographies are shaped by anti-Blackness, neoliberalism, and symbolic inclusion. Through semiotic and discursive analysis, I also position social media, particularly Instagram, as a digital food geography where Black queer foodies negotiate visibility, safety, and sustenance online. Understanding these strategies are integral in conversations addressing issues of food inequities and injustices happening in QTPOC communities. Where do we go when we put food in the context of Black liberation? What alternative food geographies are exposed? I further contextualize and respond to these questions with narratives of friends and acquaintances who live in the city and work within the Seattle food industry.

An interdisciplinary approach demonstrates how interlocking social subjectivities shape our relationships to food, exposes the cisheteronormative values embedded within culinary landscapes, and traces how these values distort food access. Often dismissed as overly subjective, Black feminist and queer theoretical interventions demonstrate that food is inseparable from meaningful languages, acts, expressions, and lived experiences. By treating culinary knowledge, creativity, skill, memory, and embodied practice as legitimate forms of scholarship, this project reveals how food has long served as a medium through which Black women articulate self-expression, self-actualization, resistance, accommodation, and power.¹³ Mainstream understandings of food access remain shaped by white supremacist, patriarchal, and capitalist structures. In contrast, feminist consciousness, community building, personal identity,

¹³ Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs*.

and cultural work point toward what becomes possible when food is situated within projects of Black liberation. Racialized and gendered sexual spatial politics do not operate at the margins of foodways and dining spaces. They are central to imagining what Katherine McKittrick describes as an interpretive and alterable world rather than a transparent and knowable one.¹⁴ These politics shape how space, place, and location are understood in both their material and metaphorical dimensions, and they are integral to more sustainable approaches to food equity, food sovereignty, and food liberation. Together, these insights lay the foundation for this project's articulation of Black queer food geographies.

On Terminology

Because this project relies on narrative interviews and long-standing relationships with participants, the terminology used here reflects both theoretical commitments and the language participants use to describe themselves. I use phrases such as “Black queer communities,” “Black queer people,” and “Black queer folks” throughout this dissertation with the understanding that both “Black” and “queer” are contested, highly politicized terms that cannot fully capture the complexity of participants' lived experiences. The language used here reflects both theoretical commitments and the terms participants use to describe themselves. All of my participants share experiences through the category of “woman,” but their relationships to gender and sexuality are shaped by distinct positionalities and evolving identities. All except one of my interviewees identify as Black. Some identify as nonbinary, genderfluid, or trans; others identify as lesbian, pansexual, or bisexual. Half identify as polyamorous or nonmonogamous, and some discussed involvement in BDSM or kink relationships. While I use the term queer throughout this project to refer broadly to LGBTQ+ communities, I also use it to encompass the diverse

¹⁴ McKittrick, “On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place,” xiii.

gender expressions, sexual orientations, and relational practices participants describe in their lives.

Several of the institutions and sites discussed in this dissertation use different language to describe sexuality and gender. For example, Public Health Seattle & King County often uses the terms “LGBT” or “LGBTQ+” to refer to queer populations. Other spaces I discuss, the Black Farmers Collective, Art Trip, and Quilliscut’s Chefs of Color Farm School of the Domestic Arts, were not explicitly marketed as “Black queer” spaces. However, each of these spaces was shaped by Black queer leadership: one of Art Trip’s founders identifies as a Black queer woman, the Black Farmers Collective cookout series was conceived and led by a Black queer woman, and Quilliscut’s Chefs of Color Farm School was also created and led by a Black queer woman. These examples demonstrate how Blackness and queerness shape food geographies even when those geographies are not explicitly named or recognized as “Black” or “queer.”

Living in Seattle for eight years, I have witnessed participants’ relationships to the term “Black queer woman” evolve, with individuals engaging the terminology strategically depending on what they are feeling, where they are, and who is around them. Expressions of gender and sexuality are contingent upon what participants wish to protect, and they present themselves through a range of gender expressions including femme, butch, stud, androgynous, and other modes of self-fashioning that challenge fixed categories of gender. For example, participants may be openly queer in their everyday lives with friends or romantic partners while choosing not to disclose this aspect of their identity on social media. Others may appear to be in heterosexual relationships while identifying as polyamorous and dating LGBTQ+ partners. Some prefer or align more closely with they/them pronouns but do not correct others who use she/her pronouns to describe them. Others do not actively hide their sexuality but also do not feel compelled to

declare it publicly. Collectively, participants use the term queer not only as an identity category but also as a political orientation. Queer signals a refusal of the heteronormative, patriarchal, and racialized structures that organize everyday life. It gestures toward alternative forms of kinship, care, and intimacy that exceed the nuclear family model and conventional relationship norms, reflecting a shared commitment to imagining social worlds beyond the limits imposed by dominant institutions structured by white supremacy.

Participants' understandings of "queer" are also shaped by their experiences of race. As Black people, they understand queerness differently than many white queer communities. Their perspectives resonate with queer-of-color critique articulated by scholars such as E. Patrick Johnson and Cathy Cohen, who demonstrate how sexuality cannot be separated from the racialized power relations that shape everyday life. While the term Black refers to people of African descent, in this project blackness is deployed as an analytic rather than solely as a phenotype. Following Katherine McKittrick, I use Blackness to name the spatial logics through which modernity has organized racial difference, dispossession, and containment. In McKittrick's work, blackness is not only an identity category but a critical framework for understanding how geographies of domination are produced through the afterlives of slavery, colonialism, and racial capitalism. Blackness reveals how space is structured by the ongoing attempt to render Black life placeless, marginal, or "elsewhere." At the same time, McKittrick emphasizes that Black geographies are not only sites of violence but also sites of creative spatial practice, where Black subjects generate alternative ways of inhabiting, imagining, and remaking place. In this dissertation, blackness functions as a lens through which I examine broader spatial relations of race, power, and belonging while remaining attentive to the specificity of Black experience.

This instability also requires a vocabulary for what remains partially hidden, withheld, or difficult to capture. I use opacity to describe the ethical and political right not to be fully known, translated, or made transparent for the purposes of recognition.¹⁵ Opacity names the ways Black queer subjects protect the parts of themselves, their relationships, and their food practices that cannot or should not be made fully available to institutions, researchers, digital platforms, or publics. In this project, opacity assists me in attending to the moments when participants choose not to disclose, explain, tag, narrate, or clarify their gender, sexuality, desires, relationships, or culinary practices. I use fugitivity to describe practices of movement, evasion, and self-making that occur under conditions of surveillance, constraint, and capture. For C. Riley Snorton, fugitivity is an escape from domination; it is also a way of understanding how Black gender and sexuality have been made through movement across categories that were never built to hold them.¹⁶ With Snorton's work, I think about Black trans and queer life as emerging in the breaks of dominant classification systems, where the refusal to remain fixed becomes a form of knowledge and survival. Fugitivity names the strategic movement between visibility and concealment, disclosure and withholding, legibility and illegibility. Vulnerability helps clarify what opacity protects and what fugitivity makes possible. Using Kevin Quashie's *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*, I define vulnerability as part of Black interior life: the quiet, intimate, and often protected terrain of feeling, desire, memory, fear, pleasure, and uncertainty.¹⁷ Quashie's concept of quiet offers a way to read Black life beyond the expectation that it must always appear as public resistance, a framing that resonates with Reese's use of quiet to describe the everyday, often understated practices through which Black food life

¹⁵ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, Nachdr. (University of Michigan Press, 2009).

¹⁶ C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

¹⁷ Kevin Everod Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 2012).

is sustained beyond dominant forms of recognition. Vulnerability names the capacity to feel, desire, remember, grieve, trust, and be changed without being made fully available for capture or explanation. Opacity protects vulnerability from compulsory disclosure, while fugitivity creates the movement through which Black queer subjects decide when, where, how, and with whom vulnerability can be shared.

The vocabulary used throughout these chapters is therefore attentive to the nuance and fluidity of participants' narratives. I reuse the language participants use during interviews and the language that developed through the course of our relationships. My use of queer is not intended to create a stable or fixed identity category. Rather, it reflects the anti-cisheteronormative political orientation embedded in the everyday decisions participants make when they want to name, obscure, or rework their gender and sexuality across the spaces they inhabit. When terms such as "Black," "queer," "blackness," and "queerness" appear to carry more analytic weight than a single identity category might suggest, it is because these concepts function in this project as both descriptors and theoretical tools. They allow me to trace how racialized and gendered power structures shape food, space, and belonging while also attending to the creative ways Black queer subjects remake those structures in their everyday lives. If these terms at times appear unstable, it is because the language available to describe Black queer life has always been provisional, stretched to hold experiences that exceed the limits of dominant social categories.

Chapter Organization

Chapter 1 begins by outlining how traditional food geographies have shaped dominant understandings of food in the United States. These approaches often rely on positivist spatial frameworks that treat food landscapes as neutral and measurable public health models that reduce food inequality to questions of access and nutrition, and food justice paradigms that

emphasize solutions such as eliminating “food deserts,” expanding markets, or improving consumer choice. While important, these frameworks frequently overlook how racial capitalism, heteronormativity, and spatial regulation structure everyday food practices and shape who is able to move, gather, and eat safely in public space. The chapter then turns to activists and scholars who challenge and expand these paradigms through Black feminist geographies, Black food geographies, queer food studies, and critical trans politics. Drawing on the work of Katherine McKittrick and Ashanté M. Reese, alongside Black feminist food scholars such as Psyche A. Williams-Forson, Doris Witt, and Tao Leigh Goffe, I foreground approaches that treat food as spatial, historical, and embodied knowledge. These insights are further extended through queer and trans critiques of food and public life articulated by Dean Spade, Kim Q. Hall, Julia C. Ehrhardt, Shayda Kafai, and E. Patrick Johnson. Together, their work centers affect, embodiment, and community knowledge as crucial to understanding how marginalized communities produce alternative food worlds. Through this scholarship, I examine how cisheteronormative ideologies shape the U.S. culinary landscape and influence how food is experienced. These critiques expose the limits of white-centered theories that interpret food primarily through nutrition, access, and consumer choice while overlooking its affective, relational, and cultural dimensions. At the same time, they reveal how Black and queer communities have long cultivated distinct food practices that sustain kinship, pleasure, and survival, practices that remain largely unrecognized within mainstream food justice discourse.

Chapter 2 situates the project in Seattle and demonstrates why the city is a critical site for exploring Black queer food. I juxtapose Seattle’s reputation as a food-lover’s haven with its history of displacing Black and queer communities, drawing on an autoethnographic account of my year-long internship at Public Health Seattle and King County (PHSKC). While the

organization recognizes racial and spatial politics in shaping food access, its interventions remain tied to traditional heteromasculinist geographic frameworks. PHSKC's discussion of healthy food emphasizes calories and nutrition over broader social or affective concerns. Because food insecurity disproportionately affects lower-income, LGBTQ, and communities of color, I argue that the organization must confront the city's histories of relegating these groups to the margins of the city's spatial and social order. These histories contextualize how Seattle's urban development and foodways have never been neutral, instead actively producing and reproducing racism, sexism, and queerphobia. This makes the city an ideal site for mapping Black queer food geographies.

Chapter 3 examines how Black queer Seattle residents navigate food inequities through everyday food practices in the physical spaces they inhabit. Building on Ashanté Reese's concept of "quiet food refusals," which documents how Black residents in Washington, D.C. express agency, care, and dissent through their food practices, I extend this framework to theorize queer food refusals within Black queer food geographies. While Reese focuses on how Black residents develop self-reliant food strategies in response to structural disinvestment, I argue that Black queer Seattleites respond to food inequities by cultivating practices of strategic fugitivity that navigate both racialized and heteronormative politics of visibility embedded in Seattle's celebrated "food utopia."¹⁸ Following José Esteban Muñoz's theorization of queer utopia as a horizon of possibility rather than an already realized place, I read these food practices as glimpses of what Black queer social life makes possible despite the failures of the present.¹⁹

¹⁸ Daniel Modlin, "Bakeries, Bars, and Seafood Make Seattle One of the Best US Cities for Food and Drink," Food & Wine, April 2, 2024, <https://www.foodandwine.com/global-tastemakers-plus-one-best-united-states-city-food-drink-2024-8612201>.

¹⁹ "Introduction: Feeling Utopia," in *Cruising Utopia, 10th Anniversary Edition*, 2nd ed., vol. 50, The Then and There of Queer Futurity (NYU Press, 2019), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv335kvs2.5>.

Drawing on narrative interviews with mostly Black (and one Laotian) chefs, restaurant owners, teachers, activists, and food enthusiasts, I analyze how participants cultivate alternative food geographies through intimate rituals of cooking, sharing meals, and building community outside dominant food institutions. These everyday practices function as forms of refusal that exceed neoliberal narratives of inclusion or representation within the food system. Rather than disappearing from the foodscape, queer food refusals sustain care, pleasure, and community through partial visibility, intimacy, and relational networks that cannot be easily mapped within Seattle's official food landscape.

Chapter 4 moves from the physical to digital spaces, examines Instagram as a digital food geography, exploring how Black queer food practices circulate within its visual and algorithmic economies. I use digital food geography to describe how online platforms spatialize food culture by organizing visibility, proximity, and belonging through infrastructures such as hashtags, feeds, and algorithms. Throughout this chapter I draw on Black queer studies, Black geographies, and critical digital media scholarship to frame Instagram as a racialized and gendered spatial infrastructure rather than a neutral platform. The queer-of-color critiques of Cathy Cohen and E. Patrick Johnson help me interrogate the limits of "queer" as a category, particularly how its dominant digital aesthetics often remain misaligned with Black LGBTQ experiences. Building on Roderick Ferguson, C. Riley Snorton, and Kara Keeling, I treat opacity, illegibility, and absence as analytic lenses that allow the sparse presence of #BlackQueerFood to be interpreted as refusal as opposed to a deficiency. Katherine McKittrick's work on Black spatial logics, alongside analyses of digital power by Moya Bailey, Safiya Noble, and Jenny Herman, situates Instagram's hashtags and algorithms as infrastructures that organize visibility, surveillance, and consumption online. These frameworks ground my argument that the absence

of #BlackQueerFood reflects a strategic negotiation of visibility within neoliberal digital food cultures.

Rather than treating social media as a neutral archive of food images, I analyze Instagram as a contested terrain where racialized and gendered hierarchies shape what becomes visible, searchable, and legible. Tracing how the platform structures visibility and belonging in ways that mirror offline spatial logics, I examine hashtags such as #BlackQueerFood, where I find not a coherent archive but a striking absence. I interpret this absence as a form of queer food refusal, a choice to remain partially illegible to the platform's neoliberal politics of diversity, branding, and consumption. Through digital ethnography and an interview with Steph, a Black queer chef who uses Instagram to share cannabis-centered culinary practices rooted in healing and pleasure, I show how everyday acts of cooking, posting, and eating become fugitive practices of self-definition and care. In this way, Instagram becomes a terrain where Black queer food practices negotiate visibility, safety, and sustenance through quiet acts of refusal and worldmaking.

In this dissertation, I consider the emanation of queer food as a distinct category of cultural production because it reveals how Black queer people use cooking, eating, memory, pleasure, and care to generate knowledge, intimacy, and alternative worlds beyond dominant food systems. I then assert that critical food studies must attend to how sexuality, desire, and embodiment reshape traditional food narratives while also accounting for race, geography, and everyday spatial practices. Across kitchens, digital platforms, and community spaces, Black queer people use food as a site of pleasure, care, memory, and political possibility. Refusal emerges as a generative practice, enacted through partial visibility, quiet withdrawal, and everyday acts of self-definition that challenge dominant food justice paradigms. By centering

affective and embodied practices, this project affirms Black queer foodways as vital modes of knowledge-making that illuminate more just, nourishing, and liberatory futures.

Chapter 1: Toward a Black Queer Food Geography

The critical work of Black feminists, Black geographers, Black queer theorists, feminist historians, and critical food scholars forms the intellectual foundation of this project. Across these traditions, scholars have interrogated the research practices that historically rendered the lives and knowledge of women of color, LGBTQ+ people, poor communities, and other marginalized groups invisible within academic inquiry. They demonstrate how dominant empirical methodologies often dismiss oral histories, embodied practices, vernacular archives, and affective knowledge as anecdotal or insufficiently objective, thereby delegitimizing the very processes through which marginalized communities document and transmit their histories. In response, these scholars advance methodological approaches grounded in self-reflexivity, lived experience, and embodied knowledge production. This dissertation builds on phenomenological and embodied traditions by refusing the epistemological division between mind, body, heart, and spirit that has long structured Western academic knowledge.²⁰ Within this framework, the body is not simply a site of experience but a site of theory-making. Drawing on Black feminist geographies and Black queer studies, this chapter develops a Black feminist geographic epistemology that understands foodways as spatial and relational practices through which Black queer communities produce knowledge, belonging, and survival within racialized food systems.

Epistemological Foundations: Black Feminist Geographies as Method

²⁰ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series (Crossing Press, 1984).

In *Demonic Grounds*, Katherine McKittrick argues that Black Feminist Geographies pushes against “longstanding geographic frameworks that materially and philosophically arrange the planet according to a seemingly stable white, heterosexual, classed vantage point” by centering the situated knowledges of Black women, femmes, trans, and gender expansive people.²¹ For McKittrick, traditional geography treats the physical landscape as naturalized, positivist, and transparent. Cartographic rules make three-dimensional spaces and places appear neutral, unchanging, and self evident, as if what we see on maps simply reflects the world as it is. McKittrick challenges this assumption by showing that space is never innocent. Rather, space is produced through racial, sexual, and gendered hierarchies that organize who is seen as belonging, who is rendered peripheral, and whose spatial knowledge counts. Her intervention insists that Black women and other marginalized subjects are not outside of geography, but central to its making. Geographies of domination depend on Black women, femmes, trans, and gender expansive people’s participation in the production of space, even as that participation is obscured. This is what McKittrick identifies as a form of dispossession.

Black people are denied spatial legibility, place-making authority, and recognition as geographic subjects, even when they shape and sustain the spaces they inhabit. To be made ungeographic, then, is to be cast as outside of place, as though one does not belong to or produce space, and as though one’s presence and spatial claims are unintelligible or nonexistent. McKittrick is careful to note that this ungeographic condition is not simply an aftereffect of colonization. Rather, racialized and gendered difference are produced alongside geographic domination through a co-constitutive process that naturalizes both forms of hierarchy together.²²

²¹ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xv.

²² *Demonic Grounds*, x.

Black Feminist Geography responds to these long standing spatial politics by making visible the obscured labor and situated knowledges through which Black women have always shaped space. McKittrick names these obscured and disruptive spatial formations “demonic grounds,” a term that describes the absented presence of Black women’s geographic knowledge and the alternative ways of knowing and inhabiting space that emerge from it.

If, as McKittrick argues, racism and sexism operate as spatial logics that render Black and other marginalized subjects ungeographic, even as they remain central to the production of space, then demonic grounds offer a way to recognize and theorize these obscured spatial practices. In this project, I extend this framework to the culinary landscape, where such practices reveal the inequities and injustices that structure contemporary food geographies. Rather than treating the interpersonal dynamics and communal building that occur in food spaces as byproducts of the space itself, I argue that they actively shape “how we organize, build, and imagine” physical geography. In other words, these everyday interactions and practices do not simply take place within food spaces. They actively shape how those spaces are organized and experienced. In doing so, they help determine who is welcomed, who is made to feel out of place, and who is excluded altogether. As a result, the racial and sexual displacement of particular bodies is not incidental, but becomes a normalized and deliberate feature of how foodways are produced and maintained. McKittrick theorizes “one way to contend with unjust and uneven human/inhuman categorizations is to think about, and perhaps employ, the alternative geographic formulations that subaltern communities advance.”²³ These alternative geographic formulations foreground the affective and metaphysical dimensions of food, opening up new ways to imagine more equitable food futures. The interrogations and remapping of a

²³ McKittrick, “On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place,” xix.

predominantly Black neighborhood in Ashante M. Reese's book *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington D.C.* demonstrates how Black diaspora populations generate new, more alterable geographic stories.²⁴

Using both macro and micro analyses to map out the unequal food landscape and how people navigate these foodscapes on a day-to-day basis, Reese addresses the dominant food systems that have negatively impacted Deanwood, a historically black neighborhood of Ward 7 in D.C. Anti-blackness is positioned as an analytic tool to describe the lack of access to healthy affordable food as a “slow walking everyday death” and links it to the same structural violence and racial terror that condone Black death at the hands of the police.²⁵ Both unequal food access and police violence produce and reinforce the expendability of Black people and “attempt to curtail Black mobility in and access to public space,” yet traditional geography renders invisible the everyday anti-Black spatializations of the racial-sexual subject. Within the realm of food, the pervasive use of white heteromasculinist discourse leads to social justice solutions that do more harm than good. Reese renounces the use of the term “food desert” to describe Deanwood. The word desert, commonly used to describe areas with inadequate food resources, inaccurately promotes an image of an impoverished empty barren place and erases the day-to-day strategies the residents have for procuring and consuming food. She prefers the term “food apartheid” which looks at the food system holistically and intersects with race, geography, economics, and faith.²⁶ This minor switch in language exposes the diverse food geographies Black residents’ created to provide for themselves and maintain community to make up for the unequal food access, racial segregation, and anti-blackness prevalent in their local food system.

²⁴ *Black Food Geographies*.

²⁵ Reese, *Black Food Geographies*.

²⁶ Reese, *Black Food Geographies*, 7.

“Geographies of self-reliance” as a theoretical framework permitted Reese to locate the everyday food practices residents adopted that were sustaining Black life in a “dying” neighborhood.²⁷ They permitted Reese to change how she viewed, read, and documented the food lives of her research participants. They permitted her to shift attention to Black residents’ agency and humanity instead of highlighting the negative impacts of disinvestment and structural racism. Despite the supposed “nothingness” in their neighborhood, Deanwood’s Black residents have developed informal food economies for living. Economies that counter the narrative that Black people are not invested in the health of themselves and their community. Economies that demonstrate how they creatively “make a way out of no way” within their current foodscape while also striving for a more equitable food future. Economies that aren’t hyper visible within dominant food geographies or obvious on a map. She named the strategies producing these economies *quiet food refusals*; “the ways that Black [people] express agency, care, and dissent in their food procurement practices, in their memories, and in their hopes for the future.”²⁸ The creation of a community garden may not be organizationally-led or have the same institutional investment as a corporate supermarket but in Deanwood it served as both a place to learn entrepreneurial and agricultural skills as well as a space that encourages communal practices.²⁹ Black-owned businesses were prevalent prior to larger commercial supermarkets. They served as opportunities for Black people to connect with their community and be a space of resistance to the systemic racism that inhibited social, economic, and physical mobility. Reese’s utilization of this framework acknowledged and criticized the disparities the Deanwood residents faced but it also emphasized how they actively determined how to meet their own needs in defiance of the

²⁷ Reese, *Black Food Geographies*, 11.

²⁸ Reese, *Black Food Geographies*, 5.

²⁹ Reese, *Black Food Geographies*, 3.

structural inequalities. Geographies of self-reliance accentuate the flourishing of Deanwood's past informal food economy and small businesses, as well as the downfall of this local foodscape by a more industrialized food system's takeover and its inevitable disinvestment from a once economically successful city. This makes it clear that although Deanwood's history has impacted their self-reliant abilities, the residents are still able to retain agency in how they procure and consume their food. The focus here is on hope, possibility, and healing.

The epistemological framework of Black Food Geographies show that it is necessary to reject positivist descriptions of food and consider the material and symbolic aspects of a meal. It questions what we think we know about food consumption and reveals that to create liberatory food futures we must think about food differently. We must think about race and racism differently, and we must think about space and place differently. I connect Reese's research to this project to amplify how Black women's geographic knowledge signal alternative patterns that work in conjunction with traditional geographies, specifically in the context of food. In addition to demonstrating how Black geographies theorize with the material components of foodways: grocery stores and gardens, Reese describes more abstract elements: memories, nostalgia, hopes and dreams. The everyday practices of food procurement and consumption among neighborhood residents despite the prevailing anti-Black corporatization of the area's food system. Reese's focus here is on Black humanity. Black food geographies' unique positionality pushes researchers to expand the methodologies that are deployed to materially and discursively understand food and foodways.

Reese's theoretical and methodological considerations also create an opening for thinking about how the researcher is implicated in the food geographies they study. Her shift from the material to the abstract reshaped not only how she approached grocery stores and supermarkets,

but also how she interviewed participants, interpreted their stories, and wrote about them in her book. It also shifted how she positioned herself within the project. Following Reese's self-reflexive methodology, I bring my own food practices and spatial negotiations into view as part of this project's analytic framework. I analyze different facets of my personal food journey in Seattle, including the history of gentrification in historically Black neighborhoods like the Central District ³⁰, the omnipresence of rainbow flags in public space as markers of LGBTQ+ inclusion ³¹, and travel blogs that name Seattle "one of the best foodie cities in America."³² Together, these dimensions of the city produced a particular kind of analysis about the dining choices I made as a Black queer person in ways I had not previously considered. Reese's willingness to let vulnerability reshape her approach to studying food in D.C. offers a model for my own work. I welcome that same vulnerability into this research and apply a similar methodological orientation to the food geographies of Seattle, where BFG makes it possible to theorize food as spatial, affective, and political at once. Seattle's institutional response to food inequities could benefit from this same methodological shift.

Governing Public Eating: Safety, Surveillance, and the Politics of Dining

In my research, the shift to theorizing food as a spatial logic emerged from examining the places where food is served through a more critical lens. This dissertation therefore begins by examining public dining spaces, specifically restaurants, as contested geographic sites through which Black queer foodies transform foodways and the social beliefs governing food's production, distribution, and consumption. Restaurants serve as places of leisure and pleasure to

³⁰ Margaret Marietta Ramírez, "The Elusive Inclusive: Black Food Geographies and Racialized Food Spaces," *Antipode* 47, no. 3 (2015): 748–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12131>.

³¹ Spade, *Normal Life*.

³² Modlin, "Bakeries, Bars, and Seafood Make Seattle One of the Best US Cities for Food and Drink."

slow down from the pace of individuals' daily schedules. They are a place to enjoy a meal by yourself or in the company of others, spaces for socializing and publicly spending time with loved ones, or sites of celebration and professional development such as networking or finalizing an important business deal. Yet too much focus on these ordinary and pleasurable functions obscure the power relations that structure who belongs, who is visible, and whose food practices are legitimized within these spaces.³³ Conventional spatial logics governing black and queer foodways still operate under geographies of domination, reproducing hierarchies that regulate their recognition and legitimacy.³⁴ As a result these geographies constrain the extent to which food-centered spaces that cater to Black and queer communities can be recognized as sites of social connection, care, and political possibility.³⁵

Dining spaces such as bars, clubs, and cafés have historically functioned as vital sites for meeting, community formation, and relationship-building within LGBTQ+ communities.³⁶ They may have looked like places of leisure and fun, but they also functioned as informal infrastructures of survival. Infrastructures through which social reproduction was sustained, political formations emerged, and the management of risk, visibility, and exposure was collectively negotiated.³⁷ Laslett and Brenner use social reproduction to refer to the everyday

³³ Naa Oyo A. Kwate, *Burgers in Blackface: Anti-Black Restaurants Then and Now*, Forerunners: Ideas First (University of Minnesota Press, 2019); Eli Revelle Yano Wilson, *Front of the House, Back of the House: Race and Inequality in the Lives of Restaurant Workers*, Latina/o Sociology (New York University Press, 2020).

³⁴ Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman, eds., *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability* (The MIT Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8922.001.0001>; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; Reese, *Black Food Geographies*; Shannon et al., "More Than Mapping."

³⁵ Gabrielle Lenart, "Adapting Queer Foodways," *Gastronomica* 20, no. 3 (2020): 62–63, <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2020.20.3.62>.

³⁶ John Birdsall, *What Is Queer Food? How We Served a Revolution* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2025); Kyle Fitzpatrick, "Queer Food Is Hiding in Plain Sight," *Eater*, June 28, 2018, <https://www.eater.com/2018/6/28/17508420/what-is-queer-food>; Anil Pradhan, "Too Gay an Oreol!: The Cultural Connotations of Queer(Ing) Food," *Café Dissensus*, January 28, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338901646_Too_Gay_an_Oreo_The_Cultural_Connotations_of_Queering_Food.

³⁷ Jon Binnie and Christian Klesse, "Food Practices, Queer Social Reproduction and the Geographies of LGBTQ+ Activism," *Political Geography* 117 (March 2025): 103273, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2025.103273>.

practices, relationships, and forms of care through which life is maintained and queer collective existence is sustained.³⁸ Prior to the Gay Liberation movement of the 1960's, underground bars and clubs were some of the only spaces for queer people to connect.³⁹ Many queer and trans people lack support from their biological family and rebuild their familial network with people they intentionally chose as their kin. These dining spaces provide them with the necessary resources for kickstarting social networks that are more accepting and supportive. For many sexual minorities, their closest relationships started in a gay bar or at a nightclub. These spaces were not only social venues, but key sites through which queer communities gathered, built trust, and made collective life possible. Their importance is especially visible in moments when bars and clubs became flashpoints for both political resistance and anti-queer violence.

The Stonewall uprising, for example, did not happen in just any public space. It emerged in and around a bar that served as one of the few available gathering places for queer and trans people, reminding us that spaces of drinking, dining, and nightlife have been central to queer sociality, survival, and political formation. In addition to being the symbolic “birthplace” of Gay Pride, Stonewall matters as evidence that queer food and nightlife spaces have historically functioned as infrastructures through which community and resistance were materially organized. Pulse Nightclub, by contrast, underscores the ongoing vulnerability of these spaces. On June 12, 2016, a gunman opened fire during Latin Night at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, killing forty-nine people and injuring dozens more. Many of those killed were Latinx, and the attack occurred in a space where queer and trans people of color gathered to dance, drink, flirt, celebrate, and be with one another. The violence at Pulse was sexualized because it

³⁸ “Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 15, no. 1 (1989): 381–404, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.15.080189.002121>.

³⁹ Marc Stein, *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History* (New York University Press, 2019).

targeted more than LGBTQ identity; it targeted a space organized around queer pleasure, erotic possibility, gender expression, intimacy, and bodily freedom. Pulse demonstrates how queer nightlife spaces, especially those organized by and for queer and trans people of color, function as vital sites of refuge while also remaining vulnerable to racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence.

As a venue where queer people, particularly queer Latinx communities, gathered for pleasure, music, and social connection, the nightclub reveals how sites of collective intimacy and recreation can also become targets of catastrophic violence. Its afterlife as a memorial further demonstrates how these spaces exceed leisure: they become repositories of grief, memory, and public mourning because they were already meaningful sites of queer worldmaking. Bars and nightclubs have also been sites where the political significance of queer gathering becomes especially visible, whether through collective resistance, as at Stonewall Inn, or through the devastating exposure of queer vulnerability, as at Pulse Nightclub. Originally an inn and bar, since 1969 Stonewall has become a historical landmark and the birthplace of Pride, a now international celebration of LGBTQIA+ lives during the month of June. Pulse Nightclub is currently being transformed into a memorial and museum.⁴⁰ So, the very spaces that have enabled queer pleasure and kinship have also been sites where safety is unevenly distributed, actively surveilled, and routinely denied.

Safety in public dining has never been neutral; it has always been selective and racialized. Elijah Anderson's concept of "White space" illuminates how restaurants, cafés, and other commercial venues are formally desegregated yet unevenly experienced, governed by

⁴⁰ Fitzpatrick, "Queer Food Is Hiding in Plain Sight"; Stein, *The Stonewall Riots*.

racialized expectations that render Black presence hypervisible, surveilled, and conditional.⁴¹ By capitalizing the W in white, Anderson positions whiteness as a specific analytic category tied to racial power, not just a space that happens to be white-dominated. In White space, although access is legally permitted, these spaces continue to operate through informal norms that discipline who belongs, how one should behave, and which bodies are deemed acceptable, making dining safety a precarious and unevenly distributed experience shaped by racial power rather than policy alone. What he doesn't say is how these norms are also gendered, policing not only race but also embodiment, comportment, dress, voice, and intimacy in ways that marginalize those who fail white, heterosexual, and cis-normative standards of respectability.⁴² The long history of racial and gender exclusion in U.S. restaurants makes this dynamic especially clear.

During the Civil Rights Movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee strategically targeted restaurants for sit-ins precisely because public eating had been organized through anti-Black segregation. Although these protests did not articulate exclusion through the broader terms of cisheteronormativity, disability, or class in the way I do here, they underscore that dining space has long been a key site where public belonging is negotiated. This exclusion persists through discriminatory service practices, labor exploitation, and the spatial politics of restaurant design, location, and sourcing. In Seattle, the gentrification of the Central District has transformed a historically Black cultural and economic hub into a landscape of trendy restaurants

⁴¹ Elijah Anderson, *Black in White Space: The Enduring Impact of Color in Everyday Life* (The University of Chicago press, 2022).

⁴² Adeyemi, *Feels Right*; Binnie and Klesse, "Food Practices, Queer Social Reproduction and the Geographies of LGBTQ+ Activism"; Williams-Forsen, *Eating While Black*.

that mirror broader patterns of racial displacement.⁴³ This contemporary remaking of Black food geographies is part of a longer history in which Black people have had to navigate where they could safely eat, gather, and rest. Historically, the Negro Motorist Green Book functioned as a necessary survival guide for Black travelers navigating unsafe dining and lodging spaces throughout the U.S., a reminder that access to food has long required careful spatial calculation.⁴⁴ For Black diners today, particularly those who are trans or queer, eating in public still entails managing the risk of harassment, neglect, or violence.⁴⁵ These dynamics are upheld through interpersonal bias but it is the spatial regulation and subtle surveillance embedded in restaurant design, staffing, and social norms that discipline who can occupy these spaces comfortably and on what terms. Against the backdrop of these histories, we can reinterpret restaurants as semi-public spaces in which respectability operates as a condition of access to customer service.

This history helps explain why contemporary restaurants often rely on symbolic gestures of inclusion to present themselves as spaces of safety and belonging. Because public dining has long been shaped by racialized and gendered exclusion, restaurants do not simply serve food; they also participate in producing an image of who is welcomed, protected, and meant to feel comfortable inside. I noticed a trend of rainbow flags and police badge-shaped stickers displayed at various restaurants, gestures that attempt to reconcile or manage this history in Seattle. The rainbow badge centers the words “Safe Place” in black font and all caps, meant to signal to customers that the establishment is “LGBTQ friendly.” The rainbow badge is an initiative

⁴³ Ramírez, “The Elusive Inclusive”; Quintard Taylor et al., *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle’s Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era*, Second edition, Emil and Kathleen Sick Series in Western History and Biography (University of Washington Press, 2022).

⁴⁴ Victor H. Green, *The Negro Motorist Green Book: An International Travel Guide* (Victor H. Green & Co., 1949).

⁴⁵ Jaime M. Grant et al., “Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey,” *International Governmental and Non-Governmental Reports and Policy Studies Related to LGBTQ Issues, Activism and Health*, 2011.

intended to unite the Seattle Police Department, local and national business owners, and Seattle residents by attempting to repair LGBTQ+ community members' distrust of police through the language of safety and inclusion.⁴⁶ The badge certifies that an establishment has policies and procedures to prevent violence and has completed training on bias and hate crimes. It is a symbol to victims that law enforcement agencies have taken steps to protect and support minority members of their community. Reflected in this Safe Space initiative are the stakes for LGBTQ+ people when they dine publicly, revealing restaurants, bars, and nightclubs as more than sites that simply satiate hunger or serve an alcoholic beverage. Racially and sexually marginalized groups have experienced dire consequences for doing so, making the mere decision to “dine in” or “dine out” a profound political decision.

To choose to “eat, drink, and be merry” with other LGBTQ+ folks can therefore be a revolutionary and liberating act, a deliberate choice to experience joy in the face of violence and death, while also pointing to a more nuanced interpretation and practice of safety. While law enforcement may view the rainbow badge as a step toward repair, symbolic gestures of inclusion such as flags or certifications do little to change underlying conditions. Instead, they reveal how visibility and access alone fail to produce meaningful safety for Black queer diners. My project is not an indictment of attempts to make restaurants “safe spaces” through a healthier relationship with the police, but rather a question about the effectiveness of shifting responsibility from communal to institutional levels. It questions safety as a branding strategy and challenges why safety is often equated with visibility. Ultimately, I take up this urgency by calling for a reinterpretation of dining that accounts not only for how people enjoy a meal, but also for the

⁴⁶ City of Seattle, “SPD Safe Place Decal - SPD Safe Place | Seattle.Gov,” accessed December 27, 2023, <https://www.seattle.gov/spd-safe-place/safe-place-decal>.

layered social, political, and spatial conditions that make even ordinary acts of eating a site of risk.

Dean Spade's formulation of critical trans politics ground my understanding of safety in possibilities not tethered to "the controlling interests and institutions of US law and culture", police protection, or state recognition.⁴⁷ Rather than seeking inclusion within existing legal and administrative systems, critical trans politics centers the material conditions that shape trans life such as housing, healthcare, food access, and freedom from violence while elevating collective care, mutual aid, and survival strategies developed outside the state. It understands that formal recognition and rights do not necessarily translate into lived safety, especially for trans people of color, and instead calls for transformative approaches that challenge the structures producing harm in the first place. Critical trans politics is central to how I theorize safety in this project because it shifts the analytic away from visibility, access, and institutional recognition and toward the everyday practices through which Black queer people produce livable worlds. In doing so, it allows me to read food, gathering, and refusal as material strategies of survival and care that reconfigure what safety looks and feels like beyond terms set by the state or institutions.

Rather than treating inclusion or institutional visibility as evidence of progress, Spade asks us to examine how vulnerability and security are distributed through administrative systems, social norms, and state violence. His critique shifts my analysis away from whether restaurants, city initiatives, or public-facing businesses claim to be inclusive and toward what those claims actually do. This matters because "inclusion" often operates as a neoliberal framework for social change, one that prioritizes representation, market participation, and individual access over structural transformation. Within this logic, the presence of diversity signals progress, even when

⁴⁷ *Normal Life*, 139.

the underlying conditions that produce harm remain intact. Inclusion becomes something that can be branded, measured, and circulated through signage like rainbow decals, diversity statements, curated imagery without requiring institutions to redistribute resources, relinquish power, or address the material realities shaping Black queer life. Inclusion does not resolve inequality so much as manage it, incorporating marginalized subjects into existing systems while leaving those systems fundamentally unchanged. Spade's intervention clarified how these gestures can obscure ongoing vulnerability, allowing institutions to appear responsive while continuing to rely on the very structures that produce insecurity in the first place.

In this dissertation, critical trans politics provides a political framework and an analytic method for reading space, safety, and everyday practice. It helps me understand that the problem is not simply exclusion from public dining, but the broader racialized and gendered organization of public space that makes some bodies legible as worthy of protection and others vulnerable to surveillance, neglect, and harm. Methodologically, this means I do not take claims of inclusion, visibility, or safety at face value. Instead, I analyze how these claims are produced, circulated, and lived, asking what material conditions they leave untouched. Following Spade, I read rainbow flags, safe space certifications, and police-partnered initiatives as administrative and affective technologies that can manage exposure to harm without redistributing safety, resources, or power. This framing sharpens my analysis of Seattle's dining spaces by refusing the assumption that law, policy, or branding can stand in for collective safety. It directs my attention to the gap between symbolic inclusion and lived experience, and to the ways Black queer and trans people navigate that gap through practices of refusal, selective visibility, and care. Critical trans politics anchors my approach to food and dining as sites where safety is not granted by institutions, but continuously negotiated, withheld, and remade outside of them.

In addition to restaurants, many organizations and agencies participate in Seattle's Safe Space initiative, and nearly 300 law enforcement agencies across the United States, Canada, and internationally now use the program.⁴⁸ As I encountered these badges and rainbow flags across Seattle's dining spaces, I began to better understand Spade's argument about the limits of inclusion. There was a persistent disconnect between the city being marketed through branding as progressive, safe, and affirming versus the racialized, gendered, and uneven realities I was moving through. The rainbow badge came to exemplify a neoliberal logic in which visibility, training, and policy are made to stand in for safety itself. Critical trans politics challenges that equation. Spade names this dynamic through the language of pinkwashing, a term he uses to describe how institutions, corporations, and states deploy LGBTQ+ symbols to signal progress and tolerance while leaving intact the systems that continue to produce violence, criminalization, and diminished life chances for the most vulnerable.⁴⁹ The badge also reveals how white liberal progressivism can convert safety into an administrative and commercial image, one that can be displayed, consumed, and trusted without requiring a redistribution of power, resources, or protection. The badge is a sign of how racialized harm can be obscured through the visual language of inclusion. That contradiction became generative for this project, leading me to ask how safety is negotiated in everyday food practices rather than assumed through institutional branding.

If waving the rainbow flag is not enough to make a restaurant a safe space for LGBTQ+ people, then what does safety look like in practice? What strategies have queer communities developed to heal, create, and thrive under conditions shaped by homophobia, transphobia, and anti-Blackness? What food geographies have endured not because institutions welcomed queer

⁴⁸ City of Seattle, "SPD Safe Place Decal - SPD Safe Place | Seattle.Gov."

⁴⁹ *Normal Life*, 140.

life, but because queer people cultivated forms of sustenance in spite of exclusion? And beyond the public visibility of restaurants, how are queer communities building foodways that reflect their social, cultural, and embodied needs? These questions shift the analysis away from recognition and toward practice. Rather than treating safety as something guaranteed by law, police partnership, or commercial signage, I formulate safety as collective, relational work grounded in care, mutuality, and practices of collective survival. This reformulation also requires looking beyond restaurants as the primary sites of queer food politics and toward alternative food geographies where nourishment is organized through community rather than certification. In this context, mainstream food justice frameworks that promise equal opportunity or safety through institutional reform alone remain inadequate because they too often leave intact the racialized, carceral, and economic arrangements that structure vulnerability.

This project intervenes through my concept of “quare food refusals.” Qware food refusals refer to everyday alimentary practices through which Black queer communities reject symbolic inclusion and police-mediated safety while cultivating alternative conditions for survival. Bringing critical trans politics into conversation with Black feminist geographies and Reese’s mapping of Black food geographies, I argue that safety cannot be reduced to visibility, certification, or access to existing public dining spaces. If McKittrick reveals how racial-sexual domination is spatialized, and Reese shows how Black communities generate food geographies through refusal, memory, and self-reliance, and Spade provides the analytic for understanding why those geographies must also refuse carceral and inclusion-based frameworks of safety, I theorize quare food refusal as a practice through which Black queer Seattle residents do more than seek recognition in public dining; they create self-governed food geographies rooted in pleasure, care, memory, and meaningful connection. The rainbow badge is not the endpoint of

my analysis but an object of critique: a visible sign of how inclusion is marketed without necessarily altering the material conditions that shape who is protected, who is surveilled, and who remains vulnerable in public space. By contrast, quare food refusals illuminate how Black queer communities produce sustenance on their own terms, offering a framework for reimagining safety beyond collaboration with law enforcement and beyond the institutional terms on which belonging is usually offered.

To operationalize this intervention, I analyze public dining as a spatial archive, centering Black histories and Black subjects to make legible social lives often rendered ungeographic.⁵⁰ Centering the food practices of Black queer and trans people who are among those most systematically excluded from restaurant spaces, I read acts of procuring and consuming food as articulations of an alternative, community grounded definition of safety that tends to both physical and metaphysical well-being. While this analysis focuses on present day food geographies and quare food refusals, these practices are rooted in longer Black feminist traditions of culinary knowledge making and memory. The following section turns to Black Feminist food archives to examine how cookbooks function as repositories of lived experience and relational care, offering historical and epistemological grounding for alternative imaginaries of safety, joy, and nourishment beyond dominant food justice frameworks.

Black Feminist Food Archives: Cookbooks, Memory, and Culinary Knowledge

Black feminist thought provides the intellectual groundwork for understanding food as a site of knowledge production, historical memory, and worldmaking. Scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde made it possible to treat Black women's lived

⁵⁰ McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place."

experience not as anecdotal supplement but as theory itself. In this tradition, embodiment, memory, affect, and everyday practice are not outside intellectual life. They are among the very conditions through which Black women come to know the world and contest domination. This shift is crucial for Black feminist food studies because once Black women's lived experiences are recognized as a source of analytic authority, food can no longer be dismissed as merely domestic, descriptive, or private. It becomes legible as a material and symbolic domain through which Black women interpret the world, transmit memory, navigate oppression, and enact resistance. Black feminist thought, then, is not simply background for my project. It is the epistemological condition that allows me to read cooking, eating, recipes, and culinary texts as sites of Black knowledge production.

In "Uses of the Erotic," Lorde insists that feeling is not opposed to knowledge but is itself a source of power and information.⁵¹ By refusing the false divide between the emotional and the political, she makes it possible to take embodied experience seriously as a site from which oppressed people come to know themselves and imagine change. A related methodological move appears in E. Patrick Johnson's formulation of quare studies, which grounds theory in the material, racialized, gendered, and classed lives of queer people of color. For Johnson, vernacular forms such as performance, folklore, literature, and verbal art do not merely reflect social life. They theorize it, often in ways that emerge from survival and struggle.⁵² Their work proves that what is felt, spoken, performed, remembered, and passed down in everyday life can carry intellectual, political, and analytic force. Drawing on this lineage, I approach vernacular traditions as critical sites of analysis, allowing me to move beyond conventional understandings

⁵¹ *Uses of the Erotic*.

⁵² Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother."

of the archive as limited to formal, institutional, or written records. Food becomes a vernacular mode of theorizing Black queer life, a domain through which feeling, memory, embodiment, and relation become legible as knowledge.

Black feminist and queer methodological frameworks also clarify why the archive of food in the Americas cannot be read innocently. Black feminist and Black food studies scholars have shown that food has long been one of the key sites through which race, gender, and power have been produced and naturalized. Doris Witt demonstrates how caricatures like Aunt Jemima condensed the violent afterlife of slavery into a consumable icon, turning Black women into symbols of nourishment while obscuring the exploitative economic relations that produced both the commodity and the fantasy attached to it.⁵³ In *Racial Indigestion*, Kyla Wazana Tompkins deepens this critique by showing that eating itself has functioned as a technology of racial formation, one through which whiteness was consolidated and Blackness rendered edible, abject, and politically unequal.⁵⁴ Naa Oyo Kwate brings this history into the restaurant by tracing how anti-Blackness has been built into American dining through branding, architecture, and themed consumption.⁵⁵ All of their work shows that the food archive is already racialized, already shaped by colonialism, commodification, and gendered violence. This is precisely why Black feminist methods are necessary: they do not simply add Black women back into the story but challenge the archive's very terms of legibility.

Psyche Williams-Forson's work offers one of the clearest examples of what such a method makes possible.⁵⁶ In *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs*, she examines the relationship

⁵³ *Black Hunger: Soul Food and America*, 1st University of Minnesota Pressed (University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

⁵⁴ *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the Nineteenth Century, America and the Long 19th Century* (New York University press, 2012).

⁵⁵ *Burgers in Blackface*.

⁵⁶ *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs; Eating While Black*.

between African American cuisine, racism, sexism, entrepreneurship, and travel through Black women's long and complicated relationship to chicken.⁵⁷ Rather than allowing racist caricatures of Black people as chicken obsessed to stand as the dominant story, Williams-Forson follows what she calls the "trail of chicken bones" through literature, cookbooks, advertisements, film, and everyday life in order to recover Black women's agency, labor, memory, and self-definition.⁵⁸ Her concept of "culinary malpractice" names the racist social process through which foods such as fried chicken become overdetermined by caricature, obscuring the complex cultural histories embedded in Black food geographies.⁵⁹ What matters for my project is not only Williams-Forson's critique of racist representation, but her method. Through a Black feminist consciousness, cookbooks and other culinary artifacts become liberatory sites of analysis that center Black people's voices and reveal how food mediates Black relationships to family, community, labor, and power.

Within Black feminist and Black queer frameworks, cookbooks and culinary memoirs emerge as especially important hybrid forms because they merge recipe, memory, family history, and cultural analysis. In *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine*, Norma Jean and Carole Darden use recipes alongside reminiscence to show that food knowledge is inseparable from regional history and Black family memory.⁶⁰ When the book was originally released, it became notable for weaving together recipes and personal memory in a way that felt formally distinctive. The text traces the lives of the Dardens and the Sampsons back through earlier generations, with chapters organized around family members, photographs, life stories, and beloved dishes. That structure

⁵⁷ Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs*.

⁵⁸ Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs*, 2.

⁵⁹ Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs*, 193.

⁶⁰ *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine: Recipes and Reminiscences of a Family*, 1st Harlem Moon trade pbk. ed., 25th anniversary ed (Harlem Moon, 2003).

matters because the book did not simply document meals. It preserved relationships, family intimacy, and the sensory textures of Black domestic life. The Darden sisters showed that culinary writing can function as more than instruction. It can hold identity, kinship, and remembrance together, making food an archive of Black relational life.

Toni Tipton-Martin's *The Jemima Code* makes a parallel but distinct intervention. She refuses dominant archival logics by treating African American cookbooks as intellectual records of Black culinary authority rather than as minor domestic ephemera.⁶¹ Her project begins from the recognition that Black-authored cookbooks have often been overlooked because they were too easily classified as practical household texts rather than as sites of theory, authorship, and historical evidence. By recovering two centuries of Black cookbooks, Tipton-Martin demonstrates that culinary writing has long served as a medium through which Black cooks documented expertise, asserted professional and cultural authority, and preserved their presence within a national food history that frequently rendered them invisible. In this way, *The Jemima Code* reveals the cookbook as a counterarchive of Black knowledge. It also exposes the inadequacy of archival frameworks that privilege institutional preservation and formal recognition over community-based forms of knowledge.

Michael Twitty's *The Cooking Gene* extends this archive through a different generic form, blending genealogy, memoir, history, ethnography, and food writing to trace how slavery, migration, religion, and racial formation continue to shape Southern cuisine and his own embodied inheritance. Framed around the question of how his destiny has been shaped by the history of Southern food, the book challenges narrow understandings of Southern foodways by exposing the central but often erased contributions of Black and African people. At the same

⁶¹ *The Jemima Code: Two Centuries of African American Cookbooks*, First edition (University of Texas Press, 2015).

time, Twitty's discussion of mourning his mother and honoring her through cooking shows how food can become a vessel for grief, healing, and ongoing relation to the dead. His reflections on funeral foodways and on preparing macaroni and cheese the way his mother made it show that culinary practice can carry memory across loss. Like the Darden sisters, Twitty treats food as a site of self-actualization and familial reconnection. But he also makes especially visible how food allows history to be entered through the body. That insight matters deeply for my project, which reads food as a medium through which Black queer people navigate memory, care, survival, and belonging.

These cookbooks and food memoirs model forms of knowledge rooted in embodiment and lived practice. They show that food archives are not static repositories of neutral facts, but dynamic sites where Black life is narrated, felt, and reassembled across time.⁶² Culinary texts do more than document what people ate. They illuminate how Black communities have used food to carry history, transmit care, and imagine ways of being that exceed dominant terms of recognition. This is why cookbooks and memoirs matter so much to my project: they preserve not just dishes or artifacts, but relationships, geographies, obligations, sensory worlds, and modes of survival that conventional archives often fail to register.

Doris Witt further expands the Black food archive by tracing how the racial politics of food circulate across multiple cultural and geographic sites. She shows that restricting the

⁶² Darden and Darden, *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine*; Tao Leigh Goffe, "Kitchen Marronage: A Genealogy of Jerk," *Funambulist*, August 27, 2020, <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/politics-of-food/kitchen-marronage-a-genealogy-of-jerk-tao-leigh-goffe>; Tipton-Martin, *The Jemima Code*; Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*; Rafia Zafar, *Recipes for Respect: African American Meals and Meaning*, Southern Foodways Alliance Studies in Culture, People, and Place (The University of Georgia Press, 2019). These works collectively demonstrate how Black food writing functions as archive, memoir, historiography, and embodied theory. The Dardens recover African American culinary history through recipes, family memory, and regional food traditions; Tipton-Martin reads cookbooks as evidence of Black women's intellectual and culinary labor; Twitty uses food memoir and genealogy to trace the afterlives of slavery, migration, and ancestry; Goffe theorizes food as a site of sensory memory, diaspora, and racial formation; and Zafar examines recipes and culinary texts as archival forms through which Black women produced knowledge, authority, and self-representation.

archive to a narrow set of texts would obscure the ways racialized subjectivities are formed across kitchens, commercial stages, public screens, and literary worlds.⁶³ Read alongside Williams-Forson, Witt's work underscores that food is never just about consumption. It is bound up with the body, the home, the marketplace, and the nation. Tao Leigh Goffe extends this spatial understanding in a different register by linking the spicy seasoning jerk and kitchen marronage to afro-Jamaican struggles for freedom. Through gastropoetics, a method that treats recipes as evidence of how "humans have cultivated and been cultivated by their environment"⁶⁴, Goffe traces the genealogy of jerk to Maroon resistance against European colonization. The need to preserve food for long periods while evading capture positioned jerk as a spatial and temporal practice shaped by flight, concealment, and survival, rendering it the taste of Black fugitivity. Jerk, she argues, depends on a decolonial sense of time characterized by patience, lying in wait, and remaining undetected, revealing how food practices encode geographic knowledge about movement, refuge, and endurance.⁶⁵ By combining poetry and culinary analysis, Goffe produces an alternative archive in which food operates as a negotiation between substance and art, positioning jerk as more than a seasoning and instead as a philosophy of endurance and a way of Black being.⁶⁶ Like Goffe, I treat ingredients, tools, and cooking practices as geographic texts that reveal how Black queer cooks navigate displacement, surveillance, and belonging. Her work helps me clarify that food is not only an archive but a geography, not only memory but method.

Because these forms of worldmaking often unfold outside dominant archival and epistemological frameworks, they demand methods attuned to what is obscured, fragmented, or

⁶³ Witt, *Black Hunger*.

⁶⁴ "Kitchen Marronage: A Genealogy of Jerk," 18.

⁶⁵ Goffe, "Kitchen Marronage: A Genealogy of Jerk."

⁶⁶ Goffe, "Kitchen Marronage: A Genealogy of Jerk," 31.

rendered illegible. Traditional academic methods frequently privilege textual coherence, institutional validation, and formal documentation, which means they often overlook the very objects and practices that have been central to Black and queer survival. Not every cookbook, appliance, or food memoir explicitly narrates the colonial histories embedded in food. Yet, as Black feminist and food studies scholars show, many African American culinary texts do precisely this work by encoding histories of displacement, care, resistance, and relation within ordinary acts of cooking and eating. In this sense, cookbooks and culinary tools operate as oppositional archives that refuse dominant epistemologies that separate knowledge from embodiment, labor, and affect. They lay the groundwork for my concept of quare food refusal by showing how the ordinary can become a site of insurgent meaning and how nourishment can become a practice of preserving life on terms that do not depend on institutional legibility or traditional spatial logics.

Queer Food Studies and Refusal: Queering Food, Queering Method

Over the last decade there has been a rise in discussions on queerness and food in and out of academia ⁶⁷. The term “queer” has been and continues to be reappropriated and redefined

⁶⁷For key examples of this emerging queer food discourse, see John Birdsall, *What Is Queer Food?*; Esther Tseng, “What Is Queer Food?,” *Eater*; Kim Q. Hall, “Toward a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food,” *philoSOPHIA* 4, no. 2 (2014): 177–96, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phi.2014.a565882>; Shayda Kafai, “Imagining Queer, Fat Food Futures,” *Fat Studies* 9, no. 3 (2020): 201–3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2019.1641668>; Gabrielle Lenart, “Adapting Queer Foodways”; and Anil Pradhan, “Too Gay an Oreol!” Hall’s essay offers an early intervention, arguing that queer and disability studies had been largely overlooked in food studies even as food discourse remained saturated with assumptions about normativity, health, and embodiment. Tseng’s *Eater* essay marks the growing visibility of queer food as a public cultural question, while Pradhan traces how popular media, cookbooks, and digital food culture have made the queering of food an increasingly explicit site of sexual politics and cultural production. Lenart further shows how queer food discourse has expanded into community practice, mutual aid, virtual programming, and chosen-family infrastructures organized around food. Kafai’s essay imagines queer and fat food futures organized around pleasure, disability, refusal, and liberation rather than stigma or dietary normativity. Birdsall’s book signals the consolidation of these discussions into a major book-length intervention, framing queer food as central to modern queer identity and food culture rather than a marginal subtopic.

based on the social and cultural climate at specific moments in time.⁶⁸ Queer has been deployed as an umbrella political identity term to encompass the anti-normalcy of gender and sexual minorities outside cisgender and heteronormative populations. It is synonymous to words such as strange, weird, or peculiar, in attempts to describe social phenomena outside the status quo. Among LGBTQIA+ communities, queer is often used as a reclaimed term, but its acceptance is neither universal nor politically uncomplicated. Black queer scholars E. Patrick Johnson, Cleo Manago, and Cathy J. Cohen have shown that the term can obscure racial, cultural, and political differences, leading some to revise it, critique it, or prefer alternatives such as *quare* or *same-gender-loving*. The word queer is subjective, political, and its definition depends largely on the social context and temporality. White queer epistemologies usage of the term have misrepresented the experiences of queers of colors, engaging in single variant analyses that primarily focus on sexuality and gender, with little engagement with race and class.⁶⁹ In response to these limitations, this section distinguishes between queer food as identity, queer food as method, and queer food as refusal to clarify how my project intervenes in queer food studies by moving beyond representational inclusion toward a praxis-oriented approach that links theory to the lived, political work of queer communities.

Queering a discipline means aligning “academic theory with political praxis outside the academy.”⁷⁰ It means focusing on the works and writings of queer people to imagine new possibilities of intellectual creation. While exploring foodways in Chicana lesbian literature,

⁶⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, First issued in hardback, Routledge Classics (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015); Julia C. Ehrhardt, “Towards Queering Food Studies: Foodways, Heteronormativity, and Hungry Women in Chicana Lesbian Writing,” *Food and Foodways* 14, no. 2 (2006): 91–109, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07409710600691931>; E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, eds., *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Duke University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822387220>.

⁶⁹ Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother.”

⁷⁰ Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” 18.

Julia Ehrhardt echoed a similar description of a queer feminist politic while analyzing foodways in Chicana lesbian literature.⁷¹ She states “queering” a discipline is to problematize and challenge heteronormativity and heterosexuality as an institution. She analyzes poetry and essays written by lesbians on Chicana culinary roles to highlight the instability and contradictory nature of hegemonic constructions of gender that continue to dictate how we know what we know and what we know about food, gender, and identity. In the Chicana literature she analyzes the figure of the hungry lesbian acts as an object to challenge the underlying heteronormative cultural assumptions about food, suggesting the “culinary strategies available to straight female cooks who wish to ‘subvert feminine gender roles’ may not work for queer women.”⁷² In her conclusion Ehrhardt warned future scholars to be mindful of the limitations of employing superficial treatments of queer perspectives and its theoretical frameworks as “decorative garnishes that hide entrenched epistemologies.”⁷³ Despite this warning, she still encourages other disciplines to employ a queer methodology as a way to enrich the dominant theories surrounding food and foodways within their respective fields. *“Towards Queering Food Studies: Foodways, Heteronormativity, and Hungry Women in Chicana Lesbian Writing”* is especially useful because it demonstrates how queer methodology can be used not superficially, but as a rigorous analytic framework for reading food texts against dominant epistemologies and for recovering embodied, racialized, and sexualized histories that conventional food scholarship often overlooks. Michael Twitty’s work offers one example of what such a method can look like in practice.

⁷¹ “Towards Queering Food Studies.”

⁷² Ehrhardt, “Towards Queering Food Studies,” 106.

⁷³ Ehrhardt, “Towards Queering Food Studies,” 107.

Twitty's work refuses to be tethered to only one literary genre.⁷⁴ Twitty's research helps illustrate how a queer and interdisciplinary food methodology can challenge narrow academic standards by treating hybrid form, embodied memory, and historical storytelling as legitimate modes of knowledge production. To authentically encompass his interlocking identities of being black, fat, Jewish, gay, and Southern he has no choice but engage his writing from an intersectional interdisciplinary approach. Although *the Cooking Gene* is not "academic" in the traditional sense (nor does it claim to be), Twitty's point of view, research methods and interdisciplinary writing style undoubtedly "queers" the discipline of food writing. I deliberately reference it here as ongoing inspiration to remain committed to a queer project grounded in expanding what counts as theory, archive, and method by taking seriously oral history, memoir, embodiment, and interdisciplinary storytelling as legitimate forms of knowledge production within food studies and academic discourse.

Twitty describes food as a "medicine and a gateway to good fortune, and a mystical lubricant between the living and the dead."⁷⁵ While writing *the Cooking Gene*, Twitty's mother unexpectedly passed away. He openly mourns her loss in his writing, expressing his longing for the graveside picnics African Americans used in the South to honor the dead. In his quest to properly honor the life and legacy of his mama, he recognizes and has a newfound appreciation for how food acts as a vessel to express and celebrate the impact she had and continues to have on his life. "The genes that were passed down to me and to [my mama] live on in me as a connection to an ancient past. In that past, I began to create a space for safe healing."⁷⁶ The picnics and the food served there are an expression of grief, an act of care, and a longing for

⁷⁴ *The Cooking Gene*; Michael Twitty, *Koshersoul: The Faith and Food Journey of an African American Jew*, First edition (Amistad, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2022).

⁷⁵ *The Cooking Gene*, 365.

⁷⁶ Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*, 374.

connection that is no longer physically present. Food is the bridge that keeps his connection to his mother alive. Not just by engaging in traditional funeral foodways but preparing and cooking food in the ways she did. He shares his macaroni and cheese recipe, and he explicitly titles it, “Macaroni and Cheese the Way My Mother Made It” to demonstrate this recipe is how he remembers his mother and where he enters a space of healing the pain from this significant loss.

The Cooking Gene is a 400-page response to the question, “how has my destiny been shaped by the history of Southern food?.”⁷⁷ Along this journey, he disrupts how and what the culinary world considers when they think of Southern food and foodways, but he also comes to appreciate the unique ways food has been a space of healing for himself and his family. He describes himself “as outside the mainstream” and “four time blessed large of body, gay, African American and Jewish” man. Various explorations of Twitty’s own family lineage reveal the limitations of oppressive narratives that paint the South as a monolith and erase the contributions of Black and African folks. For individuals who cannot ignore the multiplicity of their social subjectivities, food is “a way into an alternative history and a new vision of who we can become.”⁷⁸ A history that encompasses the unique ways food has been a space of healing, creativity, and resistance. Or how it’s been a place of purpose for him, and other Black folks like him. A space where time is no longer linear and the present, past, and future reunite to craft dishes that are not only delicious but bring forth the stories we have historically ignored. His work establishes Black queer food as a site of identity, visibility, and cultural expression, it stops short of interrogating how food practices also function as political strategies of withdrawal and refusal.

⁷⁷ Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*, 404.

⁷⁸ Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*, 405.

Disability studies scholar, Kim Q. Hall ⁷⁹, has situated her work on food at the intersections of feminist, disability, and queer theories. In her article, "Towards a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food" she starts with a scene from the documentary *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back* where Harlan Hahn, a psychology professor and disability rights activist, expresses that fast food is the food of disability culture, thereby introducing a narrative of fast-food organized around access and survival rather than the moralizing logics that often structure geographies of domination." Restaurants, she critiques, are "an exercise in various forms of tiresome hoop-jumping for many disabled people" so fast food presents a way to resist and avoid those obstacles.⁸⁰ Most fast-food narratives within dominant U.S. food discourse, including documentaries and books such as *Super Size Me*, *Fast Food Nation*, and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, describe it as "making us fat, bringing about early deaths, giving us food poisoning, destroying rainforests and nonhuman species, exploiting poor people, and contributing to the needless suffering of nonhuman animals."⁸¹ In other words, Hall is referring to familiar public health, environmental, and ethical critiques that cast fast-food as a symbol of bodily decline, industrial harm, labor exploitation, and ecological destruction but she argues that a disability framework would perhaps "bring something else to the table?"

A queer crip feminist politic of food advocates for more nutritious food for disabled people but more so it remains "critically attuned" to how bodies, identities, and relationships are conceptualized. These conceptions inform where alternative food movements distinguish between "good" and "bad" foods. She then uses this framework to offer critiques of the metaphysics of purity and alimentary ableism that structure food discourse, especially in relation

⁷⁹ "Toward a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food," *philoSOPHIA* 4, no. 2 (2014): 177–96, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phi.2014.a565882>.

⁸⁰ Hall, "Toward a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food," 177.

⁸¹ Hall, "Toward a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food," 177.

to food discourses around purity, food as medicine, and food security. Hall contends that conceptions of “good food” must see past its alimentary value, there must be an excess, she describes this excess as “flourishing.” Good food must enable flourishing, a type of flourishing where our connections to, with, and through others is prioritized over self-reliance.⁸² She states this becomes a reality by methodically problematizing the complexities of our identities in relation to humans and nonhuman others. She continues to say that a commitment to food justice engaging in queer crip feminist politic of food requires confronting the underlying assumptions that prevent “flourishing” within the lives and community of those who exist outside the criteria of heteronormativity. It requires understanding that the relationship between goodness, desirability, and food choices are connected to our social positions, how we negotiate these positions within our communities, and how our interactions with our diets can create and prevent new imaginaries.

Shayda Kafai, a fat studies scholar in California reclaims food as “more than a compulsory, obligatory act, more than chewing and swallowing and portioning.”⁸³ In “Imagining Queer, Fat Food Futures,” she shares her personal struggles with an eating disorder and uses queer theorizing to expose how fatphobia, diet culture, and hegemonic definitions of healthy bodies intertwine to frame food as a source of stigma and shame. Queering food means creating spaces where fat queer bodies can thrive, where we are actively decoding normative definitions of health, redefining the word fat, recognizing that we must support our body with the same devotion that our body supports us, and reintroducing ourselves to food from a place of empowerment. Phrases such as “clean eating” and “counting calories” dissipate and a more

⁸² “Toward a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food.”

⁸³ Shayda Kafai, “Imagining Queer, Fat Food Futures,” *Fat Studies* 9, no. 3 (2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2019.1641668>.

decolonial “body loving” language can come into fruition. In Kafai’s queer food future, she rejects the diet industrial complex and situates food as “magic, something that heals, that is playful, and that is delicious.”⁸⁴ In the same vein as Ehrhart and Hall, her work insists queering food and foodways must encapsulate all aspects of food making; the people, the space, the language, and the power dynamics operating within those categories. Together, they treat food not merely as an object of analysis, but as an embodied political terrain through which queer life is narrated, archived, and theorized.

Drawing on this body of scholarship, I use my dissertation to develop quare food refusal as a political and geographic practice rather than an identity or a method. I define quare food refusal as an active reorientation of food toward care, pleasure, and survival, one that deliberately resists dominant frameworks of inclusion, visibility, and institutional recognition. Refusal in this sense is not about absence, withdrawal, or invisibility, but about redirecting how food is produced, shared, and experienced in ways that sustain Black queer life. For decades, Feminist Studies and Queer Studies have argued that prevailing understandings of food reduce it to nutrition or consumption, discounting the social, affective, and relational dimensions through which food organizes power and inequality. Building on these interventions, this dissertation contends that addressing food justice in Seattle requires more than designating a dining space as queer through symbolic gestures such as rainbow flags, police badges, or claims of being gay friendly. To cultivate safety and pleasure for Black queer communities, dining spaces must be willing to disrupt the sociocultural and capitalist logics that structure public eating, including norms of respectability, surveillance, and profit. Black Queer Food Geographies therefore exceed the task of locating spaces populated by Black and queer bodies; they open a conceptual terrain

⁸⁴ “Imagining Queer, Fat Food Futures,” 2.

in which food's metaphorical, theoretical, and experiential dimensions actively shape landscapes, social relations, and the ways communities imagine and build livable worlds.

Methods

My journey to this project is largely shaped by my life and community outside of academia. Every time I have allowed myself to be vulnerable about the ways this influences my academic scholarship I have seen my ability to research and write academically enhance.⁸⁵ I relocated to Seattle to pursue my doctorate. Outside of that, I knew very little about the city and anyone in it. As I spent the first years of the program diving into the diversity of topics in which I potentially could write my dissertation, I was also familiarizing myself with the different facets of the city in which I wanted to invest my time and energy. As I was deciding if I wanted food to be my main subject of study, I was also contending with the shifts in my food options and changes in my diet as I adjusted to a new foodscape in the Pacific Northwest. This project and its methods have materialized alongside the development of my community and passion for food. Many of the sites, many of this study's participants, many of the data collection methods I grapple with are spaces where I loved, where I laughed, where I cried, where I grieved. Many of the project's insights have been as equally nourishing for my doctorate research as it has been for my emotional and social well-being.

So before turning to the project's broader mixed-methods design, I situate auto-theory and autoethnography as foundational to this study's methodological and epistemological commitments. This is an immensely vulnerable project that emerged from my own lived relationship to food, Black queer community, and place; that vulnerability is not incidental to the

⁸⁵ Keila D. Taylor, "Rejecting Objectivity: Reflections of a Black Feminist Researcher Interviewing Black Women," *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 33, no. 3 (2018): 721–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2018.1499505>.

research, but central to a Black queer food methodology. Put differently, my personal investments and the personal narratives that appear throughout this project are not biases that need to be set aside. Rather, they reflect what Krys Osei describes as “the deliberate act of writing ourselves, our histories, and the world through our eyes,” a practice that “pushes against the traditions of social science and critical academic enquiry” and makes clear why lived experience belongs within, rather than outside, the analytic frame.⁸⁶ They are part of the conditions through which this research became imaginable. As I have written elsewhere, Black feminist research requires “contextualizing our own subjective experiences and assessing how we can utilize them to connect with our participants, not hiding them or pretending they are not there.”⁸⁷ This resonates with Bettina Judd’s insistence that feeling is not merely an emotional response but a form of embodied knowledge produced through Black women’s creative and intellectual practice; rather than treating interiority as something opposed to theory, Judd shows how sensation, vulnerability, and lived experience become sites of knowledge-making in their own right.⁸⁸ Her work clarifies why my own food memories and embodied negotiations in Seattle belong within the analytic frame: they are not simply personal reflections, but sites where broader structures of race, sexuality, and power are lived and felt. Auto-theory and autoethnography therefore allow me to trace how food mediates belonging, survival, pleasure, and relation in ways that make those larger social worlds newly legible. The personal is not offered here as confession for its own sake, but as a critical site of knowledge production.

⁸⁶ “Fashioning My Garden of Solace: A Black Feminist Autoethnography,” *Fashion Theory* 23, no. 6 (2019): 733–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2019.1657272>.

⁸⁷ By Keila D. Taylor, “Rejecting Objectivity: Reflections of a Black Feminist Researcher Interviewing Black Women,” *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 33, no. 3 (2018): 721–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2018.1499505>.

⁸⁸ *Feelin*.

My approach draws on Black feminist and Black food studies scholars who understand embodied experience as a legitimate site of knowledge production. Lorde's theorization of feeling as knowledge and Johnson's insistence that vernacular, racialized, and embodied life worlds produce theory ground my use of personal narrative as critical method. Reese's self-reflexive methodology in *Black Food Geographies* also grounds this decision by showing how a researcher's own vulnerability and implication in the field can deepen analysis.⁸⁹ Williams-Forsen's work is especially useful here because it demonstrates how intimate food experiences can serve as evidence for understanding broader formations of race, gender, migration, and power.⁹⁰ Her Black feminist use of autoethnographic inquiry treats her own intimate and embodied experiences with food as part of the analytic field rather than as separate from it. In her article "Other Women Cooked for My Husband," she draws on her marriage, her husband's food preferences, and her own participation in cooking, shopping, and kinship negotiations to examine how food mediates gender, cultural identity, and belonging within an African American/Ghanaian household.⁹¹ Williams-Forsen uses her own encounters with disagreement, learning, and emotional tension around food to show how everyday culinary life can reveal how taste, cooking labor, and decisions about what counts as "proper" food become sites where race, migration, gender roles, and household authority are negotiated. Following these scholars, I treat my own experiences with food, place, and Black queer community in Seattle as part of the project's analytic field rather than as separate from it. My encounters with the city's foodscape,

⁸⁹ *Black Food Geographies*.

⁹⁰ "Other Women Cooked for My Husband: Negotiating Gender, Food, and Identities in an African American/Ghanaian Household," *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 2 (2010): 435–61, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27919110>; "I Haven't Eaten If I Don't Have My Soup and Fufu': Cultural Preservation through Food and Foodways among Ghanaian Migrants in the United States," *Africa Today* 61, no. 1 (2014): 69, <https://doi.org/10.2979/africatoday.61.1.69>.

⁹¹ Williams-Forsen, "Other Women Cooked for My Husband: Negotiating Gender, Food, and Identities in an African American/Ghanaian Household."

from where I have felt welcomed, to where I have felt hypervigilant, to the ways I have used cooking and eating to make home, are not supplemental to the research. They are one way this dissertation comes to understand how Black queer food geographies are lived, sensed, and negotiated. Auto-theory and autoethnography therefore help me name the reciprocal relationship between my own embodied food practices and the broader social, spatial, and affective worlds this project examines.

Locating and identifying something as esoteric as Black queer food geographies required a usage of mixed qualitative methods. A mixed methods approach highlights the diverse ways black queer food and foodways address a range of food inequities and can offer solutions that extend to many disenfranchised communities, not just ones impacted by racial, gendered, and sexual politics. I use four forms of data collection: autoethnography, archival research, participant observation, and semi structured interviews. Using self-ethnography, I trace the black queer food geographies in my own life particularly in relationship to my mother as an adult and as a child, focusing particularly on how food has been a powerful tool of self-actualization for her as a mother, a wife, an artist, and an entrepreneur. Archival research allowed me to supplement my personal food stories with other black queer communities using food to express and define themselves. Archives that I may not have access to or be aware of otherwise. I did not look at archives found in universities or libraries. Instead, I examined platform-based archives on Instagram, where Black queer users informally curate food memories, aesthetics, and community knowledge through hashtags, images, captions, and patterns of digital circulation.

There is an increasing number of Black foodies who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community sharing their lives on social media and using it as a form of advocacy and activism.⁹²

⁹² Gabrielle Lenart, "Adapting Queer Foodways"; Emily J. H. Contois and Zenia Kish, eds., *Food Instagram: Identity, Influence, and Negotiation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2022). Lenart's work

I specifically locate the social media platform Instagram as a digital food geography and explore how Black queer people users mobilize virtual visibility to share their food lives, empower connection, and have conversations that give rise to different strategies of resistance to food inequities.

The usage of semi-structured interviews and participant observation often led Ashante Reese to places she originally had no intention of going.⁹³ When interviewing her participants, she allowed them the freedom to discuss their lives as they felt comfortable. This resulted in a project “that is deeply engaged with food inequities produced by anti-Black racism but also concerned with how and where Black people create food geographies within and in spite of it.”⁹⁴ This project takes cues from Reese’s commitment to following Black life beyond food access. Semi-structured interviews produce rich narrative data, allow my participants to have agency in addressing food issues that are important to them, and provide me with a map of the intimate foodways they have generated to care for themselves and their community. I ask them questions about their food origin story, their creative culinary process, what food equity looks like to them, and how their race, gender, and sexuality intersect in their current food world.

Due to the nature of my research topic, purposive and snowball sampling has been my best approach to finding individuals who speak to Black queer foodways. In 2022, I attended a Black Food Summit in San Francisco where I was able to connect with people who were thinking of Black food in the same vein as my project. The month before the Summit, I spent a

helps situate queer foodways as practices of community building, mutual aid, and chosen-family care, while Contois and Kish demonstrate how Instagram has become a key site where food creators construct identity, cultivate publics, and negotiate influence. These works contextualize Black LGBTQ+ foodies’ digital practices as forms of visibility, cultural production, and political engagement rather than merely lifestyle content.

⁹³ Reese, *Black Food Geographies*.

⁹⁴ Ashanté M. Reese, “Refusal as Care,” *Anthropology News* 60, no. 3 (2019): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1111/AN.1181>.

week on a farm just outside Spokane, WA. There I tended to the land, connected with Black chefs and other chefs of color from Seattle, and learned more about the labor of cooking and eating with the seasons. Many of these connections have become my friends. Many of these connections were enthusiastic to support me in my research. I interviewed five people. Their careers varied from restaurant owner to private chef, artist, therapist, LGBTQ+ rights activist, culinary arts instructor but they all shared the commonality of food being central to their careers and/or creative practice. The only one who did not identify as a foodie was the restaurant owner. The youngest participant was 29 years old and the oldest was 43 years old. If they didn't grow up in Seattle, they lived in the city for at least 7 years or more. Their sexual orientation also varied from pansexual to demisexual to bisexual but all of them identified as queer. One identified as gender non-conforming, two participants identified as non-binary, and the remaining identified as cis women.

Participant observation at an urban farm named *the Black Farmers Collective* and time spent at an annual healing retreat known as *Art Trip* supplement the data I discover during interviews. The interview location at the participants' home or restaurant also provided deeper insight into what was shared. It was important to me to bear witness to food activism as opposed to only receiving data orally. Throughout this data collection process, interview transcripts, archival data, and field notes provide emergent themes of affective, embodied, and sensory refusal, which collectively trace and make legible the ways racial and queer food politics play out in the present to form queer food refusals. This mixed qualitative approach enables me to study Black queer food geographies on their own terms, attending to the affective, sensory, spatial, and political dimensions of food that conventional methods often miss. Across autoethnography, digital archival research, semi-structured interviews, and participant

observation, I center the practices through which Black queer people in Seattle narrate their food lives, cultivate community, and negotiate anti-Black, heteronormative, and capitalist food systems. In doing so, the methods themselves become part of the project's intervention: they refuse narrow definitions of evidence and instead prioritize the lived, embodied, and vernacular forms of knowledge through which quare food refusals become legible.

Chapter 2: Policy, Place and Food in Seattle

Eating the Progressive City

In April 2024, *Food & Wine* magazine declared Seattle one of the best cities in the United States for food and drinks. The city was praised for its diverse options, fresh ingredients, and unique blend of legacy and innovation.⁹⁵ “Try eating your way through Seattle without falling in love — I dare you,” the writer challenged, adding that it is Seattle’s “diverse population” that makes it the ultimate food destination.⁹⁶ When I moved from San Antonio to Washington eight years ago, quotes like these guided my expectations. I imagined a dreamlike culinary atmosphere where I would encounter food adventures unlike anything I had ever experienced. And in many ways, Seattle delivered: my palate expanded, my food vocabulary grew, and I stretched my understanding of what it means to be a “foodie.” Yet living here has also complicated my relationship with food. Behind the city’s picture-perfect imagery of multicultural dining lies a reality shaped by neoliberal governance, symbolic gestures of inclusion, and uneven food access. These contradictions push me to ask: what does food justice in Seattle really look like? And who is excluded from this vision? These questions lingered in my mind as I explored restaurants and public food spaces across the city. They became even more pressing when I began an internship with Public Health Seattle & King County (PHSKC). For a year, I worked as a graduate intern in the Assessment, Policy Development, and Evaluation (APDE) Unit, supporting the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) program. HEAL is a King County Public Health program committed to “making it easier for children and adults to make

⁹⁵ Modlin, “Bakeries, Bars, and Seafood Make Seattle One of the Best US Cities for Food and Drink.”

⁹⁶ Modlin, “Bakeries, Bars, and Seafood Make Seattle One of the Best US Cities for Food and Drink.”

healthy choices in their daily lives.”⁹⁷ HEAL partners with early learning, communities, schools, employers, faith-based settings, and healthcare providers throughout Seattle to increase health equity in their designated priority areas, one of which includes access to healthy foods. Access to healthy foods is defined as “developing healthy food environments where people can easily access affordable, quality, culturally appropriate healthy food and beverages.”⁹⁸ When working with HEAL, I saw firsthand how the city’s food access initiatives were framed, measured, and implemented. I also saw where their limits came sharply into view. By situating Black queer food within Seattle’s uneven food landscape, this chapter establishes the geographic and policy context for the chapters that follow, which move more intimately into the kitchens, digital spaces, gatherings, and everyday practices where Black queer people create nourishment beyond the city’s official visions of food justice.

These experiences led me to ask a broader question: Why Seattle? What about the city’s unique history and geography make it an ideal site to study queer food refusals? This chapter takes up that question, outlining my rationale for situating the project in Seattle and demonstrating why the city is a critical location for exploring Black queer food geographies. I turn to public policy because policy is one of the primary ways the city defines food justice, identifies whose needs matter, and decides what kinds of interventions count as solutions. Public policy produces the categories, measurements, and spatial assumptions through which food insecurity becomes legible in the first place. I juxtapose its reputation as a food lover’s haven with the realities of pervasive food insecurity, drawing on an autoethnographic account of my

⁹⁷ Washington State Department of Health, “Healthy Eating Active Living Program,” accessed February 11, 2026, <https://doh.wa.gov/about-us/executive-offices/prevention-safety-and-health/prevention-and-community-health/office-healthy-and-safe-communities/community-based-prevention/healthy-eating-active-living-program>.

⁹⁸ Washington State Department of Health, “Healthy Eating Active Living Program.”

internship at Public Health Seattle and King County (PHSKC). While the organization recognizes racial and spatial politics in shaping food access, its interventions remain tied to dominant geographic frameworks that treat space as neutral, households as stable and heteronormative, public institutions as benevolent, and food access as a problem of proximity, distribution, and individual health behavior. Its approach remains tethered to traditional heteromasculinist geographies of domination: state-centered, policy-driven models that privilege order, measurement, visibility, and regulation over the informal, intimate, and relational practices through which Black queer communities create nourishment and safety. To put it plainly, HEAL's discussion of healthy food emphasizes calories and nutrition over broader social and affective concerns. Through a Black feminist geographic framework, I analyze the history of Black and LGBTQ+ people and their place making strategies since the founding of Seattle in 1851. Embedded within these histories are spatialized food inequities shaped by segregation, displacement, and gentrification. As a result, food insecurity disproportionately affects lower-income communities and communities of color. LGBTQ+ communities are also impacted, but not evenly; race, class, gender identity, housing status, and employment all shape who is most vulnerable to food insecurity.⁹⁹

I argue that for HEAL to meaningfully advance food equity, it must reinscribe Black queer “ways of being, knowing, and doing as essential to understanding place making, an often neglected aspect of what it means not only to acquire food but also to experience one’s community in the process.”¹⁰⁰ This begins with confronting how the city’s urban development and food geographies have never been neutral but have actively produced and reproduced

⁹⁹ Communities Count, “Food Insecurity/Hardship,” 2019, <https://www.communitiescount.org/food-insecurity>.

¹⁰⁰ Reese, *Black Food Geographies*, 8.

racism, sexism, and queerphobia. It also requires resisting the urge to identify the “where” of Blackness in positivist terms. Reducing food insecurity to facts and nutrition reinforces the assumption that Black LGBTQ+ communities do not care about nutrition and more importantly, that they lack meaningful investment in creating their own strategies toward self-reliance.¹⁰¹ Seattle’s histories of relegating these groups “elsewhere, on the margin, the underside, outside the normal”¹⁰², have produced a landscape where Black queer life has had to invent alternative spatial and culinary practices to survive and thrive. In this context, queer food refusals emerge as situated responses to a city structured by exclusion, making Seattle a generative site for tracing how refusal becomes a strategy of place making, care, and world building.

When Food Equity Becomes Policy

Working within PHSKC, these geographic tensions became most visible when I began spending most of my time interning with HEAL. I gained clarity on how food equity gets operationalized and how Black queer life becomes flattened to fit into data categories when translated into policy language. The Assessment, Policy Development, and Evaluation (APDE) unit’s primary work is assessment and evaluation of population-based data and intervention, as well as integrating qualitative analysis. HEAL is a multidisciplinary group of epidemiologists and social research scientists. They collaborate with communities in Seattle & King County divisions with the goal of providing leadership and technical assistance for population-level health assessment, data-driven program planning and evaluation, and develop innovative interventions to improve the health of King County residents. Interns are paired with a lead evaluator to collaboratively design and implement qualitative data collection methods. Together,

¹⁰¹ Binnie and Klesse, “Food Practices, Queer Social Reproduction and the Geographies of LGBTQ+ Activism”; Reese, *Black Food Geographies*; Ramírez, “The Elusive Inclusive”; Vaughan-Wynn and Jung, “Digital Food Apartheid.”

¹⁰² Hawthorne, “Black Matters Are Spatial Matters.”

we gather data on PHSKC's workforce and foundational services to ensure they are meeting their goals. During my time there I was able to assist in collecting evaluation data on HEAL.

The city's food equity framework is a policy, system and environmental approach (PSE) designed to improve health equity throughout the city by creating more supportive environments that make healthy choices easier. The goal is to increase access to healthy foods by addressing key factors including availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability, and accommodation that influence whether individuals and communities can easily find, afford, and choose healthy foods that meet their needs wherever they are. This PSE framework recognizes that the environments in which people live, work, and play influences individuals' choices and behavior. They use policy to implement guidelines that relate directly to healthy food access such as Executive Order 13-06. This was an order issued in 2013 by Governor Jay Inslee requiring state agencies to offer healthier food and drink options in their vending machines, cafeterias, and social events for their employees which is still in effect. They utilize a system approach to address food insecurities on a systemic organizational level. This includes partnering with community-based organizations like the Harriet Tubman Center for Health & Freedom or the Coalition of Immigrants, Refugees and Communities of Color (CIRCC) to brainstorm new ways to connect consumers to food producers. Lastly, they adopt an environmental framework that intervenes in the physical and social conditions shaping food access. Through partnerships with grocery stores and farmers' markets, this approach is enacted through initiatives such as facilitating the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Match program, which expands low-income families' access to fresh produce. HEAL has found some success with many of these programs in reaching their city wide health equity goals. In 2019, they successfully expanded Washington's Fruit and Vegetable Incentive Program to allow families

who received food stamps to use them at farmer's markets.

When I joined their meetings, they were in the early stages of brainstorming methods to deepen their work by reviewing various food access articles across different disciplines, countries, and organizations. I worked ten to fifteen hours a week under Dr. Yui Hashimoto, a social research scientist and program evaluator. Our work together was funded by PHIG, a five year CDC Public Health Infrastructure Grant, created to strengthen local public health systems, enhance workforce development, and improve community partnerships. Yui's job was to collect and analyze data about if and how the grant was successfully supporting the implementation of different public health programs. I worked alongside her, creating surveys, analyzing the responses, and presenting the findings to PHIG partners. I developed a website for PHIG as an information hub that would make it easier for partners and community members to access resources, program updates, and evaluation findings in one centralized space. One of the programs we were evaluating was HEAL. All of the attendees had expertise in a range of food topics, some related directly to food access in Public Health and others specialized in topics indirectly related such as homelessness or racial equity and policy. Each of us carried a unique perspective on the challenges and possibilities of addressing food access across different institutional, community, and policy contexts. Once it was discovered my research related to food insecurity in Black and LGBTQ+ communities, the manager of HEAL, Elizabeth Kimball, asked me to share my insight at one of their monthly meetings. For 15 minutes, I discussed how Black queer communities navigate food access through informal networks, cultural food practices, and acts of refusal that challenge dominant food systems.

After presenting, I began attending their meetings more regularly. These meetings took place online and sometimes in person. In my first meeting I was directed to take notes for Yui

while she presented feedback from community leaders about working with HEAL. She shared what was working, what could be improved, and what they wanted more of. Most of the feedback revolved around clarity on how to best utilize the resources HEAL offered. In another meeting we brainstormed in groups what a just food system could look like in Seattle. I remember a tense debate about the benefits of a nationwide food system versus a more localized community governed food system. Both people made valid points about the pros and cons of each and I left feeling even more unsure about which approach was the best way to address unequal access. However, I also felt more aware of how complicated the issue of food disparities were. There would be no neat answers here. In another in-person meeting, I participated in an exercise where we created 3D landscapes of imaginary Seattle cities. In this model city where every citizen had access to nutritional healthy foods via water, grocery stores, farmer's markets, and even community gardens. One group's vision included a Costco while other landscapes showcased fishing in Lake Washington and picking blackberries in Seward Park.

My final meeting with them included members of Public Health's Health Equity and Anti-Racism Community Advisory Group (HEARCAG). HEARCAG had established a Policy Committee to address key priority areas, including food access. HEAL members wanted to build a stronger relationship with them. We were split into different breakout rooms on Zoom to share our thoughts on an article titled, "Native and Indigenous Foods Listening Session Report." We were asked, "what can we learn about food accessibility in King County and Seattle from this listening session?" The listening session was led by the Seattle Urban Native Community and the *sləpələbəx*^w (Rising Tides) Indigenous Planning Group. We used the session as a guide to theorize about future food policies that could support food sovereignty in the local area. It discussed how Native and Indigenous communities could not be separated from land, culture,

and self-determination, emphasizing that food is not simply a resource but a cultural practice tied to healing, identity, and relationships to place. The report critiqued settler-colonial food systems and policy frameworks, calling instead for meaningful investment in Native-led initiatives and the dismantling of structural barriers that restrict access to land, waterways, and culturally relevant foods. In the breakout room, my group reflected on how the report reframed food access as inseparable from Land Back, reciprocity, and cultural continuity, while also raising difficult questions about what justice-centered food policy can realistically look like within existing settler systems. Land Back is exactly what it sounds like; a movement that seeks to place Indigenous land back in Indigenous hands. This means Native-led efforts to reconnect with land and waterways to cultivate and harvest food and plant medicines, revitalize cultural traditions and languages, and lead conservation and restoration projects

When our time in the breakout rooms concluded each group was asked to share what they talked about, with one person summarizing the group's thoughts. Our insights varied just as much as our backgrounds did but collectively, we all couldn't help but feel the tension between the report's moral clarity and the perceived challenges of implementation, particularly around land use, labor structures, and whose knowledge is recognized as legitimate in shaping food policy. Within my group, we named the tension between the daunting question of what Land Back could realistically look like within Washington State and the ongoing devaluation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in favor of academic expertise. How do we ensure that land use truly benefits the communities it is meant to serve? And what does that responsibility mean for U.S. settlers? Questions like these weighed heavily on our minds as we confronted the depth of our own commitment to food justice. I volunteered to be the person selected to summarize our group's main thoughts. As I shared, Elizabeth and a few other members of HEAL

who were familiar with my dissertation research were curious about how I would apply a Black queer food framework to the listening session report. Initially, I felt put on the spot and unsure of what I could contribute that had not already been alluded to or explicitly stated, but I leaned into a framework of care I had been wrestling with since the meeting began. First, I explained that much like the Indigenous-led frameworks discussed in the listening session, Black queer food is a concept that centers lived experience and community knowledge to reveal food access as a site of identity, survival, and resistance rather than simply a matter of availability. From there, I pointed to an undercurrent of love woven throughout the listening session report. While the Seattle Urban Native Community and the sləp̓iləbəx^w (Rising Tides) Indigenous Planning Group do not explicitly name love as a guiding framework for their activism, it is nonetheless present. There is a clear love of self, love of their people, love of the land, and love of food shaping their articulation of an equitable, sustainable, and resilient local food system. I then posed the question to the group: What would it look like for love to be made explicit in food policy and practice? What if love, as a theory of the flesh ¹⁰³ or as an embodied epistemology, led the way in food access? Black queer food geographies sit squarely within this line of questioning, insisting that love, intimacy, and emotional vulnerability are already at work in how marginalized communities feed themselves and each other.

I share my experience as an Intern in this chapter to highlight how Seattle has responded to the ongoing systemic issue of food insecurity. Here, autoethnography provides necessary insight into what it looks like when a public health institution is trying to “fix” food access. PHSKC is a site where neoliberal food equity frameworks are reproduced. It exposes what gets counted as food justice and more importantly, what does not. I spent a year in community with

¹⁰³ Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother.”

individuals who were just as, if not more, committed to understanding and solving food justice as I was. It feels important to acknowledge the work they've done to institutionalize food equity and the ongoing efforts to improve food access across all racial demographics. My time there revealed a lot to me and deepened my understanding of how change happens on a local level. Prior to being hired, I hoped I'd gain clarity on the strategies the department of Public Health deployed to address food insecurities and the small steps King County employed to meet their goals of advancing their vision of "health, well-being and racial equity every day for everyone."¹⁰⁴ As an academic, I spend a significant amount of time analyzing structural inequalities and activism, but as an intern I witnessed how these efforts operate on the front lines. The plethora of opinions about the best way forward, the conflict when these solutions faced each other, and the humility of shifting when new information contradicted what you thought you understood revealed change as an ongoing, relational process shaped as much by listening and accountability as by policy itself. I was able to observe and contribute to the day-to-day actions that King County workers carried out to support Seattle's commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The process of choosing the right website to survey community members, finding a meeting time that would draw enough participants to make it worthwhile, and securing a supervisor's approval before sending an email, these steps mattered, too. In the fight for city-wide food equity, the time and labor required to complete these small administrative tasks were just as significant. Drafting policy language or facilitating public meetings formed the quiet infrastructure that made community engagement and institutional change possible. I quickly realized, justice work is carried out in the persistent, usually invisible labor that sustains

¹⁰⁴ Public Health — Seattle & King County, "2024–2029 Strategic Plan," Public Health — Seattle & King County, 2024, <https://cdn.kingcounty.gov/-/media/king-county/depts/dph/documents/about-public-health/phskc-2024-2029-strategic-plan.pdf?rev=463e95247ad94334915f0e725f130029&hash=21C47CBBA808925BA28F651CEB602ED9>.

collective efforts over time. Achieving these public health goals was a slow bureaucratic process and even when progress was being made, the internship confirmed that it would take a while for said progress to be visible.

The intersection of race and place are important components to HEAL's approach to food equity. So much so that it has its own section on the Washington State Department of Health. "Building healthy communities starts with looking at both race and place in everything we do.", the website reads.¹⁰⁵ On the webpage it acknowledges that where we live impacts so many facets of our lives; our education, our diet, our career, even the air we breathe. It goes on to discuss how race is an important determinant in how residents choose the neighborhoods they reside in. How practices such as redlining force people of color into certain places and how these places received inadequate resources because of who lives there. HEAL understands geographic inequities matter and should be at the forefront of improving food insecurity. However, so many of their policies and efforts rely on traditional geographic arrangements that organize the world from "a stable (white, patriarchal, Eurocentric, heterosexual, classed) vantage point."¹⁰⁶ So much so that HEAL's approach to thinking about food insecurity at the intersections of race, food, and place still over-rely on nutrition and calories.

HEAL uses the language of Black Geographies with sentences like "Sustainable communities must address both race and place, openly and authentically." on their website. Their PSE approach acknowledges the history of redlining and other discriminatory policies that have bred toxic community conditions. It acknowledges how the physical environment shapes food access and that the social environment influences food choices as well. However, as Vaughan-

¹⁰⁵ Washington State Department of Health, "Race and Place," accessed July 17, 2025, <https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/health-equity/race-and-place>.

¹⁰⁶ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xiii.

Wynn and Jung argue through the framework of digital food apartheid, food access interventions often operate within spatial logics that are already shaped by racial capitalism, treating uneven geographies as technical problems to be solved rather than as historically produced relations of power¹⁰⁷. The programs deemed successful treat space as a neutral backdrop, rather than a production of racial capitalism. HEAL's solutions like the local SNAP Match program, Executive Order 13-06, and the Breastfeeding Friendly Washington program are biocentric and focus on distribution (i.e. more healthy food in underserved areas) as opposed to dismantling the spatial logics that cast Blackness and queerness as "out of place." In this way, HEAL's interventions mirror what Vaughan-Wynn and Jung describe as food apartheid through the digital: policies that expand access within fixed boundaries while leaving intact the structural conditions that determine who is surveilled, targeted, and deemed nutritionally improvable. An overemphasis on nutritional value collapses food practices into biological terms. McKittrick cautions that this framing erases other dimensions of Black knowledge and flattens Black life to the body.¹⁰⁸ By framing food insecurity primarily as a matter of access to nutrients within already defined geographic boundaries, HEAL's solutions miss how it is also about affect, relationality, and spatialized histories of exclusion. Furthermore, they run the risk of inadvertently reproducing the food inequities they wish to solve.

Food insecurity disproportionately impacts lower income, LGBT, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American, residents in King County. Black or African American residents experienced food insecurity at a rate of 25.6%—nearly three times the county average of 9.5%. Transgender residents were twice as likely to face food

¹⁰⁷ "Digital Food Apartheid."

¹⁰⁸ "Diachronic Loops/Deadweight Tonnage/Bad Made Measure," *Cultural Geographies* 23, no. 1 (2016): 3–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474015612716>.

insecurity compared to the county overall. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual residents also reported higher rates of food insecurity at 12.4%.¹⁰⁹ These numbers show that across racial, gender, and sexual identities, food insecurity is disproportionately higher among marginalized groups, and the geographic disparities where they live are not random. In Seattle's southern cities and neighborhoods such as White Center, SeaTac, and Tukwila, areas with the highest concentrations of low-income, Black, Indigenous, and people of color, were disproportionately affected by food insecurity. These neighborhoods have limited access to farmer's markets, corner stores, grocery stores, and restaurants with fresh local produce. These disparities where they live reflect Seattle's longer history of segregation, redlining, and displacement (i.e. longstanding patterns of state violence against racialized and queer spaces). These statistics place Seattle's Black queer communities in a precarious position while food access as organizations such as HEAL fail to grapple with the city's geopolitical histories of relegating them "elsewhere. Contending with these histories through a Black feminist geographic lens provides the necessary context in seeing how Seattle's urban development and foodways are not neutral backdrops to racism, sexism, and queerphobia. "There are in fact few public social spaces that are explicitly dedicated to queer women, black or otherwise, in...the United States more broadly."¹¹⁰ Seattle's shifting landscape has historically produced these marginalizations and continues to do so.

Making and Containing Black Space

This history begins with the making of a Black sense of place, when Manuel Lopes arrived in 1858, followed by William Grose in 1861.¹¹¹ Both men came with the intention of forging a place for themselves in the emerging city. Lured by the absence of the overtly racist

¹⁰⁹ Communities Count, "Food Insecurity/Hardship."

¹¹⁰ Adeyemi, *Feels Right*, 11.

¹¹¹ Taylor et al., *The Forging of a Black Community*.

policies that governed the South, them and many other Black people were able to establish roots, build community, and create opportunities for themselves in the Pacific Northwest that proved inaccessible in other regions.¹¹² Gross opened a barbershop, a restaurant, and a hotel near the waterfront called “Our House.”¹¹³ This area would become the primary settlement area for most Black residents and become known as the Central District.¹¹⁴ In the late 1800’s Black residents established two major churches that served as vital community hubs in that same area and by 1900, there was a well-established small African American community of 603 residents and over the next decade the population throughout the city would increase by 312%.¹¹⁵ Although Black residents built community in the Central District amid already constrained racial conditions, the Black population in King County would later become more forcefully confined there through racially restrictive covenants and redlining. What began as an act of Black self-determination and community formation was ultimately reshaped by state-sanctioned housing policies that converted voluntary settlement into enforced racial containment.¹¹⁶

Racially restrictive covenants and redlining were a way to regulate “the where” of Black people which laid the foundation for contemporary food governance in Seattle.¹¹⁷ Grounded in geographic ideologies that treat the presence of Black people as disruptive and as an unnatural part of the production of space, these restrictive covenants sought to contain and control blackness through legislation that barred certain races, in this case Asian and Black people, from buying or renting property in certain areas. Non-whites were explicitly barred from living in the

¹¹² Addy Hatch, “Black History in the Northwest,” *Washington State Magazine*, 2024, <https://magazine.wsu.edu/2024/02/01/black-history-in-the-northwest/>; Ramírez, “The Elusive Inclusive”; Taylor et al., *The Forging of a Black Community*.

¹¹³ Taylor et al., *The Forging of a Black Community*.

¹¹⁴ Taylor et al., *The Forging of a Black Community*.

¹¹⁵ Taylor et al., *The Forging of a Black Community*.

¹¹⁶ Hatch, “Black History in the Northwest”; Taylor et al., *The Forging of a Black Community*.

¹¹⁷ Catherine Silva, “Racial Restrictive Covenants,” Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, University of Washington, 2009, <https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants.htm>.

neighborhoods of West Seattle, North Seattle, Capitol Hill, Queen Anne, and Madison Park.¹¹⁸ Written into property deeds, both homeowners and developers could designate that land and houses could only be sold to those racialized as white.¹¹⁹ Another tool Seattle used to confine blackness to areas like the Central District was redlining. This practice began during the Great Depression, when the federal Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) created maps that ranked neighborhoods as "Best," "Still Desirable," "Definitely Declining," and "Hazardous" to guide lenders on mortgage risk.¹²⁰ The houses in the CD were described as "old, obsolete, and in need of extensive repairs."¹²¹ Real estate agents refused to sell property in white neighborhoods to Black people and banks refused to loan them money. These housing practices restricted upward social mobility, accumulation of generational wealth, and reinforced segregation.¹²²

In addition to housing discrimination, Black people dealt with the consequences of anti-blackness in public spaces as well. Restaurants, bars, stores, salons, hospitals, and hotels excluded them from socioeconomic participation.¹²³ The Coon Chicken Inn (CCI) located in North Seattle was infamously known for its racist branding and caricaturized imagery of Black people.¹²⁴ The first restaurant opened in 1930 and closed in 1949. The restaurant's logo was a racist image of African American males that became popular in 19th century minstrel theatre. The image was an exaggerated version of Black facial features. The skin is depicted as unrealistically dark with enlarged eyes, nose, and red lips. This representation of Black

¹¹⁸ Silva, "Racial Restrictive Covenants."

¹¹⁹ James Gregory, "Seattle's Race and Segregation Story in Maps 1920-2020," Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, 2017, https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/segregation_maps.htm.

¹²⁰ Doug Honig, "Redlining, Racial Covenants, and Housing Discrimination in Seattle," HistoryLink.Org, October 29, 2021, <https://www.historylink.org/file/21296>.

¹²¹ Honig, "Redlining, Racial Covenants, and Housing Discrimination in Seattle."

¹²² Honig, "Redlining, Racial Covenants, and Housing Discrimination in Seattle."

¹²³ Kwate, *Burgers in Blackface*.

¹²⁴ Kwate, *Burgers in Blackface*; Catherine Roth, "Coon Chicken Inn (Seattle)," HistoryLink.Org, October 16, 2009, <https://www.historylink.org/File/9191>.

masculinity was known as a Coon, short for raccoon but eventually became synonymous with “a sly, knowing fellow,” and subsequently, “a Negro.”¹²⁵ The CCI used this image on their menus, dishes, silverware, delivery vehicles, and the restaurant entrance. The entrance was an enlarged 12 feet sign of the head where the grin was big enough to be the doors customers entered through.¹²⁶ The popularity of the restaurant’s food, logo, and advertising represented a consensus across Seattle of the place of Black people within the traditional geographies of the city. Black residents did not passively accept this visual assault; they protested the restaurant, challenged its public presence, and named its imagery as an affront to Black dignity and belonging.¹²⁷ Despite their protests, African Americans were surrounded by the offensive caricature. The logo was featured in many public and moveable spaces such as spare tire covers and their “Coon Cars” delivery truck.¹²⁸ These advertising strategies allowed the CCI to infiltrate the city with their racist imagery and represented city wide white acceptance of the defamation of an entire race. It wasn’t just racist. By making an anti-Black caricature a literal entrance into public dining and circulating Black distortion across the city, it treated Blackness as consumable and speaks to what spatial diffusion of a racial ideology can look like.

Food has never been neutral in Seattle. It was a site where Black belonging has either been cultivated or violently distorted. Collectively, Black Seattle residents have long had to navigate anti-Black racism and discrimination while cultivating space for themselves. The city’s food landscape actively participated in regulating “the where” of Black life. These early food geographies have not disappeared; they are sedimented into the city’s built environment where we imagine healthy food belongs. As Black people carved out space for themselves, they were

¹²⁵ Roth, “Coon Chicken Inn (Seattle).”

¹²⁶ Kwate, *Burgers in Blackface*; Roth, “Coon Chicken Inn (Seattle).”

¹²⁷ Kwate, *Burgers in Blackface*; Roth, “Coon Chicken Inn (Seattle).”

¹²⁸ Roth, “Coon Chicken Inn (Seattle).”

and are currently navigating white geographical practices that deliberately create environments that prevent the growth and expansion of Black communities and their culture. As a result, early Black culinary spaces satiated hunger and functioned as sites of autonomy and communal world-building. The Coon Inn as a public space, a food space, and an anti-black space created during the early 1900's illustrates the overall pervasive antagonism in Seattle towards Black people, their food, and place-making strategies. White-owned food spaces weaponized racial caricature to discipline and racialize places. These histories reveal that Seattle's geography was always racialized terrain and contemporary public places in Seattle are shaped by restaurants like CCI that created, perpetuated, and dispersed anti-blackness and racial hostility.

Policing and Producing Queer Space

In Seattle, the discrimination and displacement experienced by Black residents have been mirrored in the experiences of LGBTQ+ residents. Often regarded as a safe haven for LGBTQ+ communities, the city's history of violence and hostility is frequently dismissed or overlooked by civic narratives that celebrate Seattle's progressivism. Seattle's progressive reputation, however, obscures a longer history in which queer and trans communities were actively regulated, policed, and spatially constrained.¹²⁹ Queerphobia and transphobia, however, have been central to how Seattle has created and maintained its physical and spatial landscape. Sexuality has materially structured neighborhood formation, policing practices, and the regulation of public space. In the city's early years, same-sex relationships were often treated as a low priority by officials when they remained relatively invisible or economically useful to the city. By the late nineteenth

¹²⁹ Zosha Millman, *Exploring Capitol Hill's Oldest Gay Bars, and Their Future*, September 2017, <https://www.seattlepi.com/seattlenews/article/Exploring-Capitol-Hill-s-oldest-gay-bars-and-12180702.php>; Steve Nyman and Nathan Benedict, *Seattle's LGBTQ Bars in 1974: Out on the Town*, June 14, 2024, <https://www.sgn.org/story/75673>; The Seattle Out & Proud Foundation, "Seattle's Rich Queer History: A Historical Timeline," *Seattle Pride*, 2024, <https://seattlepride.org/timeline>.

century, however, as same-sex sexual activity became more visible in areas such as Seattle's Tenderloin/Pioneer Square, Washington joined a broader national pattern of criminalizing nonprocreative sex when the state legislature passed an anti-sodomy law in 1893.¹³⁰ In Seattle, the law's effects were shaped by local enforcement practices, especially in relation to male same-sex activity in the Tenderloin.¹³¹ The criminalization of same-sex relations marked an early effort to police morality and regulate who belonged in public space. These laws functioned as spatial technologies of exclusion, determining whose bodies could safely occupy the city and under what conditions. By criminalizing certain sexual acts and authorizing surveillance and policing, they transformed urban space into a regulated terrain where queer presence could be monitored and disciplined. Bars and cafes served as important places for queer folks to gather. Often, they were the only spaces where people could openly express themselves and find community, but they were also subject to hate crimes.¹³² From very early on, they were at the mercy of the police, who established a bribery system that allowed certain "vices" to flourish. LGBTQ+ establishments became easy targets: if they refused to pay, they risked harassment of their customers and suspension of their liquor license.¹³³ Because of their criminalization, these spaces existed in a constant state of precarity and a perpetual cycle of vulnerability and exploitation. The state thus simultaneously criminalized and economically exploited queer space, rendering visibility both possible and punishable.

This climate remained in place until the 1960s and 70s, when civil rights activism was

¹³⁰ Kevin McKenna and Michael Aguirre, "A Brief History of LGBTQ Activism in Seattle," Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, 2016, https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/lgbtq_history.htm.

¹³¹ McKenna and Aguirre, "A Brief History of LGBTQ Activism in Seattle."

¹³² Chrystie Hill, *Queer History in Seattle, Part 2: After Stonewall* (HistoryLink.org, November 11, 2003), <https://www.historylink.org/file/4266>; Millman, *Exploring Capitol Hill's Oldest Gay Bars, and Their Future*; Nyman and Benedict, *Seattle's LGBTQ Bars in 1974: Out on the Town*.

¹³³ McKenna and Aguirre, "A Brief History of LGBTQ Activism in Seattle."

becoming increasingly visible and prominent in mainstream media, bringing an increase in legal protections and the creation of activist organizations for sexual minorities in Seattle.¹³⁴ One year after Stonewall, the Seattle chapter of the Gay Liberation Front was formed. Also in the seventies, Washington State repealed its anti-sodomy laws under Governor Dan Evans, the City of Seattle banned housing discrimination based on sexual orientation and added protections to its open housing ordinances, and the Greater Seattle Business Association (GSBA) was created to attract customers to gay-owned businesses, further strengthening LGBTQ+ visibility and support in the city.¹³⁵ Neighborhoods like Pioneer Square and Capitol Hill were becoming known areas where LGBTQ+ communities' were especially visible. By 1974, there were 18 bars actively serving Seattle's gay community, primarily centered in Pioneer Square.¹³⁶ These bars did not fully represent the experiences of lesbians, trans people, or queer people of color. Most of them catered largely to gay men and became key sites for male same-sex sociality. Pioneer Square eventually established itself as a National Historic District which drove up costs which led younger LGBTQIA+ people to open bars in Capitol Hill. The more difficult it became to meet in Pioneer Square the more Capitol Hill saw an increase in its gay bars.¹³⁷ These geographic shifts reveal that queer neighborhoods were shaped by redevelopment pressures, economic restructuring, and the uneven politics of preservation.

Food and drink establishments functioned as vital spatial infrastructure through which queer life in Seattle was made possible. In these spaces, nourishment and visibility were intertwined: sharing a meal or drink became a way to reclaim space and occupy the city together.

¹³⁴ McKenna and Aguirre, "A Brief History of LGBTQ Activism in Seattle."

¹³⁵ The Seattle Out & Proud Foundation, "Seattle's Rich Queer History: A Historical Timeline."

¹³⁶ Nyman and Benedict, *Seattle's LGBTQ Bars in 1974: Out on the Town*; The Seattle Out & Proud Foundation, "Seattle's Rich Queer History: A Historical Timeline."

¹³⁷ Millman, *Exploring Capitol Hill's Oldest Gay Bars, and Their Future*.

Bars and restaurants such as Shelly's Leg and the Wild Rose emerged in the 70's as emblematic sanctuaries, offering both refuge and a platform for LGBTQ+ visibility.¹³⁸ The 1980s and 1990s intensified this relationship between food, survival, and politics as the AIDS epidemic devastated Seattle's queer communities.¹³⁹ In response, mutual aid efforts like the Chicken Soup Brigade redefined nourishment as collective care, delivering meals to HIV+ patients who had been abandoned by state and medical institutions.¹⁴⁰ Food was transformed from a commercial commodity into a practice of relational sustenance. At the same time, LGBTQIA+ political participation increased.¹⁴¹ Cal Anderson became the first openly gay state legislator, and Sherry Harris became the first Black lesbian elected to the Seattle City Council.¹⁴² Together, these developments demonstrated that queer geographies in Seattle were built not only through protest and policy, but through everyday acts of feeding and being fed. Through collective activism and mutual care, LGBTQ+ communities transformed spaces of marginalization into sites of political power, showing that queer belonging in Seattle has always been produced through struggle rather than granted by the city's progressive identity.

As queer communities secured greater visibility and institutional recognition, city agencies sought to reframe their relationship to LGBTQ+ residents through symbolic gestures of inclusion. In an effort to repair the history of fractured trust between the LGBTQ+ community

¹³⁸ Millman, *Exploring Capitol Hill's Oldest Gay Bars, and Their Future*; The Seattle Out & Proud Foundation, "Seattle's Rich Queer History: A Historical Timeline."

¹³⁹ Hill, *Queer History in Seattle, Part 2*; McKenna and Aguirre, "A Brief History of LGBTQ Activism in Seattle"; The Seattle Out & Proud Foundation, "Seattle's Rich Queer History: A Historical Timeline."

¹⁴⁰ Renee Raketty, *Lifelong's Chicken Soup Brigade Soldiers on: Local Nonprofit to Hold Online Auction for World AIDS Day*, November 26, 2021, <https://www.sgn.org/story/310867>.

¹⁴¹ Ann Dornfeld, *Seattle's LGBTQ History That Isn't All White, All Middle Class, All Male*, August 17, 2017, <https://www.kuow.org/stories/seattles-lgbtq-history-isnt-all-white-all-middle-class-all-male/>; The Seattle Out & Proud Foundation, "Seattle's Rich Queer History: A Historical Timeline."

¹⁴² Hill, *Queer History in Seattle, Part 2*; McKenna and Aguirre, "A Brief History of LGBTQ Activism in Seattle"; The Seattle Out & Proud Foundation, "Seattle's Rich Queer History: A Historical Timeline."

and the State, the Seattle Police Department's Safe Space Initiative was created.¹⁴³ It was an initiative to unite Seattle police, businesses, and residents by displaying rainbow "Safe Place" badge stickers at restaurants to signal LGBTQ friendliness, bias-crime training, and police partnership.¹⁴⁴ This response assumes that visibility and certification are sufficient replacements for structural change. Rather than guaranteed in practice, safety is morphed into signage for consumption. Travel and lifestyle media reinforce this framing. A recent feature highlighting "LGBTQ-friendly" food and drink spots in Seattle celebrates Capitol Hill's rum bars, sandwich shops, bakeries, and wine bars as markers of a vibrant queer culinary scene, presenting safety and belonging as attributes of particular establishments one can patronize.¹⁴⁵ In this narrative, queer inclusion is mapped onto restaurant lists and neighborhood branding. Yet when safety is mediated through police-endorsed symbols and commercial dining spaces, it risks becoming a marketable aesthetic. One that obscures the deeper racialized and spatial inequities that continue to shape who feels welcome, who feels surveilled, and who remains out of place.

Seattle's queer food geographies reveal a stark contrast between food as mutual aid, relational sustenance, and food as branded inclusion. What started as precarious spaces carved out under the threat of criminalization evolved into networks of care and political organizing. As LGBTQ+ visibility became institutionally legible, safety shifted from a collective practice to a commercial signal. The rainbow badge and curated restaurant list represent how queer belonging has become produced less through shared risk and struggle and more through certification,

¹⁴³ PCH-HSC--Healthy and Safe Communities--8400, "Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Program | Washington State Department of Health," accessed June 25, 2025, <https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/healthy-eating-active-living>.

¹⁴⁴ City of Seattle, "SPD Safe Place Decal - SPD Safe Place | Seattle.Gov."

¹⁴⁵ Vacationer Staff, "Tasting The Emerald City: 9 Great LGBTQ-Friendly Spots for Food and Drink," *Vacationer Magazine*, August 18, 2025, <https://www.vacationer.travel/tasting-the-emerald-city-9-great-lgbtq-friendly-spots-for-food-and-drink/>.

branding, and consumption. If queer belonging in Seattle has historically been produced through struggle, mutual aid, and everyday acts of feeding one another, the contemporary framing of safety through signage and commercial branding demands scrutiny. Whose histories of survival are being memorialized, and whose ongoing precarity is being obscured? For those whose relationship to Seattle's neighborhoods have been shaped by displacement and policing the promise of "LGBTQ-friendly" space cannot be separated from the city's longer geographies of exclusion. The task, then, is not simply to identify establishments owned by queer individuals or ones with rainbows in their windows, but to examine how food spaces participate in either reproducing or unsettling the carceral structures that organize the city.

Where Black and Queer Geographies Meet

Seattle's food geographies have been shaped by the regulation of Black settlement, the policing of queer gathering, and the commodification of difference under neoliberal multiculturalism. Black and queer geographies were not peripheral to the city's development; they were central to it. As these communities built alternative infrastructures of survival through food and collective care, they were simultaneously contained, regulated, and marketed. Though their histories are often told separately, reading them together reveals how race and sexuality are co-constituted. The spatial containment of Blackness and the policing of queerness intersect within Seattle's foodways, positioning food as a key site where racial capitalism, heteronormativity, and the carceral logics of surveillance, containment, and exclusion are negotiated. In HEAL's 3D exercise, we were tasked with imagining a just food system. We dreamt of a geography where grocery stores, gardens, and waterways seamlessly provided nutritious options for every resident. Our models overlooked the sedimented histories that rendered some neighborhoods hazardous, some bodies surveilled, and some forms of

nourishment illegible. The exercise assumed justice could be spatially redistributed without confronting how space itself has been racialized and sexualized. It treated food insecurity as a problem of placement rather than a problem of power. This limitation is not unique to the exercise. Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) frameworks similarly prioritize access, proximity, and nutritional metrics. While calories and nutrients are crucial in addressing hunger, they do not exhaust what food means. Queer and Black feminist food scholars call for understandings of food that exceed nutrition and instead center relationality, pleasure, and embodied knowledge.¹⁴⁶

A Black queer geographic lens provides an opportunity to understand space as structured by racial power and sexuality as materially embedded in public life. Within Seattle's food landscape, nourishment, policing, belonging, and refusal operate together rather than separately. From this vantage point, queer food refusals are not signs of marginalization but alternative geographies of sustenance that reimagine belonging in a city organized through exclusion. Black queer food practices function as knowledge systems. They challenge positivist "where" questions that map deprivation as a static condition and instead produce relational mappings grounded in

¹⁴⁶ Jon Binnie and Christian Klesse, "Food Practices, Queer Social Reproduction and the Geographies of LGBTQ+ Activism," *Political Geography* 117 (March 2025): 103273, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2025.103273>; Kim Q. Hall, "Toward a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food," *philoSOPHIA* 4, no. 2 (2014): 177–96, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phi.2014.a565882>; Phillip Joy et al., "Queer Food Futures: Recommendations for Inclusive Support Systems for LGBTQ+ Communities Affected by Food Insecurity," *Food, Culture & Society*, January 30, 2025, 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2025.2459995>; Shayda Kafai, "Imagining Queer, Fat Food Futures," *Fat Studies* 9, no. 3 (2020): 201–3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2019.1641668>; Northwest Harvest, "Food Is Pride," 2025, <https://www.northwestharvest.org/get-involved/june-food-is-pride/>; Ashanté M. Reese, *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019). These works collectively push food analysis beyond access-based and nutrition-centered frameworks. Reese demonstrates how Black communities navigate food inequity through self-reliance, memory, care, and place-making rather than access alone. Hall and Kafai extend food studies through queer, crip, fat, and feminist frameworks that foreground embodiment, pleasure, refusal, and the politics of normativity. Binnie and Klesse, along with Joy et al., situate queer food practices within broader questions of relationality, community formation, social reproduction, and alternative food futures. Northwest Harvest's food justice work similarly emphasizes that hunger and food insecurity are shaped by structural inequities, not simply individual choice or geographic proximity to food.

lived experience, intimacy, and care. Even within violent food geographies, Black and queer communities persist and innovate. By linking food to equity and social reproduction, they cultivate alternative kinship networks, unsettle heteronormative family structures, and sustain life within hostile environments. Food apartheid does not simply deny nutrient dense food options, it disrupts relational conditions that make love, care, and joy possible. Scarcity pushes care into "survival mode," expressed through sacrifice and exhaustion, making it harder to sustain over long periods of time.¹⁴⁷ The stress and shame of food insecurity not only creates starvation and hunger, it interrupts self-compassion.¹⁴⁸ The absence of communal spaces such as farmer's markets or grocery stores not only impacts obesity rates, it erodes everyday practices of reciprocity, gathering, and belonging that food often makes possible. The disconnect from the land and farming rupture our ability to extend empathy to the nonhuman world. These dimensions show that food apartheid impacts far more than nutrition. It distorts our relationship to the world around us.

This is precisely where *quare* food refusals emerge. Drawing from Reese's call to examine "what is happening rather than simply what is wrong"¹⁴⁹, *quare* food refusals shift the analytic frame. Rather than asking only where food should be placed, it examines how marginalized communities have forged foodways that exceed constraint. Rather than centering deficiency, they attend to the practices already sustaining Black queer life. They revalue intimacy over visibility, pleasure over pathology, and private space over public certification. In kitchens, shared meals, chosen-family gatherings, and small-scale food rituals, Black queer communities produce alternative geographies of nourishment. The ingredients chosen, the tools

¹⁴⁷ Gumbs, *Spill*.

¹⁴⁸ Reese, *Black Food Geographies*.

¹⁴⁹ Reese, *Black Food Geographies*, 8\.

used, and even the sizzle of a favored cooking oil become strategies of space-making within Seattle's food apartheid. Quare food refusals do at least three things that PSE frameworks have yet to address. First, they foreground relational care as infrastructure, recognizing that belonging is produced through everyday practices rather than institutional recognition. Second, they refuse deficit narratives that cast marginalized communities as nutritionally inadequate populations to be corrected. Third, they generate alternative mappings of the city grounded in lived experience, intimacy, and embodied knowledge rather than cartographic indicators of proximity. Their epistemology challenges positivist "where" questions and instead asks how space feels, who is safe within it, and what forms of care it makes possible. A just food geography in Seattle would therefore look different than the models constructed in HEAL's 3D exercise. It would not simply redistribute grocery stores or expand incentives. It would confront the racial and sexual containment structuring the city's development and reinscribe Black queer ways of being, knowing, and doing as essential to place-making. Such an approach would recognize that food justice is not only about acquiring food but also about experiencing one's community in the process. Rather than locating public-facing responses to food insecurity alone, it would attend to the intentionally private spaces where cooking and eating sustain life. It would treat Black queer foodways not as marginal adaptations but as theoretical and practical blueprints for more loving food systems.

The Best Food City?

So is Seattle "the best city in the United States to eat your heart out"?¹⁵⁰ The answer depends on what that celebration requires us to forget. Seattle's culinary reputation and its erasures operate together, producing a polished identity that markets diversity and innovation

¹⁵⁰ Modlin, "Bakeries, Bars, and Seafood Make Seattle One of the Best US Cities for Food and Drink."m

while obscuring the racialized and queer labor that sustains its food scene. The “best food city” narrative is not false, but it is incomplete. It renders structural inequality atmospheric, converting struggle into ambiance and survival into brand. Seattle exemplifies how progressive urbanism can aestheticize difference while leaving its underlying hierarchies intact. Abundance and exclusion are not opposites here; they are co-produced. When I first arrived, I saw culinary innovation and geographic beauty. I now see the infrastructures of labor, refusal, and containment that make that abundance possible. Justice, then, cannot be reduced to access. It requires reckoning with how space has been organized through racial and sexual power. Black queer food geographies insist that nourishment is inseparable from dignity, memory, and place. They call not for better placement within the existing landscape, but for a reconfiguration of the landscape itself.

Chapter 3: Black Queer Food Refusal in Seattle

Reese's concept of "geographies of self-reliance"¹⁵¹ offers a lens for reading everyday food practices as both material and imaginative acts that sustain Black life within landscapes structured by neglect, displacement, and uneven access. In *Black Food Geographies*, Reese defines self-reliant geographies as the material and imaginative practices through which Black communities make life possible in spaces marked by abandonment, while "quiet food refusals" name the forms of agency, care, and dissent embedded in everyday food practices, memories, and aspirations for the future. This chapter expands Reese's framework by asking what happens when self-reliance is read through Black queer life in Seattle, a city that frequently brands itself as progressive, inclusive, and culinarily exceptional even as its foodscape remains shaped by racialized and queer exclusions.¹⁵² This chapter turns to multiple interviews grounded in the physical geographies of Seattle to examine how refusal is lived in kitchens, restaurants,

¹⁵¹ *Black Food Geographies*, 11.

¹⁵² Callie Craighead, "Mayor Harrell Issues New Executive Order to Strengthen Anti-Displacement Strategies," Office of the Mayor, City of Seattle, January 30, 2025, <https://harrell.seattle.gov/2025/01/30/mayor-harrell-issues-new-executive-order-to-strengthen-anti-displacement-strategies/>; Margaret Marietta Ramírez, "The Elusive Inclusive: Black Food Geographies and Racialized Food Spaces," *Antipode* 47, no. 3 (2015): 748–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12131>; Natalie Vaughan-Wynn and Jin-Kyu Jung, "Digital Food Apartheid: The Uneven Food Geographies of Seattle in the Era of Amazon," *Environment and Planning F* 3, nos. 1–2 (2024): 81–105, <https://doi.org/10.1177/26349825241234430>. Craighead, Ramírez, and Vaughan-Wynn and Jung help situate Seattle's celebrated foodscape within longer histories of racial displacement, uneven development, and exclusion. Ramírez demonstrates how gentrification in the Central District has transformed a historically Black neighborhood through redevelopment, cultural displacement, and new consumer landscapes. Craighead and Vaughan-Wynn and Jung further show how Seattle's progressive and culinary branding can obscure the racialized conditions that shape who can access, belong to, and benefit from the city's food geographies. Alongside Reese's framework, these works clarify why Black queer food practices in Seattle must be understood as practices of survival, place-making, and refusal within a city structured by both racialized displacement and narratives of liberal inclusion.

gatherings, and shared food worlds. I conducted interviews with local Black queer chefs, restaurant owners, organizers, and food enthusiasts. I focus on the stories of Black queer people who, even when food was not central to their careers, described it as an important site of creativity, self-care, and connection. Their everyday practices reveal that refusal is not always named or announced as resistance. More often, it is enacted through improvisation, selective gathering, sensory trust, and the careful curation of intimacy. In sharing their stories, participants become co-theorists of this project, offering ways of understanding refusal that exceed what scholarship alone can name. Their narratives show how Black queer food practices unsettle dominant expectations about visibility, hospitality, expertise, and belonging through ordinary acts of cooking, feeding, withholding, and making space for one another.

I argue that these practices queer Reese's geography of self-reliance by showing that Black queer sustenance depends on endurance within conditions of structural neglect and also on opacity, affect, and partial visibility. Reese's formulation illuminates how Black communities creatively navigate food apartheid, my Black queer extension of that reveals how sexuality and gender complicate the politics of recognition that often structure both urban belonging and food justice discourse. In Seattle, participants do not simply seek incorporation into the city's celebratory narratives of diversity, inclusion, or "food utopia." They resist the demand to make their food spaces fully discoverable, marketable, or legible. They refuse edible rainbows as a sufficient sign of queer belonging. They refuse the idea that healing, pleasure, and joy must remain secondary to survival. Through these refusals, self reliance becomes more than a strategy of making do. It becomes a sensuous, relational, and sometimes covert practice of worldmaking.¹⁵³ To apprehend these quieter practices, this chapter relies on a relational

¹⁵³ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*, First published as a Norton paperback (W.W. Norton & Company,

methodology grounded in shared meals, in person interviews, and narrative interpretation. Across field sites such as Quillisascut Farm School, Art Trip, Queer the Land, the Black Farmers Collective, participants and I moved through food as both topic and method, cooking, eating, grieving, remembering, and theorizing together. These encounters made clear that quare food refusals often emerge in registers that are intimate, embodied, and only partially visible.¹⁵⁴ They are felt in the body, sensed in atmosphere, and negotiated through trust. As a result, they cannot be understood through extraction. They must be approached through relation.¹⁵⁵ This methodological orientation allows me to read participants' stories as testimonies and analytic accounts of how nourishment, care, and belonging are forged under conditions that do not fully make room for Black queer life.

What emerges from these narratives is a theory of refusal as an embodied, affective, and spatial practice. Refusal appears in participants' trust in intuition over institutional expertise, in their investment in ancestral memory and sensory knowledge, in their decisions to gather outside formal structures, and in their selective management of access to joy, grief, and care. These practices are not reducible to invisibility, retreat, or negation. Rather, they constitute a strategic mode of partial offering, one that shares enough to sustain community while withholding enough to protect intimacy, autonomy, and self definition.¹⁵⁶ Quare food refusal then is the practice of organizing nourishment, intimacy, and space on terms that resist capture by neoliberal recognition, white spatial discipline, and the market logics of visibility. In this sense, the chapter

2020); Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Reese, *Black Food Geographies*.

¹⁵⁴ Irma McClaurin, *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics* (Rutgers University press, 2001); Carole McGranahan, "Theorizing Refusal: An Introduction," *Cultural Anthropology* 31, no. 3 (2016): 319–25, <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.3.01>; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*.

¹⁵⁵ Kim TallBear, "Standing With and Speaking as Faith: A Feminist-Indigenous Approach to Inquiry.," *Journal of Research Practice* 10, no. 2 (2014): 1–7, 101850329, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=91acbd6a-4589-30cd-9525-b1f467e66789>; K. D. Taylor, "Rejecting Objectivity."

¹⁵⁶ McGranahan, "Theorizing Refusal"; Reese, "Refusal as Care."

argues that Black queer food geographies are made not only through survival, but through the ongoing creation of forms of sustenance and relation that allow people to live otherwise within, against, and beyond the city's exclusions.

Methods as Relational Entry

If self-reliant geographies and quare food refusals are enacted through daily, embodied practice, then knowledge of them must also emerge relationally.¹⁵⁷ Black feminist scholarship has long insisted that knowledge is not produced from distance or presumed neutrality. Through lived relation, accountability, and the conditions under which one comes to know are valued forms of knowledge production. That orientation was especially important for this chapter because the forms of refusal I trace are quiet, intimate, and only partially visible. They do not always announce themselves as political acts. More often, they appear in atmosphere, in gesture, in the arrangement of a meal, in the modulation of access, and in the decisions people make about what kinds of nourishment, grief, pleasure, and care can be shared, and with whom. A methodology attuned to Black queer food geographies therefore had to do more than gather information. It had to remain open to the fact that refusal might surface obliquely, through relation rather than declaration, and through the sensory and affective texture of everyday life rather than only through direct political speech. My methods reflected this ethic. Data collection became a co-created process grounded in shared meals, vulnerability, and a deep reverence for the role food plays in shaping memory, intimacy, and belonging.

¹⁵⁷ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 30th anniversary edition (Routledge, 2022); Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic*; TallBear, "Standing With and Speaking as Faith."

I conducted five interviews with Black queer foodies I met through various food spaces across the Pacific Northwest, ranging in age from their mid twenties to late forties. These encounters were formative to its epistemological shape. Participating in collective cooking, grieving, celebration, and informal conversation blurred the boundary between researcher and participant in productive ways, making clear that food was a medium through which trust was built, feeling was expressed, and knowledge was transmitted. Food mediated how people narrated themselves, how they remembered childhood, how they described safety and desire, and how they imagined collective futures.¹⁵⁸ This methodological orientation positions food as a site through which relation itself is made and sustained. The research process did more than document queer food refusal from the outside. It entered into and was shaped by the same circuits of care, opacity, and mutual nourishment that the chapter seeks to theorize.

I entered into practices of mutual nourishment that reflected the self-reliant geographies I analyze. One formative site was Quillisascut, a farm school in Eastern Washington devoted to the Domestic Arts, where I spent time in 2022 after receiving a scholarship to attend a workshop created specifically for people of color working in or moving toward culinary and hospitality worlds. The workshop welcomed culinary students, food service professionals, hospitality workers, home cooks, and people in higher education programs related to food. Quillisascut itself was built over time by Rick and Lora Lea, who transformed a bare stretch of land into a home, farmstead, cheese business, and school organized around farm-to-table education.¹⁵⁹ For this workshop, they collaborated with James Beard nominated Chef Kristi Brown to create a curriculum that introduced foundational agricultural skills while centering the experiences,

¹⁵⁸ Phillip Joy et al., “Queer Food Futures: Recommendations for Inclusive Support Systems for LGBTQ+ Communities Affected by Food Insecurity,” *Food, Culture & Society*, January 30, 2025, 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2025.2459995>; Kafai, “Imagining Queer, Fat Food Futures.”

¹⁵⁹ *Quillisascut – Farm School of the Domestic Arts*, n.d., accessed November 12, 2025, <https://quillisascut.com/>.

histories, and culinary traditions of people of color. What mattered to me about Quillisascut was not only what I learned there in a technical sense, but what the space clarified theoretically. On the first day, we learned about the farm's no-waste policy and its commitment to a closed-loop food system. Nothing was discarded. Food scraps were composted to feed the soil, peelings and crusts were given to animals, and the abundance produced by the farm returned to the table in the form of vegetables, cheese, and meat. This ethic of circularity resonated with the forms of interdependence and care I would later identify across interviews. Self-reliance, in this sense, did not mean isolation or rugged individualism. It named systems of mutual sustenance that reduce dependence on extractive institutions while deepening accountability to land, labor, and one another.

The workshop also provided an embodied frame for understanding food as improvisation, intimacy, and worldmaking. Over several days, we learned how to butcher chickens and lamb, studied the science of making goat cheese and mozzarella, and harvested squash, tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, and herbs from the garden for our daily meals. We pushed ourselves to imagine menus that rivaled our favorite restaurants while also trusting instinct, experimentation, and play. The labor was rigorous and deeply sensory. We handled animals, kneaded dough, tasted sauces, and adjusted meals not by rule alone but by attunement. At night we sat outside under the stars and debated the political stakes of Netflix's *High on the Hog*, talked about our families and desires, and reflected on what it meant to learn to grow and prepare our own food. The conversations were often animated, sometimes tense, always revealing. By the end of the workshop, I had formed relationships with several queer chefs who later became interviewees and eventually friends. Those relationships emerged through the setting of the farm school, not as a byproduct of it. Quillisascut became important as a recruitment site and as a methodological

and conceptual site, where I began to understand how food labor, improvisation, skill, and collective reflection could generate forms of knowledge not easily captured by conventional research distance.¹⁶⁰

Another key site was Art Trip, an annual gathering that began in the early months of the pandemic. I was invited by two Black women who felt compelled to create a space for processing the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and the intensification of racial violence that structured that period. At the time, I was only mildly acquainted with the founders and arrived unsure of what the weekend would hold. What I encountered, however, was a space where food, art, grief, and care were inseparable. On the first morning I came downstairs to breakfast cooking and an arts and crafts station set up for decorating birthday cards for Breonna Taylor. The gesture was simple and profound. Rather than centering only the violence of her death, the gathering invited us to honor her life through color, creativity, and tenderness. Between bites of bacon and eggs, I assembled a collage of flowers, bright paper, and affirming messages, trying to imagine a form adequate to grief that did not reduce Black life to injury. Over the course of the trip, food structured our time together. One person made buttermilk fried chicken brined in pickle juice with homemade cinnamon waffles. Another led us through a painting exercise featuring a sun and moon, a meditation on death, renewal, and rebirth. We

¹⁶⁰ Priscilla McCutcheon, "Food, Faith, and the Everyday Struggle for Black Urban Community," *Social & Cultural Geography* 16, no. 4 (2015): 385–406, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2014.991749>; Camilla Hawthorne, "Black Matters Are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-First Century," *Geography Compass* 13, no. 11 (2019): e12468, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12468>. McCutcheon and Hawthorne offer frameworks for understanding food, land, and embodied labor as sites of knowledge production instead of just objects of study. McCutcheon theorizes cooking, growing, and shared food labor as spatial practices through which people negotiate power, place, and everyday survival. Hawthorne's work on Black geographies further clarifies how embodied practice, intimacy, and relationality generate geographic knowledge outside the distancing conventions of dominant research methods. These authors help frame Quillisascut as both a field site and a methodological space where food labor, improvisation, sensory attunement, and collective reflection are central to how I came to know Black queer food geographies.

spent our days making art and meals, telling stories, reflecting on what it meant to be Black in America, and feeding one another through both conversation and ritual. By the end, we had built a communal altar of birthday cards, Polaroids, crystals, and dried herbs. It was at once a table of offerings and a record of what we had made together: a temporary world organized around beauty, nourishment, and collective care in the midst of mourning. That gathering became an annual tradition known as Art Trip, and over the years it developed into one of the spaces through which I came to understand how grief, pleasure, intimacy, and nourishment converge as practices of quare refusal and worldmaking. I also met interviewees there who became friends, further reinforcing that the project's archive was shaped through shared vulnerability rather than detached access.

These sites, Quillisascut and Art Trip, were significant not only because of whom I met there but because they modeled approaches to food, relation, and survival that helped clarify the chapter's theoretical terms. Other interviewees came through snowball sampling and through my relationships with people connected to Seattle area food justice spaces, especially Queer the Land and the Black Farmers Collective. My decision to recruit from these communities grew out of sustained involvement in Seattle's broader food world and from an awareness that both organizations are led by Black and queer people whose everyday practices already theorize what food and land can mean beyond survival. Time spent in these spaces made clear that they are both sites of production or political intervention and also sites of care, imagination, pedagogy, and belonging. At Queer the Land, food circulates through collective living, shared kitchen practices, and a small but intentional garden. Meals become a way of holding one another, of practicing autonomy and interdependence at the same time. At the Black Farmers Collective's Yes Farm site, food production is inseparable from gathering, teaching, and healing. These

organizations shaped the project because they provided access to participants and because they offered living examples of the forms of relationality and self-determination that this chapter names as Black queer food geographies. Interviewing people connected to these spaces allowed me to learn from individuals who were already theorizing, through practice, what it means to feed community under conditions that refuse to fully sustain Black and queer life. Recruiting through these networks therefore strengthened the project's methodological coherence, ensuring that the analysis remained accountable to communities whose knowledge exceeds what academic theory alone can provide.

All interviews took place in person. Sometimes I met participants at restaurants they owned or worked in; other times, we met in their homes. The settings mattered. Two interviews began in the kitchen while participants prepared food. I stood a few feet away, observing and asking questions as they chopped, stirred, seasoned, and plated. The conversation moved between informal catching up and more structured engagement with my prepared questions. One interview ended with me leaving with a bowl of khao soi. Another ended with a steak dinner at a participant's new dining room table. Neither outcome had been planned in advance, yet in both cases the food became part of the archive. Taste, texture, timing, and atmosphere supplemented spoken narrative, offering a sensory record of how participants related to food through care, pleasure, and skill. Witnessing their culinary practices in real time added another layer to understanding the phenomenological dimensions of their food worlds. In one case, the interview took place in my own home, the only time that happened. I prepared breakfast tacos with creamy coconut grits, and over the course of the morning we laughed, cried, and at times forgot we were being recorded. What these moments made clear is that knowledge emerges from the content of participants' verbal responses and through the conditions of the encounter: the rhythm of a

shared meal, the intimacy of a kitchen, the bodily ease or vulnerability a setting could produce. These interviews mirrored a relational methodology in which care and curiosity preceded critique, and where shared sensory experience opened pathways to forms of understanding that would not have surfaced through a more extractive format.

Depending on the intimacy of our relationship, interviews lasted between one and three hours. My questions moved through autobiography, sensory and affective memory, identity articulation, and political and speculative reflection. I structured them deliberately to build trust over time, beginning with familial food memories and then moving gradually toward more vulnerable questions about race, sexuality, activism, and belonging. I often started by asking participants about their earliest relationship to food: what meals were like growing up, who cooked, what they remember eating, and what being in the kitchen felt like as a child. These questions surfaced intergenerational food geographies and brought participants into contact with the sensory and emotional landscapes that shaped them. From there, I shifted to questions about place and identity. I asked participants about the Seattle food scene, whether they felt connected to it, and how race, sexuality, and gender shaped their values, tastes, and food practices. I also invited them to define queer food in their own terms as a way to co-theorize Black queer food as a situated and living concept. I concluded by asking about their hopes and desires for the future, especially how they imagined themselves in relation to broader struggles around equity, sustainability, and community nourishment. This arc, from memory to embodiment to futurity, allowed participants to narrate refusal as a historically layered and future-oriented practice of imagining otherwise.

I recorded interviews on my iPhone and transcribed them using Dovetail, but the heart of my analysis rested in narrative interpretation. This approach reflects my refusal of a positivist

model of knowledge that treats truth as most reliable when it is distanced from feeling, memory, place, and the body. I understand knowledge as produced through relation, shaped by lived experience, and carried through affective, sensory, and embodied forms of meaning. I approached each story as a situated account shaped by relation, embodiment, and context.¹⁶¹ Narrative analysis allowed me to stay with the quieter, less immediately legible practices of care, autonomy, opacity, and nourishment that may not have surfaced through a more rigid coding structure alone.¹⁶² Across interviews, certain motifs recurred: trust in intuition, improvisation over precision, the emotional charge of feeding others, the management of access to intimate spaces, the refusal of extractive institutions, and the search for ways of making nourishment feel possible on one's own terms. These patterns became the foundation of what I theorize here as quare food refusals. This interpretive process aligns with the larger epistemological commitments of the project. Black queer food geographies require an epistemology capable of taking seriously what is felt, remembered, tasted, improvised, withheld, and shared. Because self-reliant geographies and quare food refusals often operate in intimate, covert, and affective registers, they require methods capable of attending to layered meaning and partial visibility. My analysis emerged through closeness rather than distance, through shared meals and emotional labor rather than the fantasy of detached objectivity. In foregrounding relation as method, I position the research process itself as a site where care, self-reliance, and refusal are practiced rather than merely observed.¹⁶³ Knowledge, in this chapter, is produced through mutual

¹⁶¹ Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic*; B. K. D. Taylor, "Rejecting Objectivity."

¹⁶² Reese, *Black Food Geographies*; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*.

¹⁶³ Reese, "Refusal as Care."

vulnerability and reciprocal presence. It is shaped by the same embodied and relational conditions that make Black queer food geographies possible in the first place ¹⁶⁴.

To understand how these dynamics materialize in everyday life, I turn to the stories of the Black queer Seattleites whose experiences anchor this chapter. What follows are the narratives of chefs, culinary instructors, restaurateurs, and home cooks whose practices reveal how refusal and self-reliance are lived, felt, and tasted in Seattle's foodscape. Some names and locations have been changed, although many participants requested to be identified on their own terms. In sharing their stories, participants became co-theorists of this project, articulating forms of refusal that exceed what scholarship alone can name. Their everyday gestures, what they cook, how they cook, who they feed, and what they refuse to disclose, together constitute a quiet geography of resistance. The sections that follow trace three interrelated dimensions of this refusal. First, I examine embodied and epistemic refusal, showing how participants challenge dominant culinary authority by grounding knowledge in the body, in ancestral memory, and in sensory attunement rather than institutional training or standardized technique. Second, I turn to withholding and the curation of intimacy, where refusal operates through the selective management of access: how participants decide who is invited in, what is shared, and how spaces of care, joy, and grief are protected from extraction and commodification. Finally, I consider spatial and atmospheric refusal, attending to how participants remake the sensory conditions of food spaces themselves, reorganizing sound, movement, and sociality in ways that disrupt the racialized norms of comfort, quiet, and respectability that often govern public dining environments. Their stories invite a reading practice attuned to opacity, challenging the assumption that marginalized lives

¹⁶⁴ McClaurin, *Black Feminist Anthropology*; McGranahan, "Theorizing Refusal"; B. K. D. Taylor, "Rejecting Objectivity."

must be fully legible to matter. Their accounts reveal refusal not as a singular act of resistance, but as a patterned, relational practice that moves across the body, through relations, and into space, remaking the conditions of belonging in a city that often fails to imagine them. Tending to these narratives is a political act that upholds the everyday strategies of nourishment, care, and worldmaking that rarely register within mainstream accounts of Seattle's food culture.

Embodied and Epistemic Refusal

Refusal first emerges in these interviews not as a slogan or explicit political declaration, but as an embodied and epistemic orientation to food. Across participants' stories, cooking is not approached primarily as a technical discipline governed by institutional expertise, proper tools, or fixed measurements. It is practiced as improvisation, memory, intuition, and sensory attunement. What participants refuse, in this register, is not knowledge itself but the authority of dominant culinary logics that equate expertise with precision, standardization, professionalism, and often whiteness. In their kitchens and food practices, authority flows differently. It is located in the body, in ancestral memory, in repetition, in taste, in touch, and in the confidence to make something work outside sanctioned forms of legitimacy. Refusal here is epistemic because it challenges who gets to be recognized as knowing, and embodied because that challenge is enacted through the senses and through the ordinary gestures of cooking itself.

Refusal initially revealed itself in my interview with Maisha. They had just bought a house. When I visited their home in White Center, they were unpacking boxes with their partner while also preparing dinner for the evening. I sat at the bartop asking questions and observing as they chopped, roasted, and moved through the kitchen with ease. At one point, needing to open a can of coconut milk, they grabbed a hammer and used the back end to puncture the lid and pry it

open. I noted the gesture without interrupting, only later realizing that it condensed an entire philosophy of cooking. Later on when asked about their favorite kitchen appliances they unintentionally explained the hammer usage, describing themselves as a minimalist when it comes to tools.

I didn't eat a lot of things that came in cans so when I would have a thing that came in a can, I'm like, I'm not buying a thing. I'm not getting a new thing for this. Hammer. That's what the back of a hammer can do. Just right into it. Pull it back. Boom. Your can's open. All food we eat now was made by people who didn't have tools or had minimal tools.

They go on to share how they also use wine bottles as rolling pins because they “can make this shit work.” It's apparent in Maisha's enthusiasm that they enjoy the idea of making do with what they have, preferring improvisation over specialized tools. The sound of the hammer penetrating the top of the can or the weight of a wine bottle rolling against fresh pasta dough connect Maisha to a way of cooking grounded in resourcefulness and bodily knowledge where touch, force, and adaptation matter more than the proper tool. The point is not deprivation. It is the refusal of unnecessary specialization and the insistence that one can cook well without submitting to an ever-expanding market of tools, gadgets, and standards of culinary correctness. Maisha's pleasure signals that self-reliance is not merely a condition of having less, but a cultivated relationship to adaptation and confidence in one's own capacity. Their cooking practice resists the idea that legitimacy depends on having the right equipment and locates authority in the body's ability to improvise with what is available.

Soy, a Laotian self-taught culinary instructor, extends this refusal more explicitly into the terrain of culinary authority and colonial knowledge.¹⁶⁵ She repeatedly returned to the value of intuition, ancestral memory, and sensory confidence over the prestige of Eurocentric culinary standards.

France or whatever is the leader in a lot of culinary techniques and all these different things like that but that's just because they went around fucking colonizing everybody, and brought their little, shitty food everywhere. And everywhere they brought their shitty food, the people made it better.

She humorously links the elevation of French cuisine as a universal standard to histories of colonial violence and appropriation, using food to name how power shapes taste and technique. Her point was not just to assert her opinion that French cuisine is overrated, but that the very designation of certain traditions as universal standards is inseparable from histories of oppression. In refusing that hierarchy, Soy also refuses the idea that legitimate food knowledge must be formalized, institutionalized, or externally validated. Her favorite kitchen tool is a mortar and pestle because “it is a tool that will span the ages in food.” She appreciates new tools but “if it is not broke, don’t fix it.” Her preference for a food technology that indexes continuity, durability, and relation over novelty condenses a broader epistemic stance: if something already

¹⁶⁵ I include Soy in this project to account for the relational conditions through which Black queer food geographies are made, without collapsing her Laotian identity into Blackness. I met Soy in a Black-centered space, Art Trip, where food, grief, art, and collective care created the conditions for Black queer worldmaking. Her intimate community includes Black people, and her culinary practices participate in food worlds that counter anti-Black spatial logics by refusing Eurocentric culinary authority, valuing ancestral memory, and creating spaces organized around care, pleasure, and collective survival. Soy’s inclusion reflects this project’s commitment to Black queer food geographies as relational formations shaped by proximity, accountability, shared practice, and participation in food worlds that sustain Black life.

works, if it has fed people across generations, there is no inherent virtue in replacing it with newer technologies or more codified methods.

Soy's account of cooking further unsettles dominant culinary authority through her refusal of exact measurement and procedural rigidity. When I asked her what made her feel most connected to the food she creates, she pointed to her belief in her ancestors and their "shared memories that get passed on." Because U.S. wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar displaced her family from Laos when she was four, she did not grow up in her homeland. Yet she described herself as able to access something of her people and land through dreams, feeling, and the search for childhood flavors in the present. That search is both sensory and historical. It is a way of healing, of reclaiming a relation to self that colonial war and migration attempted to interrupt. This orientation also shapes how she cooks. Rather than treating recipes as fixed authorities, she trusts intuition, repetition, and sensory judgment, explaining, "you can do whatever the fuck you want (smirks)...with limitations."

Taste your food and then you can go in with your taste knowledge of what to fill in the gaps to get it to where it needs to be. I work with these ingredients enough to know visually how much I need to put in. Because again, when you get good at something, you love something, you want to learn everything about it, and you don't need institutional learning to do that. Especially with cooking. Especially if you already come from a people who have these beautiful flavor profiles and dishes that have existed for a really long time. And that have gone through its own journey of people leaving the homeland and/or coming back.

These connections support her effort to “search for flavors of my childhood and bring them into my present life” as a way of healing her younger self. This is why institutional learning does not occupy the highest place in her culinary worldview. For Soy, to know food is to develop an intimate relationship with ingredients, memory, desire, and repetition. Refusal here takes the form of trusting that the body already holds forms of knowledge that dominant institutions neither author nor fully recognize. Her body’s sensory memory is prioritized over external metrics. Even if she does not always feel an explicit connection to her land and people, knowing that the flavors she develops and the ingredients she uses “evolved from her ancestors” affirms that this inherited knowledge is her birthright.

Dalisha’s narrative similarly locates food knowledge in improvisation, memory, and bodily feeling, though through a different historical route. She recalled learning from her mother, whose repeated incarceration shaped both the material conditions and the creative possibilities of cooking.

My mom could make a feast out of shit you would get out of a vending machine. She could make like a five course meal out of things you can get out of the commissary. She would take little hostess cakes, but then smash them up, mix them with milk and then turn that into this whole new concoction...Cooking things on little ghetto hot plates made from a typewriter that you took apart. When you’re a kid, vending machine food is attractive and then your mom could flip it into some multi-course meal, it’s a memory that stays with you.

What stayed with Dalisha was not only the ingenuity of those meals, but the memory of watching undesirable or stigmatized ingredients become abundance through care,

experimentation, and imagination. In her retelling, jail food becomes more than a story of deprivation. It becomes an archive of Black culinary inventiveness under conditions of confinement and scarcity. This shapes Dalisha's approach to cooking as a form of play where she can "improvise and experiment without measurements." She cooks through play, seasons until something "feels right," and resists the demand to reproduce recipes perfectly. Muscle memory matters more than external measurement. Here again, refusal is not framed as opposition for its own sake. It appears in the quiet insistence that the body, especially a body shaped by intergenerational survival, already knows things that dominant culinary discourse too often dismisses as imprecise, amateur, or insufficient. Dalisha's practice makes visible how embodied food knowledge can emerge from spaces of violence and constraint while still refusing to be reduced to lack.

Maisha, Soy, and Dalisha reveal that quare food refusal often begins in a challenge to dominant terms of knowing. Their stories celebrate creativity in the kitchen. They also expose how conventional ideas of culinary expertise are bound up with racialized, colonial, and classed assumptions about what counts as proper technique, proper tools, proper training, and proper taste. Against those assumptions, participants authorize other forms of knowing. They trust the hand that has done something many times before. They trust the tongue that can register imbalance and possibility. They trust memory, improvisation, and the sensory residue of what elders, ancestors, and prior selves have carried forward. This type of epistemic refusal is inseparable from the body. Knowledge is produced through touch, smell, taste, rhythm, and repetition, not abstracted from sensation. These practices also trouble linear temporalities of culinary mastery that privilege formal progression, certification, and professional refinement. They direct our attention to more cyclical, relational forms of learning in which the past remains

active in the present and the body becomes a living archive of technique, survival, and desire. These narratives make clear that embodied and epistemic refusal are foundational to Black queer food geographies in Seattle. Participants do not wait for institutions to authorize their methods, nor do they organize their food practices around the aspiration to become legible within dominant culinary worlds. They build authority elsewhere: in ancestral continuities, in improvisational confidence, in the pleasure of making do without apology, and in the sensory knowledge that comes from cooking in ways that feel intimate and self-directed. Refusal, in this register, is the practice of displacing dominant expertise with embodied ways of knowing that better sustain Black queer life. It is a refusal of culinary capture at the level of method itself. Before refusal becomes visible in how space is curated or how intimacy is withheld, it is already present in the body as a way of sensing, knowing, and making nourishment possible on one's own terms.

Withholding and the Curation of Intimacy

Another way participants enact queer food refusals is through withholding. If the previous section traced refusal through embodied knowledge, improvisation, and sensory trust, this section turns to the management of access: who is invited in, what is shared, under what conditions, and how intimacy is protected from extraction. Across these narratives, withholding does not function as withdrawal, silence, or the simple denial of access. Rather, it operates as an affective and spatial tactic through which Black queer subjects preserve the conditions necessary for joy, grief, care, and self-definition. Withholding then is not the opposite of relation. It is one of the ways relations are made possible. It is the practice of deciding how much of oneself, one's home, one's labor, and one's community can be offered without surrendering them to

commodification, surveillance, or the demands of public legibility. Refusal appears here through calibrated openness: a selective sharing that sustains community while protecting the fragile and sacred forms of intimacy that Black queer gathering makes possible.

This dimension of refusal became especially legible to me through Art Trip, an annual gathering that has unfolded over several years as both a personal and analytic site of insight. What first appeared to me as an intimate getaway among friends gradually revealed itself as a carefully curated Black queer space of nourishment, grief work, and political care. Founded by Dalisha and her best friend Simone in 2020, Art Trip emerged during a period when isolation, racial terror, and social exhaustion were intensified for Black people and other people of color. Dalisha described the impetus for the gathering simply: they “needed connection and creativity and a safe space to feel so they built what they needed”¹⁶⁶. That language is crucial. Art Trip was made out of need, intimacy, and imagination, not from abundance or institutional support. Its founders built a space where grief could be witnessed without becoming spectacle, where joy could be cultivated without apology, and where food could anchor both. Feeding one another was one of the primary ways care was materialized and shared.

Anytime we're coming together in our queerness and we are eating, that's resistance. The grand design of racism, colonialism, capitalism, they don't want us to be in joy and connection. So I feel like when we get together and we cook and we eat and we're in connection, we're creating joy. It's got a healing component to it. These overarching oppressions don't have power here. We're reclaiming something or we're rooting ourselves in something that feels like it's in contradiction to what systems and institutions of oppression (colonialism, capitalism, fatphobia, racism, white supremacy) want. They

¹⁶⁶ Dalisha, interview by author, Seattle, WA, July 12, 2024.

don't want us to have any of those things. It doesn't serve those things for us to be in connection and joy and nourishment.

Her framing locates food as more than an accompaniment to political relation, but as one of its conditions of possibility. Cooking and eating together created a temporary world in which the usual demands of white supremacy, capitalism, colonialism, and fatphobia could be suspended, however briefly, and replaced with connection, pleasure, and collective restoration.

What made Art Trip especially significant, however, was how selectively it gathered people. Dalisha and Simone were deliberate about whom they invited. Participation was not open, publicly accessible, or governed by the logic of expansion. Instead, they invited eight to ten women of color, primarily Black, whom they believed would honor the vulnerability and intention of the space they were trying to create. Some invitees were close friends, while others were connected through looser networks of trust. Even as Art Trip evolved over time into Art Glamp and later Art Abroad, that commitment remained central. Growth would not come at the expense of intimacy. Care would not be subordinated to scale. The space would remain relational rather than open ended, shaped by accountability and shared values rather than market style accessibility. This is where withholding becomes analytically important. Art Trip refuses indiscriminate access. It withholds itself from the expectation that all meaningful community spaces must be fully open, fully visible, or indefinitely expandable to matter. In doing so, it protects the affective conditions that make the gathering meaningful in the first place. Joy is not made publicly available for consumption. Grief is not offered up as spectacle. Care is not rendered into a service. Through selective invitation, the founders preserve a form of Black queer nourishment that depends on trust, familiarity, and the right to remain partially closed.

The later receipt of a King County business grant did not erase this dynamic but sharpened its stakes. Art Trip became formalized in one sense, gaining recognition as a community-based cultural practice, yet it did not relinquish its relational ethos in exchange for legitimacy. This tension is important because it clarifies that withholding is about more than staying hidden from institutions. It is also about refusing to let institutional recognition determine the terms of one's practice. Art Trip could accept material support without becoming fully reorganized by public-facing expectations of professionalism, transparency, or growth. Withholding becomes a tactic for preserving political and affective integrity under conditions in which recognition often arrives with new demands for legibility. What Dalisha and Simone built was not valuable because it could scale. It was valuable because it sustained forms of Black queer feeling and connection that depended on remaining partially protected from commodification. Withholding here is an ethic of care. It safeguards the interiority of the gathering so that vulnerability and joy can circulate without being flattened into consumable diversity or community branding.

Soy's annual Summer Yard Party Pop Up offers a related but distinct example of withholding as affective and spatial refusal. Held in her front yard on the Fourth of July, the gathering featured food, music, tattoos, and local vendors, including queer sex workers, artists, and makers. Soy sold barbecue skewers and Laotian sausage stuffed chicken wings with sticky rice and cucumber salad, while her partner Noah sold handmade leather goods related to BDSM, pet play, and fetish fashion. The event was promoted through Instagram and word of mouth among friends, local business owners, and extended community networks. On one level, the pop up created a lively and accessible social space centered on queer creativity and food. On another, it depended on a careful negotiation of visibility.

I chose 4th of July because I knew that nobody cares if people are gathering. If a bunch of people are showing up somewhere, it's because that's what they do. Because everybody has that day off. That was strategic so we wouldn't get busted. I don't have a license or anything to sell food from my home. I do have a food permit but that's different.

Soy chose July 4 strategically because she knew large gatherings would attract less suspicion on a holiday already associated with outdoor celebration. She was explicit that part of the calculation was to avoid being “busted,” given the precarious legality of selling food prepared at home without the proper licensing structure. That choice matters. Rather than pursue full incorporation into formal food economies or seek safety through total regulatory compliance, Soy created a space that was visible enough to gather community while still partially illegible to municipal oversight. The front yard became a semi-private zone of queer nourishment, one that existed in public view without fully submitting itself to public regulation. This is what makes the pop up a compelling instance of withholding and not simply informal entrepreneurship. Soy was simultaneously selling food while orchestrating a social world organized around community, pleasure, and mutual support on terms that did not align with dominant expectations of culinary professionalism or respectability. By centering BDSM artisans, fetish fashion, and queer sex worker entrepreneurs, she also refused the sanitizing norms through which public food culture often secures legitimacy. The event cultivated a space where its politics, aesthetics, or affiliations did not seek inclusion by toning down. Those dimensions coexist openly, though not fully transparently, within a relationally bounded environment. Access was managed through familiarity, word of mouth, and a scale that kept the gathering close to “her people,” even as curious newcomers occasionally stopped by. This is withholding as strategic opacity. The space

was not closed, but neither was it fully available. It was arranged to permit gathering without inviting full capture. Soy's language of "collateral" deepens the analytic stakes of this example.

I wanted people to feel that they could eat the food without having to put up too much collateral. And I succeeded. I thought that was really beautiful. I really loved it. I really enjoyed it. Was I tired? Absolutely. Will I charge a little more next year? (laughs) Probably. But the fact that I had it here in my home, with my community coming to support me? Yeah, it was special. It was like a catered experience and it turned out better than I expected. But that's just how my mind works when it comes to me. There's still a little person in me that's trying to heal and adult me is trying to do that.

That phrase does important conceptual work. Collateral refers not only to money, though price is certainly part of it. It also gestures to the emotional, cultural, and social costs that marginalized people are often required to pay in order to access pleasure, leisure, and high quality food. Many food spaces demand forms of conformity before they offer comfort: appropriate dress, appropriate demeanor, appropriate taste, appropriate relation to whiteness, professionalism, or heteronormativity.¹⁶⁷ Soy's pop up interrupted that structure. By hosting in her home, pricing with care, and centering relational support over profit maximization, she reduced the kinds of collateral participants were expected to offer in exchange for nourishment. Food was not something that had to be earned through respectability, status, or market fluency. It circulated through familiarity and a desire to make pleasure feel possible without overburdening those who came. This shift matters because it reveals withholding not only as a way of keeping things back,

¹⁶⁷ David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203349656>; Kwate, *Burgers in Blackface*; Lenart, "Adapting Queer Foodways"; Williams-Forson, *Eating While Black*.

but also as a way of refusing the terms under which access is usually granted. What is withheld, in this case, is compliance with the transactional and disciplinary logics of mainstream food culture.

At the same time, Soy is clear that this form of refusal requires labor. She describes herself as tired afterward, though the tiredness is not framed as depletion in the same way as wage labor or institutional service work. It is the fatigue of having created something meaningful and self-directed, of having fed people on terms she chose. That distinction is critical. Refusal is not effortless. The spaces participants build do not escape labor, planning, or vulnerability. What they do escape, at least partially, are the extractive relations that so often structure labor under racial capitalism. The catered quality of Soy's event, which she described with delight, was detached from the hierarchy and exclusivity usually associated with upscale dining culture. Community support took the place of institutional validation. Feeding others became a way to repair something in herself, to care for the "little person" she still carries and to create the kind of abundance that dominant systems rarely make available without violence or compromise. Nourishment here circulates as both material and emotional restoration. Withholding protects that circulation from being fully absorbed into the city's regulatory, commercial, or moral economies.

Art Trip and Soy's pop up illuminate withholding as a form of calibrated openness. In both cases, the home or home-like space is neither fully privatized nor fully public. It is selectively opened in ways that gather people while still preserving intimacy, political intention, and affective depth. These events do not aspire toward endless scale, broad discoverability, or maximum visibility. Instead, they fold inward even as they reach outward, prioritizing trust, familiarity, and the right to decide how relation unfolds. This is what makes them practices of

quare food refusal rather than simply examples of community building. They refuse the assumption that value must be measured by growth, openness, branding, or legibility. They safeguard joy from extraction, grief from public consumption, and care from being reduced to transaction. Withholding, then, is not a retreat from the social. It is a way of structuring the social differently. It names the Black queer practice of sharing enough to sustain community while keeping enough protected to ensure that nourishment remains intimate, accountable, and difficult to capture. By focusing on these scenes of selective gathering, I argue that refusal operates not only through what Black queer subjects reject, but through how they arrange relation itself. The question is not whether access is granted or denied, but what kinds of worlds become possible when access is curated according to care rather than market logic, according to trust rather than transparency, and according to emotional and political safety rather than public recognition. In this chapter, withholding emerges as one answer to that question. It is an affective and spatial tactic for preserving the conditions under which Black queer life can be fed, felt, and protected.

Spatial and Atmospheric Refusal

Refusal also takes shape through atmosphere, appearing in the deliberate construction of environments that unsettle dominant norms of comfort, conduct, and belonging. In this register, quare food refusal is about how a space feels, sounds, and moves. It concerns the sensory order of a food space: who is allowed to be loud, who is expected to be quiet, what forms of embodiment are welcomed, and what kinds of presence are subtly disciplined. Leona, a local café owner at The Station, offers the most poignant example of this form of refusal. Through the atmosphere she curates, she rejects the racialized and classed expectations that often structure

Seattle coffee culture ¹⁶⁸ and, in doing so, transforms the café into a space where Black and queer presence does not have to shrink itself in order to belong. Like Soy's rejection of European culinary standards, Leona is notable because she resists being folded into professional categories in the first place.

I don't even know if I fit in the category of culinary arts. I make coffee every day, but they're handcrafted. And we also serve sandwiches at the station. But the relationship I have is that I like to eat it. I'm a foodie.

That answer matters because it refuses the demand that food authority be expressed through polished culinary identity, formal expertise, or professional self-branding. Her relationship to food begins with pleasure and everyday practice rather than prestige. This refusal of legibility at the level of identity carries into the space itself. The Station does not present itself as an upscale artisanal café seeking legitimacy through restraint, refinement, or curated neutrality. It is built to disrupt the sensory codes that usually define coffee shops.

The Station definitely changed the coffee culture, for sure. I think my space is so different from what I was used to before going to coffee shops. The environment is not like a library, like most coffee shops. It's not quiet. We blast the most ratchet music half the time. It's almost like a party in there. I don't know how people get work done but they still get work done in there. You want it quiet, bring your headphones or go somewhere else. The culture (at the Station) is very different.

¹⁶⁸ Bran Holden, "Coffee in Seattle," in *HistoryLink.Org* (History Link, July 26, 2023), <https://historylink.org/file/22750>.

What Leona names is more than a stylistic preference. She is identifying sound as a spatial practice. The loudness of The Station is part of how the café refuses white coffee shop decorum, especially the expectation that “good” public food spaces should be hushed, orderly, and affectively contained.¹⁶⁹ Silence in these spaces is never neutral. Quiet often operates as a code for refinement, self-management, and palatable public behavior. It produces an atmosphere where certain bodies feel naturally at ease while others are made hyperaware of themselves. Volume is political. Ideals that appear neutral but are shaped by racialized standards of who belongs and how they should behave. By blasting music, allowing debate, and cultivating an environment that feels closer to a gathering than a library, the Station refuses the respectability politics that often attach to urban coffee culture. It does not ask Black or queer patrons to prove they belong by becoming quieter, tidier, or less socially present. Instead, it permits sound, movement, conversation, and energy to become part of the architecture of belonging. Loudness, in this context, is political because it contests who public comfort is usually built for. Williams-Forsen reminds us, Black food encounters are routinely surveilled and policed even in seemingly ordinary settings, including coffee shops, and food itself operates as a potent conveyor of power.¹⁷⁰ Tompkins amplifies this point by adding that eating is a technology of racial formation through which embodiment is regulated and racial difference is made to feel natural¹⁷¹. Their insights clarify that silence is an atmosphere of regulation. It rewards forms of restraint associated with whiteness while making other modes of gathering seem excessive, improper, or out of place. The Station’s loudness disrupts that arrangement by allowing Black sociality to

¹⁶⁹ Bell and Valentine, *Consuming Geographies*; Kwate, *Burgers in Blackface*; Williams-Forsen, *Eating While Black*.

¹⁷⁰ Williams-Forsen, *Eating While Black*.

¹⁷¹ Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion*.

register on its own terms rather than being filtered through the demands of palatable public behavior.

Leona's makes this atmospheric difference inseparable from race and ownership. She explains that "because I'm black and I own the station, people like me, like us, know they have somewhere they can go and be themselves." She contrasts this with earlier experiences in coffee shops, recalling that "there was always this demeanor in coffee shops," a kind of barista smoothness and white-coded conduct that made her feel uncomfortable. That discomfort becomes an important analytic point. The Station is more than a Black-owned business within an unchanged coffee culture. It is a refusal of that culture's underlying sensory and social expectations. When Leona says that people who "look like us" feel safe there because they see someone like them "working and owning the spot," she points to a form of safety that exceeds representation alone. Yes it matters that Black ownership is visible, but more importantly that ownership authorizes a different atmosphere where Black sociality does not have to pass through white norms of composure and restraint in order to be recognized as legitimate.

At the same time, Leona does not perform ownership in the way one might expect from entrepreneurial narratives of visibility and branding.

I hide behind the machine and make all the drinks throughout my entire shift, which is why people probably don't always know that I'm one of the owners, because I'm just there, like, serving the drinks. But I kind of like it that way.

This is a striking articulation of refusal as nonperformance. Even as owner, she does not seek hypervisibility or the spectacle of authority. She remains embedded in the labor of the café, partially obscured, allowing the space to function without needing her identity to be constantly

announced or displayed. This refusal resonates with the project's larger argument about partial legibility. Leona's authority does not depend on a polished entrepreneurial performance. She owns the space without needing to continually stage ownership as a public identity. Her refusal of queer marketability enriches this point further. When asked about rainbow police symbolism or similar signs of public LGBTQ visibility, Leona responds bluntly:

I don't know exactly what you're talking about. We don't have that. I don't want that...
They can put their little flags up in their own areas, but not my coffee shop.

Leona sharply distinguishes Black queer refusal from liberal inclusion politics. There is no interest in making her or The Station's queerness legible through commercial or symbolic shorthand. The café does not need rainbow signage to function as a space of Black queer comfort and safety because its queerness is organized through practice. Leona defines queerness as being "unapologetically free," and that definition helps clarify what The Station makes possible: a space where Black and queer patrons can be loud, linger, debate, work, laugh, gather, and be socially present without being disciplined into quiet respectability. The Station's openness to queerness is established through Black queer ownership, Leona's own presence and authority in the space, the regular gathering of Black and queer patrons, and an atmosphere that permits forms of sound, intimacy, embodiment, and sociality often constrained in white, heteronormative food spaces. It is also established materially, through the café's mutual aid practices during the pandemic, when The Station hosted a food pantry, circulated gift cards to people who could not normally afford coffee, and helped keep community members fed when schools and other infrastructures of care were disrupted. The Station's queerness is affective and it is a material politics of nourishment, access, and care. That politics also emerges through labor. Leona describes herself as the person behind the machine making drinks, while her husband handles

social media, paperwork, and public-facing forms of promotion. Her Blackness and queerness are embedded in the tactile, repetitive, bodily labor of the café, not in its branding. Those politics are carried in the room's texture: in who feels at ease, in how sound circulates, in what kinds of bodies and interactions are normalized, and in the refusal to rely on consumable symbols of diversity. Queerness at The Station is lived through the atmosphere, labor, and everyday care that make the space feel possible.

This is what makes Leona's example so important for theorizing spatial and atmospheric refusal. The Station does more than include Black and queer people within an existing café model. It reorganizes the model. It rejects quiet as an unquestioned good, refuses the polished neutrality of white coffee culture, and creates what might be called fugitive comfort: a space where people can gather, debate, work, linger, and "be themselves" without the same risk of surveillance or correction. Even Leona's repeated insistence that she is "such a simple person" can be read as part of this refusal. She resists being made into a cleanly branded, easily theorized subject. Her simplicity is not lack. It is a refusal of overexplanation, a refusal to translate herself into the academic or market language that might make her more consumable to others. Leona's account also extends the chapter's broader argument that refusal is sensory. Earlier examples showed participants trusting taste, touch, intuition, and memory over standardized measures of culinary authority. At The Station, sensory politics operate at the level of environment. Here refusal is not only tasted and touched but also heard. Auditory sensibility becomes central to how Black queer food geographies are made. Through music, volume, and social energy, Leona contests what a café should be, whom it should accommodate, and what kinds of conduct should define a respectable food space. If dominant coffee culture values quiet precision and minimalist order, The Station centers rhythm, movement, and collective presence. In doing so, it displaces

respectability politics with a different sensory ethic grounded in affirmation rather than policing. Ultimately, what Leona's interview shows is that refusal can be atmospheric without being subtle in its effects. The Station communicates belonging without relying on rainbow branding, corporate diversity language, or explicit declarations of inclusion. Its politics are embedded in the room's feel. Spatial and atmospheric refusal, then, names the practice of organizing food environments against the sensory and behavioral codes of whiteness. It is the creation of spaces where nourishment is not severed from sound, where ownership need not be performed through hypervisibility, and where Black and queer life can gather without being disciplined into quiet respectability.

Rethinking Refusal

Taken together, these narratives show that quare food refusal is not best understood as a dramatic break or explicit declaration. It more often appears in the ordinary calibrations through which people decide how to cook, whom to feed, what to share, and what to protect. In Seattle, these practices rework self-reliance into something more intimate and more insurgent than survival alone. They name a form of nourishment grounded in bodily knowledge, selective gathering, affective care, and strategic opacity. Refusal is not only a rejection of domination. It is the Black queer practice of organizing food, intimacy, and space on terms that resist capture, preserving the conditions under which joy, care, and belonging can still be made. In extending Reese's framework of self-reliant geographies, this chapter shows that quare food refusal is a response to structural neglect and a method for reorganizing how nourishment circulates, across bodies, across relationships, and across space. What emerges here is much more than refusal as an absence or withdrawal. Refusal is an active practice of worldmaking. Quare food refusal, as I

define it here, is a relational and sensory practice through which individuals and communities determine what remains shareable, what must remain protected, and how nourishment can move without being fully absorbed into the logics of visibility, professionalism, or market recognition.

This reframing has implications for how food justice, public health, and urban policy understand access and belonging. Approaches that prioritize visibility, expansion, and incorporation risk misrecognizing the very practices that sustain Black queer life. Not all food worlds seek to be scaled, branded, or made legible. Some depend on opacity, on selective gathering, and on the ability to refuse recognition on dominant terms. While this chapter draws on a relatively small set of interviews, these narratives are not offered as exhaustive or representative of all Black queer food practices. Their value lies in what they make perceptible. Attending closely to these five participants' lives allows for a depth of engagement with forms of refusal that are often difficult to capture at scale precisely because they are intimate, relational, and only partially visible. The patterns that emerge across their stories point to a broader set of practices and logics that remain underexamined within dominant frameworks of food access and consumption. The archive sharpens rather than limits the argument, revealing how much of Black queer food life is organized through practices that resist enumeration, measurement, and incorporation. Honoring these practices requires a shift away from frameworks that equate access with inclusion and toward an understanding of nourishment as relational, affective, and unevenly shared. Black queer food geographies are not only shaped by what is denied, but by what is carefully made and kept for ourselves. These forms of sustenance persist because of refusal not in spite of it.

Chapter 4: #BlackQueerFood and Instagram

The year is 2013. “Selfie” is the word of the year. Marriage rights have been extended to same sex couples. George Zimmerman has been acquitted for the murder of Trayvon Martin. Beyonce just dropped her self-titled album. I’m about to graduate college. My younger brother just passed. I’m working at a call center I hate while volunteering graveyard shifts at a non-profit I love. It’s a slow night tonight so I grab my Kindle and log into Tumblr. I finally get the courage to share a photo of me wearing that pink crop top I’ve been eyeing and memes saying “Keep Calm and Carry On” are taking the internet by storm. On my feed tonight, I scroll past GIFs of Scandal and Black Lives Matter hashtags with a background that says “You are Magic.” My dashboard; a collage of grief, food porn, and humor, part educational, part emotional. Looking back, I realize this wasn’t random. My profile was a crash course in feeling, in resistance, in becoming. Every reblog, a small act of curation. I didn’t quite have the voice yet but my Tumblr sure did.

Tumblr to IG: A Personal and Theoretical Entry Point

Tumblr was the first social media platform where I saw the day to day application of Black feminism. It was a platform where I first saw Black women celebrated for their contributions to American culture and where I found Black women critiquing their misrepresentation or lack thereof in the media. It was where I saw frustrations I had internalized for years as a fat Black femme being contextualized on a systemic level. Where connections to structural levels of racism, sexism, and fatphobia were clarified in a way that felt accessible. Tumblr offered to me what I had hoped majoring in Sociology would: a deeper understanding of my positionality in the world. While videos of Black people dying by the hands of law enforcement were surfacing, my department remained silent. While Shonda Rhimes was transforming the way Black women in television were represented in front of and behind the camera, while Michelle Obama’s appearance was being absurdly criticized by conservative media outlets, and while Beyonce was dropping arguably one of the greatest visual albums of our

generation, my curriculum ignored the sociological value of these events, centering social phenomena grounded in white male perspectives. Politically and socially, Black life was saturated with larger reflections of American society and yet in my studies these observations and connections remained largely absent. Tumblr filled the theoretical void my formal education left.

It was not just a platform for sharing, it was a public classroom, a digital geography where Black Feminist thought was lived, debated, and circulated in real time. As the introduction to *A Tumblr Book* makes clear, Tumblr functioned as a counterpublic space whose pseudonymity, reblog structure, and relative opacity enabled marginalized users to build alternative worlds of dialogue, creativity, and political education outside the logics of mainstream social media.¹⁷² Kendra Calhoun's analysis of Black Tumblr sharpened this claim by showing how Black users engaged in "everyday online activism" through challenging anti-Black ideologies, promoting underdiscussed issues, calling out hypocrisy, and generating affirmative representations of Black life, thereby transforming ordinary platform practices into political labor. At the same time, "'Tumblr didn't really give me sex ed, it more gave me like, Queer ed': how 2SLGBTQ+ people with developmental disabilities use social media for Information" demonstrates that Tumblr also operated as an informal pedagogical site for 2SLGBTQ+ people with developmental disabilities, offering what participants called "queer ed": a space to learn language for identity, encounter affirming narratives, and find community when formal institutions failed them.¹⁷³ These accounts position Tumblr as a pedagogical and affective

¹⁷² Allison McCracken et al., eds., *A Tumblr Book: Platform and Cultures* (University of Michigan Press, 2020).

¹⁷³ Alan Santinele Martino et al., "'Tumblr Didn't Really Give Me Sex Ed, It More Gave Me like, Queer Ed': How 2SLGBTQ+ People with Developmental Disabilities Use Social Media for Information," *Sex Education* 26, no. 2 (2026): 186–201, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2024.2436998>.

infrastructure where marginalized users produced knowledge for one another, made themselves legible on their own terms, and cultivated forms of political and personal education unavailable offline.

Scholarship on Tumblr illustrated to me how the social media platform bridged a necessary gap in my training as a sociologist about the connections between theory, practice, and current events. It gave me an informal but rigorous education in what sociology failed to provide: an example of ways to connect structural analysis to the immediacy of Black life as it unfolded across media, politics, and popular culture. What appeared in my feed was more than random content. It was a constantly updating archive of Black feminist interpretation, where grief, humor, representation, violence, beauty, and refusal were placed in conversation with one another. Scholarship on Tumblr helps me now name what I was learning there. Katrin Tiidenberg's groundbreaking work is useful here because it understands Tumblr as a space where embodiment, intimacy, and visual self-making became central to how users negotiated identity online.¹⁷⁴ Her concept of silosociality captures how Tumblr's social worlds were organized less through stable, transparent networks of known users than through shared moods, vernaculars, affects, and clustered forms of participation. Her attention to the entanglement of image, feeling, and platform affordances helps explain why Tumblr was so formative for me: it made visible how digital practices could hold theory and lived experience together. What looked like a chaotic dashboard was, in fact, a set of overlapping interpretive worlds through which users learned how to read each other, and the political stakes of everyday life. Tumblr was a space that trained me to read everyday mediated life as intellectually dense, socially patterned, and politically instructive.

¹⁷⁴ Katrin Tiidenberg et al., *Tumblr*, Digital Media and Society Series (Polity, 2021).

As a young eager twenty-three year old, so much of what I longed for in terms of acceptance and unapologetic pride in my Blackness took shape here. As an inexperienced social scientist, the applicability of the concepts I was learning were witnessed here. It was through Tumblr that my perspective on the utility of social media platforms expanded. I see now that it was a legitimate source of knowledge production, not just entertainment. These platforms reproduce spatial and affective relations. Who becomes visible, who gets centered, and who is rendered peripheral are all key aspects to their interface. Many academic fields have been slow to broach social media as a site of inquiry due to misconceptions that what happens virtually is of less significance than the events of the “real world.”¹⁷⁵ Social media theorist Nathan Jurgenson names this digital dualism, the belief that the digital world is “virtual” and the physical world is “real” and considers this duality a fallacy. He argues “digital and material realities dialectically co-construct each other”¹⁷⁶ and adopts a more generative perspective:

I am proposing an alternative view that states that our reality is both technological and organic, both digital and physical, all at once. We are not crossing in and out of separate digital and physical realities, ala *The Matrix*, but instead live in one reality, one that is augmented by atoms and bits. And our selves are not separated across these two spheres as some dualistic “first” and “second” self, but is instead an augmented self. A Haraway-like cyborg self-comprised of a physical body as well as our digital Profile, acting in constant dialogue.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Emily J. H. Contois and Zenia Kish, eds., *Food Instagram: Identity, Influence, and Negotiation* (University of Illinois Press, 2022); Nathan Jurgenson, “Digital Dualism versus Augmented Reality,” *Cyberology*, February 24, 2011, https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/02/24/digital-dualism-versus-augmented-reality/?utm_source=chatgpt.com; Tama Leaver et al., *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures*, Digital Media and Society Series (Polity, 2020).

¹⁷⁶ Jurgenson, “Digital Dualism versus Augmented Reality.”

¹⁷⁷ Jurgenson, “Digital Dualism versus Augmented Reality.”

Jurgenson pushes back against the idea that digital platforms only reflect social life, arguing instead that they actively shape how knowledge and identity are produced and are meaningful platforms to study human behavior. Fortunately, the establishment of interdisciplinary fields such as Digital Humanities have helped to counter misconceptions like digital dualism and secure social media status as a worthy area of study. Since then, I've witnessed its impact and influence being taken more seriously.¹⁷⁸ Social media platforms have been popularized as a casual, fun space to share highlights of your life, but we now know social media's utility extends far beyond its original intentions. They are also critical sites for theorizing the self, building publics, circulating political critique, producing cultural memory, and negotiating who gets to be legible and affirmed within digital space. Depending on a platform's structure and interface, when they are analyzed as digital geographies, they potentially offer a multitude of reflections about social phenomena and the overall human experience.¹⁷⁹

Digital geography examines how online infrastructures such as feeds, hashtags, and algorithms produce spatial relations of visibility, proximity, and exclusion.¹⁸⁰ Rather than treating digital platforms as neutral containers for interaction, this framework understands them as active producers of social space, arranging what and who can be encountered, how content travels, and which identities or claims are made searchable, amplified, or obscured. Feeds and

¹⁷⁸ Contois and Kish, *Food Instagram*; Jenny L. Herman, “#EatingfortheInsta: A Semiotic Analysis of Digital Representations of Food on Instagram,” *Graduate Journal of Food Studies* 04, no. 02 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.21428/92775833.6889719f>; Leaver et al., *Instagram*.

¹⁷⁹ Jim E. Thatcher and Craig M. Dalton, *Data Power: Radical Geographies of Control and Resistance* (Pluto Books, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv249sg9w>.

¹⁸⁰ Lelia Marie Hampton, *Black Feminist Musings on Algorithmic Oppression*, version 2, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2101.09869>; Sarah J. Jackson et al., *#HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10858.001.0001>; Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); Natalie Vaughan-Wynn and Jin-Kyu Jung, “Digital Food Apartheid: The Uneven Food Geographies of Seattle in the Era of Amazon,” *Environment and Planning F* 3, nos. 1–2 (2024): 81–105, <https://doi.org/10.1177/26349825241234430>.

recommendation systems cluster users into patterned relations of nearness and distance, while hashtags create pathways through which people, ideas, and political demands become linked across space and time. These same infrastructures do not distribute visibility evenly. As Safiya Noble argues, algorithms are shaped by the social values of the institutions that build them, often reproducing racialized and gendered hierarchies through forms of technological redlining rather than merely reflecting them.¹⁸¹ Hampton similarly demonstrates that algorithmic systems can render marginalized subjects both invisible and hypervisible, either erasing them from view or making them excessively legible in ways that intensify surveillance and harm.¹⁸² While Vaughan-Wynn and Jung’s research in Seattle remind us that these digital arrangements do not stay online but materialize in the built environment through delivery zones, access regimes, and platform-mediated infrastructures of everyday life.¹⁸³ Digital geography gives a language for understanding social media as a spatial technology that organizes belonging, on the screen and across the broader terrain of social life.

Tumblr offered me an informal but rigorous conceptual arena for theorizing identity and power. Haimson and his colleagues describing Tumblr as a “trans technology” underscores that this platform functioned as an infrastructure for becoming, one that allowed marginalized users to document transformation, access communal knowledge, and negotiate selfhood in ways formal institutions often failed to make possible¹⁸⁴. Tumblr had its own metrics of attention through notes, reblogs, and likes. Value on the platform often circulated through resonance and

¹⁸¹ Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York university press, 2018).

¹⁸² Lelia Marie Hampton, *Black Feminist Musings on Algorithmic Oppression*, version 2, (New York, NY), ahead of print, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2101.09869>.

¹⁸³ Vaughan-Wynn and Jung, “Digital Food Apartheid.”

¹⁸⁴ Oliver L. Haimson et al., “Tumblr Was a Trans Technology: The Meaning, Importance, History, and Future of Trans Technologies,” *Feminist Media Studies* 21, no. 3 (2021): 345–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1678505>.

shared discourse. Instagram's "like" economy, by contrast, makes approval more immediately visible and quantifiable by attaching social value to images through metrics that reward aesthetic coherence and desirability. I now seek to locate this digital arena of identity formation, communal knowledge, and self-theorization in the digital landscape of Instagram (IG). Carrying that framework forward, I turn to Instagram as a related but distinct digital geography, one where the politics of identity are organized less through reblogged discourse than through curated visibility and consumption. In contrast to Tumblr, Instagram is a platform about being seen, emphasizing aesthetics and consumption.¹⁸⁵ I ask, *how do Black queer foodies navigate, resist, or refuse this visual economy?* By visual economy I mean the platformed system through which images are sorted, aestheticized, and assigned value according to their capacity to conform to dominant norms of desirability and consumption. I am shifting my focus from discourse and theory to curation and algorithmic regulation of identity. What Tumblr nurtured was a Black feminist mode of online theorizing: a form of knowledge production rooted in intersectional critique, everyday experience, and the understanding that feeling and embodiment are legitimate grounds for analysis. If Tumblr nurtured this mode of online theorizing, Instagram reveals how visibility itself becomes commodified and policed, especially for those at the intersections of Blackness, queerness, and food culture. That demands a different kind of analytic because of the centrality of food to its visual culture. Unlike Tumblr, where layered dialogue and counterpublic discourse structured much of the platform's political life, Instagram organizes identity through images and aesthetics. That distinction is important for a project on Black queer food. Food on Instagram is curated, stylized, made searchable, and assigned value within a visual economy that rewards desirability and consumption. Instagram is therefore the right site for this project's

¹⁸⁵ Tania Lewis, *Digital Food: From Paddock to Platform*, 1st ed. (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350055131>.

inquiry because it elucidates how Black queer food practices are negotiated within a platform that makes visibility both an opportunity and a risk. It is also one of the dominant digital spaces through which food, identity, and value are made aestheticized and algorithmically sorted.

This chapter examines the social media platform Instagram as a digital food geography, exploring how Black queer food practices circulate within the platform's distinct visual and algorithmic economies. I trace how IG organizes visibility and belonging in ways that echo the racialized spatial logics of the offline world. Through an investigation of hashtags such as #BlackQueerFood, I first confront my methodological expectations of a coherent archive of Black queer food content. What initially appears as absence or lack, I deem as refusal. As outlined in earlier chapters, I understand refusal not as disappearance but as a strategic negotiation of legibility, and this chapter shows how that negotiation operates on Instagram in particular, where Black queer foodies navigate a platform that turns visibility into value and opacity into a necessary mode of self-protection. Drawing on Black queer studies and Black geographies, I pair an interview with a Black queer chef named Steph with digital ethnographic engagement to show how her everyday acts of cooking, posting, and eating become fugitive forms of self-definition and care. In doing so, this chapter reframes Instagram not as a neutral site of representation but as a terrain where Black queer foodies negotiate visibility, safety, and sustenance through quiet, embodied acts of opacity and digital refusal.

Instagram as a Food Geography

Launched in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, Instagram brought a whole new media network culture to smartphone users with its unique photo-sharing platform.¹⁸⁶ Emerging

¹⁸⁶ Herman, “#EatingfortheInsta: A Semiotic Analysis of Digital Representations of Food on Instagram”; Leaver et al., *Instagram*; Lachlan MacDowall, *Instafame: Graffiti and Street Art in the Instagram Era* (Intellect, 2019).

from the male-dominated world of early 2010s Silicon Valley, Instagram was shaped by a startup culture that prized rapid growth, scale, and visibility as forms of value. In 2012, Facebook announced its acquisition of Instagram for approximately \$1 billion, further cementing the platform's place within a highly commercialized social media economy.¹⁸⁷ The addition of digital cameras to cell phones in the late 2000's set the stage for a visually oriented social media app like IG to take the virtual world by storm. The portmanteau, combining "instant" with "telegram," hints at the creators' vision to revolutionize social media in the same ways the telegraph did with instantaneous communication across continents.¹⁸⁸ The design is considered an "open architecture," allowing "users to approach content from different directions, for example, through a feed of followed accounts, through the explore function, via hashtags or monitoring the likes and follows of other users."¹⁸⁹ Everyone engages with it differently, creating different subcultures like secret cliques or fan clubs. Some users use it as their personal virtual photo album, others employ it as a global library. Overall, Instagram functions as both platform and infrastructure: a technological and cultural space that mediates how people see, share, and understand themselves and others in the digital age.

Features such as the feed, the hashtags, and the explore page contribute to the platform's architecture of shareability. These affordances are the possibilities and constraints built into a platform's design that influence how users interact.¹⁹⁰ Temporality, belonging, and visibility are mediated here. The feed structures what you see and when, the hashtag connects users with

¹⁸⁷ Leaver et al., *Instagram*.

¹⁸⁸ Contois and Kish, *Food Instagram*; Leaver et al., *Instagram*.

¹⁸⁹ MacDowall, *Instafame*, 9.

¹⁹⁰ Taina Bucher and Anne Helmond, "The Affordances of Social Media Platforms," in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, by Jean Burgess et al. (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473984066.n14>; Peter Nagy and Gina Neff, "Imagined Affordance: Reconstructing a Keyword for Communication Theory," *Social Media + Society* 1, no. 2 (2015): 2056305115603385, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115603385>.

shared interests and hobbies, and the algorithm decides who is featured or shadowbanned. When users are shadowbanned their content is quietly rendered less visible to other users without formal notice. As its popularity grew, perceptions of its intended uses expanded, as did interest in its impact on American culture. By 2018, it had surpassed Twitter, reaching 1 billion users ¹⁹¹, with food becoming one of its most popular and regulated topics.¹⁹²

Initially, the abundance of photos of babies, brunches, and pets almost pigeonholed it into an app of white affluence and leisure, but its accessible design and visual flexibility soon opened space for a wider range of users to represent their own worlds, turning the platform into a dynamic site where identity, culture, and power could be negotiated through everyday images.¹⁹³ The immediacy of eating aligned perfectly with Instagram's "instant" logic: its minimalist interface, square format, filters, and hashtag system rewarded spontaneous, beautiful images of meals that could be shared instantly. Food soon flooded the platform, proving ideal for Instagram's influencer and attention economies because it was universal, photogenic, and emotionally evocative. It bridged everyday relatability with aspirational lifestyles, turning the act of eating into shareable cultural capital. This convergence of design, visibility, and affect laid the groundwork for the rise of distinct food subcultures on the app, where users mobilize food images to build community, perform identity, and challenge dominant norms. While these early affordances made Instagram especially hospitable to stylized food photography, the platform's later shift away from the square image and toward video-based content would further transform how food, identity, and visibility circulated on the app.

¹⁹¹ Leaver et al., *Instagram*.

¹⁹² Michelle Ruiz, "Instagram Feeding Frenzy: How 'Influencers' Are Changing the Food Scene | Bon Appétit," April 11, 2016, https://www.bonappetit.com/entertaining-style/trends-news/article/rise-of-influencers-ruining-everything?srsltid=AfmBOopk4wsJztLE4kHFhdkHGmlz_Rq5I_FWH-55Wy2ASIFjc334IibX.

¹⁹³ Contois and Kish, *Food Instagram*.

Early social media scholarship largely focused on Twitter and Facebook, while Instagram was slower to be taken up as a major object of analysis, in part because its visual, feminized, and consumer-oriented cultures were often trivialized within academic research¹⁹⁴. Instagram has garnered some attention but its presumption as a feminine consumerist platform has slowed its interest. Some publications are addressing the ways Instagram has influenced society but its depth and significance are still being uncovered. It was only five years ago that the first book exclusively focused on Instagram was published.¹⁹⁵ While the app has evolved a lot since then, this body of work provided a comprehensive examination of how Instagram shaped and reflected emerging visual social media cultures. They discuss how the platform's design, from its filters and feed to its algorithms and influencer economy, establish new norms around visibility, self-presentation, and authenticity online. IG's infrastructure encourages users to curate idealized digital selves and create content for commercial gain is situated within larger conversations about labor, surveillance, and affect. The authors' research presents a critical backdrop for understanding how content circulates on the platform today and how marginalized users, particularly Black queer creators, navigate and sometimes subvert these economies of visibility.

This larger conversation about Instagram's culture of visibility and self-presentation comes into sharper focus when we turn to food, one of the platform's most popular and revealing subjects. This approach builds on a longer semiotic tradition that treats food as a signifying system. In "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," Barthes famously argued that food functions as "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of

¹⁹⁴ Contois and Kish, *Food Instagram*.

¹⁹⁵ Leaver et al., *Instagram*.

usages, situations, and behavior,”¹⁹⁶ while Stano similarly insists that food is not only a substance for survival but also part of a broader sign system through which cultural meanings are produced.¹⁹⁷ To understand how Instagram food culture produces meaning, I perform a semiotic analysis of food images, hashtags, and captions as signs that organize identity, value, and belonging. In “#EatingfortheInsta: A Semiotic Analysis of Digital Representations of Food on Instagram,” Herman examines the cultural impacts Instagram has had on Western culture’s relationship to food.¹⁹⁸ By analyzing the functions of hashtags and their direct relationship to trendy topics, she argues that not only does posting pictures become a curation of digital identities but also redefines food as a more abstract entity. “IG grants users the ease of specifying meaning through hosting photos, enabling captions to describe the images, and adding both location markers (geotags) and hashtags, which link to other related content.”¹⁹⁹ A simple photo of dinner at a restaurant morphs into an expression of personal interest, a signal of belongingness to a social class, as well as an overt and discreet advertisement. These food images, detached from the act of eating and reattached to ideals of lifestyle, taste, and aspiration, transform food into what Herman calls a simulacrum, blurring the lines between real and imagined. Instagram produces and circulates new meanings of food that blur the boundaries between nourishment and performance.

While food images on Instagram signal belonging and aspiration, hashtags expose how visibility itself becomes a contested space marked by both struggle and possibility. Negotiating

¹⁹⁶ Roland Barthes, “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption,” in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315680347-2>

¹⁹⁷ Simona Stano, “Introduction: Semiotics of Food,” *Semiotica* 2016, no. 211 (2016): 19–26, <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2016-0095>.

¹⁹⁸ Herman, “#EatingfortheInsta: A Semiotic Analysis of Digital Representations of Food on Instagram.”

¹⁹⁹ Herman, “#EatingfortheInsta: A Semiotic Analysis of Digital Representations of Food on Instagram.”

visibility, identity, and circulation, hashtags recast the logics of social media as instruments of counterpublic expression and social justice. To understand how this practice emerged, *Hashtag Activism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* traces the political life of hashtags on Twitter, the platform where the practice originated.²⁰⁰ The authors describe Twitter as a counterpublic digital space that allows marginalized people to tell their own stories, often in opposition to mainstream media narratives. They define hashtag activism as “the strategic ways counterpublic groups and their allies on Twitter employ this shortcut to make political contentions about identity politics that advocate for social change, identity redefinition, and political inclusion.”²⁰¹ Drawing on communication studies, digital humanities, and network science, Jackson, Bailey, and Welles argue “for the importance of the digital labor of raced and gendered counterpublics.”²⁰² They demonstrate how such counterpublics are vital for Black people, women, and queer and trans folks who have been historically misrepresented or excluded from traditional media spaces.

The hashtag #SayHerName gained visibility after the police murder of Sandra Bland and later became the title of a report by the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) that addressed Black women’s experiences of profiling and policing. The campaign challenged mainstream narratives that “Black women and girls are victims of the state only through their relationships with Black men who have been killed and harmed by police violence.”²⁰³ It memorialized victims of state and gendered violence such as Bland and Rekia Boyd, whose deaths reveal the normalization of violence against Black women. #SayHerName merged visibility with

²⁰⁰ Sarah J. Jackson et al., *#HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* (The MIT Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10858.001.0001>.

²⁰¹ Jackson et al., *#HashtagActivism*, xxviii.

²⁰² Jackson et al., *#HashtagActivism*, 1.

²⁰³ Jackson et al., *#HashtagActivism*, 52.

storytelling, grief, and protest, exposing how misogynoir often renders Black women's suffering invisible while reshaping social justice movements both online and offline. Its transformation, from hashtag to organizing resource to digital archive, embodies a Black feminist ethic that complicates visibility and redefines the political potential of digital space.

While Twitter has been a primary site for such forms of digital activism, hashtags now circulate across platforms like Instagram, where they function not only as tools for activism but also as means of archiving, connecting, and curating community visibility. Compared to Twitter, their use on visual platforms has received far less scholarly attention, but these spaces reveal how visibility operates not just through words and discourse, but through images, aesthetics, and affective connection. *Hashtag Activism* shows how visibility can be a powerful response to oppression but visibility is not neutral or inherently liberatory.²⁰⁴ It was not and is not always feasible or safe for marginalized folks to be seen. Catherine Knight Steele points out how certain hashtags may celebrate Black women such as #BlackGirlMagic but in the offline world Black women's contributions remain invisible or undervalued in serious political discourse. Visibility is a double edge condition. Even as Black women's ideas circulate more widely, that recognition remains unstable, since "our ideas are co-opted" even while "our victimization remains on the margins."²⁰⁵ This selective recognition can quickly become a spectacle more than empowering.

To fully understand how foodways take shape online, hashtags must be seen as contested digital geographies. Within this geographic framework, they function as more than tools of communication; they actively shape how space is organized on social media. This framing matters for digital food geographies because it reveals that food hashtags, like #Foodie,

²⁰⁴ Jackson et al., *#HashtagActivism*.

²⁰⁵ Catherine Knight Steele, *Digital Black Feminism*, Critical Cultural Communication (New York University Press, 2021).

#SoulFood, or in my case #BlackQueerFood, do more than index taste, they map belonging. Participation, exclusion, proximity are all mediated through these hashtagged terrains in ways that mirror the racial and sexual spatial politics of the physical world. Thinking about hashtags as spatial infrastructures aligns with André Brock's *Distributed Blackness*²⁰⁶ and Catherine Knight Steele's *Digital Black Feminism*²⁰⁷, both bodies of work treat online space as lived, embodied, and racialized. Visibility is situated as more than simply appearing. It is a strategic negotiation of legibility about who and what gets seen within systems that surveil or commodify Black and queer expression. It's a reclamation of spatial power where marginalized communities can resist and reimagine.

This body of scholarship reframes social media as a contested geography where power, identity, and visibility are continually negotiated through digital design and user practice. Building on these insights, I turned to Instagram expecting to find a vibrant #BlackQueerFood network, an archive of images, meals, and stories that might illuminate how Black queer people use food to claim space online. Food is a visual experience before it is a tangible one, and because Instagram centers on photography, I saw it as the most suitable platform for examining the relationship between food justice and digital media, especially in contrast to more text-based apps. In my own life, I had noticed the growing use of the terms *queer food* and *Black queer food*. When Bryant Terry released a cookbook in 2021 featuring an entire chapter on Black queer food, I was certain Instagram would reflect this expanding discourse.²⁰⁸ Similar to what Bailey, Welles, and Jackson observed on Twitter, I expected that studying Instagram would reveal how

²⁰⁶ André L. Brock, *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures*, Critical Cultural Communication Ser, v. 9 (New York University Press, 2020).

²⁰⁷ Steele, *Digital Black Feminism*.

²⁰⁸ Bryant Terry, *Black Food: Stories, Art, and Recipes from Across the African Diaspora [a Cookbook]* (Potter/Ten Speed/Harmony/Rodale, 2021).

hashtags construct counternarratives to the misrepresentations of food accessibility in Black and queer communities. I set out to explore how Black queer people who love food or who have built careers around it were using the platform. What I found instead was absence, a silence that, as I argue in the next section, signals a form of queer food refusal.

The Hashtag That Wasn't

My arrival at the term Black queer food emerged through a personal journey of learning how food could hold me emotionally, creatively, and spiritually. The red velvet story shared in the introduction reflects this process of intimately narrating how food has been a life-giving force in shaping my identity. What it means to me to be a Black queer womxn is informed by my relationship to food, and how I embody those subjectivities in my daily life is expressed through it. When I bake my mom's sweet potato pie, I am flooded with memories of her freestyling measurements of allspice, cinnamon, and nutmeg into a bowl of semi-smashed sweet potatoes, eggs, and sweetened condensed milk. I am her sous chef, quietly begging for a recipe that she can only communicate through intuition and feeling. "It's just a lil bit of dis with a small pinch of that, Keila." When the pie is finished, the crust golden and the custard set, I grab the homemade whipped cream and reach for two forks to share a slice with my girlfriend. Eating it together folds memory and presence into the same moment, a quiet reminder of the care, accountability, and trust we continue to build.

It was in these small, intimate rituals that I began to realize food was carrying meanings I hadn't yet learned to name. Once I understood food as a medium that embodies and affirms the feelings I could not yet find words for, Black queer food filled in those gaps. It defined a ritual of love and care, an imagined geography that defied the linearity of space and time, passed from my mother's hands to mine, sustained each time my girlfriend and I cook, eat, and make room for

one another at the table. My use of the term was personal, but it was also arriving at a moment when the phrase was gaining recognition in broader food and cultural spaces. When I first said it out loud in 2018, it felt like a private articulation of belonging. By 2020, conversations around queer food were appearing in cookbooks, online communities, and more mainstream cultural discourse, it had become a shared language for many of us naming the intersections of identity, care, and creativity.²⁰⁹ The authors featured in the “Black, Queer, Food” section of Bryant Terry’s *Black Food* anthology echo this understanding and it was the first I saw queer food writings intersect with blackness.²¹⁰ Through essays, recipes, and conversations, contributors like Zoe Adjonyoh, Lazarus Lynch, and Ebony Derr reflect on how cooking and eating become practices of intimacy, resistance, and world-making. Their work confirmed that Black queer food is not only about what is prepared or consumed, but about how nourishment itself becomes a way of claiming space, building kinship, and imagining new futures.

With these connections taking root in kitchens, books, and cultural conversations, I turned to social media expecting to find similar languages of care, creativity, and resistance thriving on Instagram. I began my search with the hashtags #blackqueerfood and #blackqueerfoodies, terms that mirrored the exact communities I sought to engage: Black and

²⁰⁹ Fitzpatrick, “Queer Food Is Hiding in Plain Sight”; Hall, “Toward a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food”; Kafai, “Imagining Queer, Fat Food Futures”; Lenart, “Adapting Queer Foodways”; *MoAD Black Queer Food Full Discussion*, directed by Museum of African Diaspora, 2019, Video, 123 minutes, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ig6YSs-9GdA&t=3602s>; Pradhan, “(PDF) Too Gay an Oreos!” https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338901646_Too_Gay_an_Oreo_The_Cultural_Connotations_of_Queering_Food. Fitzpatrick, Hall, Kafai, Lenart, Museum of African Diaspora, and Pradhan collectively mark the emergence of queer food as both a scholarly and public-facing discourse. Hall’s “Toward a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food” offers an early theoretical intervention by bringing queer, crip, and feminist analysis to food studies, while Kafai’s “Imagining Queer, Fat Food Futures” extends this conversation through fatness, disability, pleasure, and refusal. Fitzpatrick, Lenart, and Pradhan show how queer food became increasingly visible in online food writing, popular media, and community food practice by the late 2010s and early 2020s. The Museum of African Diaspora’s 2019 panel on Black queer food is especially significant because it names Black queer food as a distinct site of cultural production, creativity, memory, and community formation. These texts explain how queer food became a shared language for naming the intersections of identity, care, pleasure, and culinary imagination.

²¹⁰ Terry, *Black Food*.

queer. Within this online archive, however, there were fewer than one hundred posts using these tags. Specifically, #blackqueerfood had only eleven posts, and #blackqueerfoodies had fifteen, a pattern that has remained consistent since 2022. Most of these posts were linked to Bryant Terry's *Black Food* and his 2022 Museum of the African Diaspora panel titled "Black Queer Food." One additional account, @_eats4beats, belonged to a polyamorous, gender-nonconforming chef based in Philadelphia. These numbers were far smaller than I anticipated, prompting me to explore related tags such as #blackqueerchef (40 posts), #blackqueercooking (0 posts), and #blacklgbtqfood (0 posts). Posts under #blackqueerchef featured figures like Lazarus Lynch, the first Black queer chef to cook at the Met Gala in 2021, and Cole Lawson, a Los Angeles-based chef and strategist whose work explores the intersections of memory, land, and liberation. While this expanded my findings slightly, the overall presence remained sparse. Since 2019, I have periodically returned to these searches to see if engagement has grown. As of 2025, it had not. This corner of Instagram remains largely unoccupied by Black queer foodies, farmers, chefs, and restaurateurs seeking to document, share, or cultivate their culinary lives online.

Was I wrong? Were Black queer folks not sharing their unique perspectives on food online? I found that hard to accept. These results directly contradicted what I knew from my own experience on social media. I followed and personally knew Black queer people who worked with and loved food, who were visibly engaging online. So why didn't the #blackqueerfood archive reflect that? Was it simply a label that had not yet been taken up by Black queer food lovers? In time, I realized I had been asking the wrong questions. The issue was never a lack of Black queer people engaging with food online. It was the limitation of the archive itself. The hashtags I searched couldn't and/or didn't encapsulate the diverse ways Black queer folks were already cooking, sharing, and building community across digital spaces.

But even when Black and queer content is posted and explicitly hashtagged, platform algorithms determine whether it becomes visible at all. The digital architecture itself reproduces racialized exclusion. While the nature of Black queer life may already elude dominant modes of visibility, Instagram's infrastructural design further shapes this elusiveness, revealing how digital systems reproduce the very limits of legibility that Black queer life often exceeds. Safiya Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* unpacks the racial prejudice embedded in digital technologies, highlighting that search engines and algorithms reflect the values of their predominantly white male creators.²¹¹ Her most striking example is the search for "black girls," where pornography overwhelms the results, amplifying anti-Black stereotypes rather than offering genuine representations of Black girlhood. These supposedly "neutral technologies" encode and automate white supremacist beliefs. This inherent misrepresentation is not limited to Google; Instagram's algorithm similarly perpetuates racism, sexism, and other forms of systemic oppression, producing the same uneven visibility and inviting surveillance, commodification, and sometimes violence.²¹²

If the digital infrastructure privileges aesthetics aligned with whiteness and heteronormative desirability, then even when Black queer users do post about food, their content may be shadowbanned or rendered searchable only through hypersexualized or commodified tropes.²¹³ Algorithmic bias intensifies this dynamic by reproducing structural racism and sexism under neoliberal capitalism, creating a contradictory form of visibility in which Black queer content becomes hypervisible as spectacle yet invisible as legible subjectivity.²¹⁴ The limited

²¹¹ Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*.

²¹² Ruha Benjamin, *Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Polity, 2019).

²¹³ Contois and Kish, *Food Instagram*.

²¹⁴ Moya Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, Paperback edition, Intersections (New York University Press, 2022); Benjamin, *Race after Technology*; Brock, *Distributed Blackness*; Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*.

visibility of #blackqueerfood cannot be understood as exclusively cultural or linguistic, nor can it be reduced to the simple absence of users. It may instead reflect a range of forces: the architectural and algorithmic conditions that shape discoverability on Instagram, the use of alternative vocabularies for naming Black queer food practices, and the strategic choice not to render oneself searchable through a consolidated identity label. Yet Black queer users still find ways to forge connections, enact refusal, and create digital food geographies regardless of their misalignment with platform infrastructures. With that in mind, I ask: *what might declining to name or tag one's content as #blackqueerfood make possible? What does such nonnaming protect? What Black queer socialities are preserved when content is not easily searchable, categorizable, or brandable?* The thinness of the hashtag does not simply signal absence. It may also index forms of partial illegibility through which Black queer networks and knowledges circulate beyond the extractive demands of platform visibility.

Beyond the Hashtag

After sitting with my findings, I accepted that locating Black queer food geographies online required reframing my expectations. The lack of content is not about a gap in content within #Blackqueerfood tag. It is about what the hashtag is capable or incapable of capturing about Black queer food life. Rather than seeking a neat and clearly defined archive, I began to understand Black queer food more as a dispersed, affective, and embodied geography. Food is already entangled with silences or invisibilities. Rituals of cooking and eating operate within private, sensual, and/or metaphorical geographies that make certain dimensions of food incompatible with platforms that reward disclosure and streamlined legibility.²¹⁵ While I initially

²¹⁵ Bell and Valentine, *Consuming Geographies*; Maria Kuczera, "More Than a Lens: Reflections on Eating, Materiality, and Practice," *Graduate Journal of Food Studies*, ahead of print, October 16, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.21428/92775833.0dc24946>; Anita Mannur, *Intimate Eating: Racialized Spaces and*

positioned Instagram as an ideal social media platform to study food, scholars like Anita Mannur highlight how “intimate eating publics” generate belonging through kinship, not through public display.²¹⁶ Maria Kuczera said the embodied materiality of food, the taste, smell, and texture, is often flattened or lost when food is treated merely as a “lens”²¹⁷ and Zara Worth showed Instagram’s predominantly visual logic produces a “sensory dissociation,” separating food from its full, lived, gustatory meaning.²¹⁸ These insights demonstrate how the sensory, intimate, and relational dimensions of food exceed what platforms can capture and when these realities intersect with blackness and queerness, subjectivities also mediated by silence and invisibility, absence emerges as a mode of protection, sustaining relational practices that cannot be rendered through platform logics.

Methodologically, these realities of how hashtags function forced me to confront my own assumptions about Instagram's archives. I found it frustrating to realize that hashtags, though useful as starting points, would never fully represent the transformative and oppositional character of Black queer food. It became clear that the impulse to search and count hashtags were shaped by my academic expectations, data driven approaches, and the desire for convenient, easily interpretable results. Seeking a clean, coherent archive of Black and queer chefs through hashtags overlooked how Black food geographies defy dominant spatial logics

Radical Futures (Duke University Press, 2022); Zara Worth, “Shared Meals: Instagram as a Space for Virtual Feasting and Rites of Incorporation,” *Feast*, 2018, <https://archive.feastjournal.co.uk/article/shared-meals-instagram-as-a-space-for-virtual-feasting-and-rites-of-incorporation/>. <https://archive.feastjournal.co.uk/article/shared-meals-instagram-as-a-space-for-virtual-feasting-and-rites-of-incorporation/>.

²¹⁶ Mannur, *Intimate Eating*.

²¹⁷ Kuczera, “More Than a Lens.”

²¹⁸ Worth, “Shared Meals.”

both on- and offline.²¹⁹ I needed to theoretically reorient myself to recognize hashtags as both tools and spaces that offer critique on how platforms organize and constrain expressions of identity and culture. Yes, hashtags on Instagram function as key tools for categorizing and discovering content, but they also shape the platform's digital spatial arrangements. They encourage a very specific type of public visibility and consumability tied to branding and individual self-optimization that is fundamentally neoliberal.²²⁰ Identity turns into a type of searchable and monetizable metadata, directly impacting how users carve out their personal spaces.

These arrangements, produced by Instagram's technical systems and social norms, parallel physical geographies of domination; my attempts to use hashtags to locate the phenomena I was seeking revealed just how limited these structures are. Black queer food geographies are often intimate and selective. Intentionally disengaged from imposed food systems²²¹. Hashtags collapse or attempt to collapse this complexity into a single label, operating within an attention economy that rewards aesthetics and high engagement. Black queer food that prioritize intimacy do not traffic in these algorithmic currencies of hyper-stylized food shots or lifestyle branding. This makes Black queer food content less likely to surface even if it is tagged. Hashtags as one of Instagram's central organizing features cannot adequately capture Black queer foodways because it confines Blackness and queerness to fixed, searchable categories,

²¹⁹ Hawthorne, "Black Matters Are Spatial Matters"; McCutcheon, "Food, Faith, and the Everyday Struggle for Black Urban Community"; Ramírez, "The Elusive Inclusive"; Reese, *Black Food Geographies*.

²²⁰ Brooke Erin Duffy and Emily Hund, "Gendered Visibility on Social Media: Navigating Instagram's Authenticity Bind.," *International Journal of Communication* 13 (September 2019), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A610367795/LitRC?u=wash_main&sid=summon&xid=37f35667.

²²¹ Kara Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, Sexual Cultures (New York University press, 2019); Reese, *Black Food Geographies*.

ignoring how embodied queer experience may actually appear and are communicated when shared online.

Before treating #BlackQueerFood as a straightforward descriptive label, it is necessary to pause over the politics of the term *queer* itself. In “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” Cathy J. Cohen notes that many queer people of color have expressed misgivings about the term, which she describes as “fraught with unspoken assumptions that inhibit the radical political potential of this category.”²²² The interpretation of the word queer is connected to race, class, and gender privilege based on sexual dichotomies that leave little room for the experiences of Black folks.²²³ In other words, queer then is an identity too often centered on white gay men. Although tagging posts with keywords preceded by the # symbol makes content discoverable, connects it to broader conversations, and helps form online communities²²⁴, food as experienced and expressed by Black and queer chefs frequently resists and reconfigures these conventional spatial frameworks. When Black and queer foodways intersect, they take shape through deep sensory and embodied practices. Tastes, textures, and rituals unfold in kitchens, semi-private gatherings, and chosen-family spaces, settings that are often offline and not created for mass visibility or social media branding. Hashtags often collapse the complexity of these experiences because it demands a shared consistent terminology and queer digital aesthetics (i.e. the rainbow, glitter, sparkles). This collapse is what Black queer foodways refuse. Instead, Black queer food emerges

²²² Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens.”

²²³ Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” 36.

²²⁴ Contois and Kish, *Food Instagram*; Leaver et al., *Instagram*; Jackson et al., *#HashtagActivism*. Contois and Kish, Leaver et al., and Jackson et al. frame hashtags as digital tools that organize visibility, circulation, and community formation. Contois and Kish show how food creators use Instagram to construct identity, negotiate influence, and cultivate publics, while Leaver et al. explain how platform features such as hashtags, feeds, and metrics shape discoverability and participation. Jackson et al. further demonstrate how hashtags can function as networked counterpublics, linking individual posts to broader conversations around race, gender, and justice. These books clarify why hashtags matter as spatial and social infrastructures, even as Black and queer food practices often exceed the forms of visibility, categorization, and searchability that hashtags make possible.

as an imaginative geography that misaligns with neoliberal visibility and this is why its absence in Instagram's digital archive becomes a site of analysis to understand refusal. Absence does not equal empty or lack. It is a refusal of extractive visibility, a spatial strategy that resists being captured through dominant cartographies.

McKittick describes the dominant cartographies of plantations and prisons as sites of containment and surveillance.²²⁵ These spatial logics reduce Black life to suffering without acknowledging the complexity of Black spatial experiences, including the joy, creativity, kinship, and creativity that also exist in those spaces. Hashtags as a digital mapping tool, are not prisons or plantations but they echo similar logics at a different scale by depending on categorization and tracking, mechanisms that insist on legibility over complexity. Identities become stable, nameable, and easily indexed, but Black queer expression unfolds outside these neat architectures. So what if this absence was not an oversight but a reflection of how Black queer life resists and exceeds the digital logics of visibility? Black queer people may not use #BlackQueerFood because the rhetoric and aesthetics of queerness circulating online do not always resonate with their lived experiences or the digital communities they seek to connect with.²²⁶ Taking this into account, the racialized assumptions baked into the term "queer" are imported into hashtags like #Blackqueerfood.

The absence in the digital archive of #BlackQueerFood mirrors this hesitancy. E. Patrick Johnson's distinction between "queer" and "quare" further confirms Cohen's misgivings.²²⁷ This matters for my study because it suggests that #BlackQueerFood cannot be treated as a neutral or

²²⁵ McKittick, *Demonic Grounds*.

²²⁶ Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens"; Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother."

²²⁷ Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother."

universally available term through which Black LGBTQ+ users would necessarily choose to name themselves online. Within a queer-of-color critique, the ongoing sparseness of the #BlackQueerFood archive suggests that the prevailing language and aesthetics of “queer” remain misaligned with the needs and cultural expressions of Black LGBTQ+ people and their digital communities. Black queer refusals of hashtag visibility within digital food spaces reveal a different politics of online participation. To understand how this refusal illuminates the relationship between power and belonging online, I frame the sparseness of the archive as productive rather than empty. Drawing on Ferguson, Snorton, and Keeling, I treat limited visibility as both a critique and a method for analyzing how racialized power operates.²²⁸ Ferguson argues that Black queer life often escapes full legibility in state discourse and cultural archives because those frameworks were never designed to apprehend it.²²⁹ Snorton similarly shows that overlapping histories of anti-Blackness and trans marginalization make full visibility impossible, not as a deficit but as a methodological lens for understanding systems of power.²³⁰ Keeling extends this insight into digital spaces, showing how technological affordances both expose and reproduce these absences, thereby positioning invisibility as a productive lens for understanding power, belonging, and Black queer futurity.²³¹

²²⁸ Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, 1st ed, Critical American Studies (University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*; Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*.

²²⁹ Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*.

²³⁰ C. Riley Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the down Low* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

²³¹ Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*.^k

Steph and the Practice of Quare Food Refusal

These Black queer theories clarify how absence functions as critique and method, but they do not fully account for how these refusals are enacted in everyday digital practice. Everyday digital practice refers to the ordinary decisions users make about what to post, what not to post, which hashtags to avoid, how much of themselves to disclose, and how to remain present online without becoming fully available to platform capture. The significance of this hashtag absence is most legible when placed alongside the daily choices Black queer people make while navigating online food spaces. The interview that follows with a Black queer chef named Stephenie aka Steph grounds the conceptual frameworks in lived experience, highlighting how decisions around visibility and participation emerge not from disengagement but refusal of hashtag visibility and categorization that are not simply abstract politics but a deliberate negotiation of exposure and belonging online. For Steph, refusal does not mean leaving Instagram altogether; it means using the platform while declining some of the terms through which Instagram asks users to become searchable, branded, and easily recognizable. This case study argues that Steph's Instagram practice represents a form of queer Black food refusal grounded in pleasure, partial visibility, and strategic absence. Rather than completely disavowing social media, she forges a fugitive relationship to it: one that allows her to circulate images of food, travel, cannabis, desire, and everyday pleasure without translating those practices into a stable public identity category such as "Black queer food." This fugitivity encompasses posting without full legibility, cultivating intimacy without disclosure, and organizing her feed based on pleasure rather than identity.

I choose to focus on this particular interview because she was the only participant who intentionally began her culinary career through social media, specifically Instagram. She

articulated both the advantages of using IG to share content with wider and more diverse audiences and the platform's limitations. Other interviewees used social media selectively, but Steph used it as the primary infrastructure through which her culinary identity, audience, and professional trajectory were initially formed, making her attuned to the politics of visibility that shape how users are expected to present themselves as coherent, aestheticized, and searchable subjects on Instagram. This makes her especially useful for this chapter, as she offers a clear example of how Black queer food can refuse the compulsory demand to become legible through dominant hashtag economies. Stephenie's narrative paired with a visual and semiotic analysis of her IG page confirm that absence can function as a strategic mode of relation, and that Black queer food cultures exist online while simultaneously hiding in plain sight, refusing to appear in the normative ways one might assume or expect. How she has chosen to present herself as a Black queer chef exemplifies a form of refusal operating through her everyday posting choices rather than more overt forms of representation and resistance.

Stephenie is a 29-year old African American woman born and raised in Washington, oscillating between Olympia and Seattle. Food has always been important in her life. In the interview, she shared being inspired by various family members' cooking, such as her grandfather who traveled the world as a cook, her uncle's making mustard fried catfish, and elaborate dinner parties thrown by her aunt. Despite growing up with these core memories, she did not consider food a serious career option until the COVID-19 pandemic. The isolation amplified her desire to heal and recover parts of herself she denied or buried. "This was a unique opportunity to pause and get clearer on how I wanted to build a life for myself," she recalls. Amid a deep depression, it was a search for pleasure, self-acceptance, and self-love that led her back to food. Her partner at the time encouraged her to start calling herself "Chef Steph" and

helped secure her first catering event. Traveling between two cities with such rich food culture and history, New Orleans and Chicago, helped solidify her decision. Eventually she moved to Chicago, for food and for her relationship. The relationship was temporary but she moved forward with her plan and began making food posts on her social media page @highlyfavored_steph eventually leading her to return to Seattle in 2021. This was not a hobby or an indulgence. It was a necessity. Steph's decision to choose food while figuring out what reclaiming pleasure looked like for her was how she survived a once in a lifetime global pandemic.

She credits IG with providing opportunities that advanced her career. As of April 2026, she has garnered 2,600 followers on her page since its inception and has contributed over 400 posts. Her bio reads "turning my love for flowers and food into a reality. I make food that looks, tastes, and feels good."²³² Not all of her posts are directly food related but most of them are. Sometimes her posts are of food she's been paid to style, food she's enjoyed while eating out or traveling, or food she's made while working or at home. What is consistent is her ability to create enticing videos that capture the sumptuousness of food, highlighting both its rich textures and vibrant colors, which together enhance the sensory appeal and aesthetic quality of the dishes. Her usage of hashtags tell the story of her connections to her family's New Orleans lineage and her love of cannabis. Rather than using hashtags to make herself fully searchable within dominant food or queer economies, Steph employs them selectively, treating visibility as a choice rather than an obligation. She frequently uses #cannabiscooking, #blackchef, #blackfood, #seattleeats, but not on every post. This allows her to be visible without being entirely engulfed by IG's classificatory logics.

²³² Stephenie Simmons, "Instagram Profile of Stephenie," Instagram, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/highlyfavored_steph?igsh=ODJ4aWh1cHRqNXhi.

Surprisingly, one of the bigger videos that got people's response was when I talked about the relationship between cannabis and slavery. They actually encouraged slaves to smoke weed because it helped them to pass the time. It helped them to get through these long hours of labor. It was something that they grew alongside tobacco and other plants that could grow in their areas and stuff like that. On my post, I was just talking about how fucking wild that is. You know what I mean? Like, how wild is it that Black people get toted as being lazy, especially around cannabis. Like black people just smoke weed and they don't be doing shit and weed is why they don't be doing shit. It's all this negative shit. Ain't that fucking wild, you know?

The more she learned about cannabis's political and racial history, the more she leaned into educating her followers on it while sharing recipes that featured it as an ingredient. With time and consistent posting, her catering business grew and so did her career opportunities. She ventured further into exploring the relationship between cannabis and food, learning to grow, cultivate, and harvest marijuana. She was featured on her favorite podcast *Inner Hoe Uprising* where she shared how becoming a chef reconnected her back to pleasure in an episode titled "Pleasure, Cannabis, & Cooking."²³³ She goes in-depth of the importance for her as a Black woman to offer a counter narrative of pleasure and self-care to the common misconceptions we have been told about marijuana usage among Black people that have led to their mass incarceration. There is an obvious refusal to subscribe to the stigma of using marijuana or situating it as a form of deviant behavior. There's another form of refusal happening as well. By turning toward cannabis education and linking it to Black survival, labor, and pleasure, she

²³³ Sam et al., hosts, *Inner Hoe Uprising*, episode 15, Pleasure, Cooking & Cannabis w/ Chef Steph, YouTube, April 20, 2021, 72 minutes, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpGb_GHJrMA.

refuses the racialized narratives that discipline Black bodies online. Enjoyment becomes a political intervention and a quiet form of queer Black feminist resistance.

The podcast episode aired on April 20th, an international counterculture holiday based on the celebration and consumption of cannabis.²³⁴ In a post sharing the interview she says,

There's so much to unpack about the day 4-20, where it came from and what it means now. Today should not be the only day we become disgusted by incarceration and the impacts it has on those most affected by the criminalization of cannabis. White supremacy and capitalism benefit from theft of Black folks: our lives, labor and intellectual property. This can be found in every sector particularly food, music, and as today reveals again — cannabis. Pay attention. So today I smoke and cook to enjoy the pleasures of being Black and pay my respects to those who made it all possible.

#HighlyFavored.

Steph lets pleasure do the heavy lifting here. She is present and expressive, but she doesn't name smoking cannabis as an act of resistance, nor does she offer herself up for full consumption or categorization. Pleasure is an intentional refusal of carceral geographies that separate Black joy from political consciousness, not an escape or indulgence. She cleverly uses Instagram to stage pleasure as a refusal of the platform's tendency to flatten Black cannabis use into a spectacle or deviance.

In another post she shares two dinner recipes that explain how to infuse cannabis into the meal. These types of posts eventually led her to doing meal delivery services. Meal delivery services led her to underground cannabis events where she networked and cooked with other Black women involved in cannabis. For a few months, using food to educate her followers on

²³⁴ *Inner Hoe Uprising*.

cannabis and refute the stereotypes associated with Black people were one of the main focuses on her page, but during this time she also competed on Hulu's *Secret Chef*, a food competition reality TV show. She didn't win but the exposure helped her land a position at a James Beard nominated, Black owned restaurant named Communion. It was here she sharpened her knife skills and refined her leadership abilities working the front and back of the kitchen as a line cook and shift lead. She created a BIPOC summer cookout series, a free food community event with the *Black Farmers Collective*, featuring herself and other queer chefs in Seattle to celebrate the end of harvest season with the community. Our paths crossed in 2022 because like myself she won a scholarship attending a farm school in Rice, WA and in 2023, she assisted a fellow Black woman chef in opening Seattle's first Liberian & Ghanaian restaurant. These moments illustrate how refusal can coexist with visibility. Rather than presenting her story as a simple narrative of progress, I share her accomplishments to underscore how recognition can occur without full legibility or assimilation. Quare food refusal is not a form of oppositional withdrawal. Her success reflects an ongoing negotiation of how to move through institutional spaces while retaining control over how one is read, recognized, and categorized.

In Steph's account of these moments, her queerness and sexual orientation were central to the decisions she made about what to claim, what to withhold, and how to move through food work publicly. During our interview she expresses that her "highest self has always been a queer gay self" but growing up within a religious conservative family, like many others, she was hesitant to actively identify as such.²³⁵ Her queerness had always been present, but it wasn't until shortly before the pandemic, as she reintroduced food into her life as a career, a creative outlet, and a place of healing, that she began to fully claim it. This point makes the interview especially

²³⁵ Stephenie Simmons, "Interview with Steph," January 23, 2024.

important for understanding Steph's virtual enactment of queer food refusal, because her Instagram page does not explicitly name her queerness. There are no rainbow emojis, explicitly queer hashtags, or overt signifiers that would render her sexuality immediately legible within dominant digital economies of identity. But this does not mean queerness is absent. Following Snorton, I do not read this through the conventional epistemology of the closet. The closet assumes a movement from concealment to disclosure, from hidden truth to public revelation, as if liberation depends on making sexuality fully known. Snorton's formulation of the glass closet complicates that model by showing how Black sexuality is already made available to observation, speculation, fantasy, and surveillance. In his framework, the problem is not that Black queer sexuality remains unknown, but that it is made knowable through distorted and constrained terms. I understand the tension between Steph's lived queerness and its nonexplicit presentation on Instagram through this contradictory logic of the glass closet, where Black sexuality is made subject to constrained forms of display.²³⁶ Steph's refusal to name or hashtag her queerness directly, then, should be read as a way of negotiating a digital environment where Black queer self-presentation can be watched, misread, consumed, or folded into hypersexualized and commodified narratives before it is recognized as self-defined subjectivity. This withholding is a conscious refusal of the demand that identity be made publicly searchable in order to be recognized as real. Her online presence instead works through partial legibility, allowing queerness to remain lived, intimate, and embodied without being fully surrendered to the platform's economies of visibility. She is rejecting the expectation that identity must be publicly named to be lived, creating a deliberate practice of resisting the demand that queerness

²³⁶ Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed to Know*.

be made visible, searchable, or legible to be recognized as valid. When I asked her how her queerness connected to her relationship with food she said:

I think in relation to my queerness that has blossomed and changed... in the same very curious way that I enjoy food and continue to enjoy food. There's just a curious nature, an exciting, pleasure based feeling that I get when I think about fucking Simone right now and then when I think about eating something very good. And so I think at the same time of me trying to figure out what abuse looks like and what that means. As a very young person, I'm also learning what food is.

Steph lived in silence about her sexual trauma for years, a silence that left her feeling lonely and disconnected from herself. Rather than seeing the emotional independence that grew out of this isolation as a flaw, she came to understand it as an opportunity to reclaim agency over her life. Food became the avenue through which she did so, beginning with the simple act of posting her meals online each day. Her desire to heal, coupled with a longing to release shame, drew her toward food as both a creative practice and a source of meaning. In the midst of a deep depression, her search for pleasure, self-acceptance, and self-love ultimately led her to claim the title of chef. In our conversation, Steph expressed that she was still learning how pleasure lives in her body and still defining what food means to her. The way she spoke about pleasure as something she was actively discovering through food and intimacy gave me this impression, as if it was not something that had fully settled or was easily named but at that time she seemed content linking the joy of good food with the desire to share sexual intimacy with her partner. Rather than separating nourishment from desire, she described them as mutually illuminating, suggesting that pleasure was becoming legible to her through these intertwined bodily experiences. This turn toward food was not simply about creative fulfillment or public visibility,

but about learning how to inhabit herself after years of survival and how to do so through practices that made pleasure feel possible again. Her relationship to food resonates with Savannah Shange's framing of Black queer taste as a refusal of the logics that equate value with usefulness, productivity, and external legibility. For Shange, Black queer food practice is not only about sustenance but about entering both the kitchen and the bedroom with one's own appetite, cultivating forms of joy and care that are not organized around service to others. Steph's turn toward food similarly emerged as a trauma-informed practice of self-preservation, one through which pleasure could be approached without being fully surrendered to public view. Her refusal of complete legibility online is therefore not an absence or a failure to speak. It is an embodied practice of care that prioritizes self-preservation and refusal protects pleasure as a condition of that preservation.

When Steph reflects on the risks she took and the conditions that made food feel necessary rather than optional, she situates this choice within a longer history of emotional self-reliance, articulating food as the space where agency, care, and choice finally converged.

I think being willing to take that risk to go into food full time made me have a certain level of self-trust. I really care about this thing, so I'm going to make it work. I have to make it work. And I think with my abuse, I had a lot of privilege as a child, but also a huge level of emotional independence, right? I'm carrying something for a very long time. I live in this space, you know? I'm in control of this space. I have to work with a space in me, in my body, in my mind, in my heart. I have to live here, you know? And so if I have to live here, what do I want? If I'm choosing to live, what's it gonna be? There has to be something. You know? My family isn't enough right now. My job surely isn't enough. Living in Chicago, this place is not enough. What is it gonna be? I chose food.

Choosing food marks a refusal, not against a single institution, but against the accumulation of demands that asked her to endure rather than decide how she wanted to live. This structured how she appeared online, guided by pleasure and care not obligation. Steph's reflections make clear that her choice of food as a career and creative outlet cannot be separated from her coming into queerness. The same curiosity, pleasure-seeking, and bodily attentiveness that shaped her understanding of sexual intimacy also informed how she learned to relate to food; slowly, experimentally, and on her own terms. Choosing food was not only a professional decision but a queer one: a means of cultivating pleasure after trauma, reclaiming control over the body, and refusing dominant scripts that demand legibility, disclosure, or visibility as proof of queer life. Food becomes the site where Steph practices queerness quietly yet deliberately, allowing desire, care, and self-trust to guide both how she eats and how she lives. Instagram becomes the site where her embodied relationship to pleasure is spatialized, allowing her to live out queerness through what she shares (and doesn't share), consumes (and refuses to consume), explains and (refuses to explain). Steph's narrative is a queerness grounded in practice rather than proclamation, one that resists visibility as obligation. This refusal of explicit declaration shapes how she moves online, where pleasure becomes the organizing principle of space rather than identity labels.

Rethinking Digital Food Geographies

This chapter has argued that Black queer food cannot be located only through hashtags, explicit declarations, or platform-generated categories. Instagram promises visibility, discoverability, and connection but its classificatory logics narrow what can be recognized as Black, queer, or food-related in the first place. To rely on hashtags as the primary method for finding Black queer foodways is therefore to mistake platform visibility for social presence. It

overlooks the ways Black queer life has long survived through partial legibility, coded expression, strategic withholding, and refusal. Stephenie's Instagram practice makes this problem clear. Her absence from hashtags such as #BlackQueerFood is not a sign of lack, stigma, or political absence. It demonstrates a form of fugitive visibility: a way of using digital space without becoming fully available to capture, categorization, or surveillance. Through images and narratives of cooking, cannabis, pleasure, and everyday self-making, Stephenie creates a Black queer food geography that does not depend on naming itself as such. Her practice requires an expanded understanding of queerness as more than an identity label, but as a way of reorganizing space, relation, pleasure, and survival.

Cannabis is central to this reorganization. Following Laura Alexandra Harris, I understand pleasure as a queer Black feminist practice shaped by race, class, gender, and sexuality.²³⁷ In Stephenie's posts, cannabis becomes part of a queer food praxis of pleasure that refuses the terms through which Black women, chefs, and cannabis users are often disciplined. Against norms that value Black women primarily through labor, and against narratives that frame cannabis users as lazy, criminal, or irresponsible, Stephenie positions pleasure as a practice of agency, self-actualization, and everyday refusal. Her Instagram illustrates Harris's pleasure principle and extends it into the terrain of digital food geography, where food, cannabis, embodiment, and curation are methods for making Black queer life livable. This is methodologically important because if Black queer foodways are often untagged, implicit, coded, or withheld, then researchers must move beyond metrics as the primary evidence of digital life. Hashtags can reveal some forms of connection, but they cannot account for the affective and fugitive practices through which Black queer people make meaning online.

²³⁷ Laura Alexandra Harris, "Queer Black Feminism: The Pleasure Principle," *Feminist Review*, no. 54 (1996): 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1395608>.

Reading for Black queer food requires attention to what is present without being declared, what is shared without being fully disclosed, and what is made visible only to those who know how to read for it. Following Cohen, these practices emerge from life at the margins of normative respectability, where survival often depends not on full visibility but on the careful management of exposure²³⁸. Rethinking digital food geographies, then, means refusing to treat Instagram as a neutral archive of searchable content. It means understanding the platform as a contested space where Black queer people negotiate visibility, pleasure, care, and risk. Stephenie's digital food practice shows that Black queer food is not absent because it is difficult to find through hashtags. It may be operating through forms of relation, pleasure, and refusal that exceed the platform's categories. To study Black queer food online, we must learn to read what remains partial, implicit, sensorial, and deliberately uncaptured.

²³⁸ Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens."

Conclusion: Still, We Eat

This dissertation spends a lot of time naming what Black queer geographies are, where they are, how they have come to be, and why they matter. At times it has felt like a plea, in defense of a community that is simultaneously appropriated and undervalued. That impulse toward defense is grounded in something both ordinary and urgent: the conditions under which Black queer life is nourished, often through practices as fundamental, and as overlooked as eating. The simple decision to eat is a profoundly important one. Where and when and what we eat is even more important. Something that is physiologically required of every body on this planet is loaded with information about who we are and the environments we inhabit. It is such a taken for granted act that unless we are without it, it doesn't necessarily receive the attention it deserves. But even when it does, we have yet to eliminate food insecurity, an epidemic that is neither inevitable nor morally defensible. As quotidian as the act may be, it is laced with meaning. Everyday when people, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation make the decision to eat, they are making a choice to live. When they choose to cook with or for someone else, they are extending that choice to others, a nonverbal way to say, "I hope you live too." These daily choices matter when the nation state is dedicated to eliminating your existence whether that be passively by failing to provide adequate resources to sustain your living or actively passing legislation that normalizes the violation of your human rights.²³⁹ Against a government that doesn't see the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion, to eat is a bold declaration to survive, to see your life as worthy of being lived.

²³⁹ Cullen Peele, "Roundup of Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation Advancing In States Across The...", HRC, Human Rights Campaign, May 23, 2023, <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/roundup-of-anti-lgbtq-legislation-advancing-in-states-across-the-country>.

This dissertation begins the task of articulating a Black queer food framework that theorizes with the everyday habits and rituals that sustain Black queer life. I name these practices quare food refusals. These refusals are strategies of survival within a political climate shaped by anti-Blackness, queerphobia, racial capitalism, and the hollow promises of progressive inclusion. They may appear ordinary or difficult to discern, but that difficulty is intentional. They are not always meant to stand out. They are meant to hide in plain sight. They may look invisible because they are not meant for everyone to see. They may not seem political because they do not always appear as organized protest, public declaration, or institutional demand. But when the state does not care whether people like you live or die, survival is resistance. To choose a joyous life is resistance. To eat, to feed others, and to gather around food are radical choices grounded in the desire to live and to help others continue living. Quare food refusals may not look queer in ways that satisfy dominant expectations of queer visibility, but that is part of their power. In this project, queer is a political orientation as much as it is a sexual identity. It names a decision to live in defiance of white cisheteronormativity, and to make food worlds where Black queer lives, appetites, pleasures, and forms of care matter on their own terms.

In July 2025, the government passed a federal budget law that made significant cuts and changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This included stricter eligibility and work requirements.²⁴⁰ By the fall, those cuts collided with the federal government shutdown, placing food assistance in immediate crisis. In Washington, officials warned that SNAP/Basic Food benefits would run out after October 31 if the shutdown continued, threatening nearly 930,000 low-income residents with delayed or disrupted food assistance. That

²⁴⁰ Alexandra Yoon-Hendricks, *WA SNAP Benefits to Run out Nov. 1 If Government Shutdown Persists*, October 23, 2025, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/wa-snap-benefits-to-run-out-nov-1-if-government-shutdown-persists/>.

disruption did occur: November benefits were not issued on the normal schedule, leaving households uncertain about how they would buy food and placing additional pressure on food banks and community aid organizations. After federal court intervention, however, benefits began flowing again quickly. By November 7, more than 250,000 Washington households had received their full November benefits, and DSHS confirmed by November 8 that full November benefits had been released to Washington households. Although benefits resumed fairly quickly in Washington, the crisis exposed how fragile food assistance becomes when survival depends on federal funding, court intervention, and emergency administrative fixes. The disruption created immediate confusion for households who rely on SNAP to plan grocery trips, stretch limited income, and feed children, elders, and disabled family members. It also shifted pressure onto food banks and pantries that were already facing high demand because of rising food costs. Washington officials warned that community food resources would likely have longer wait times and limited supplies, especially in places where large shares of residents rely on SNAP.²⁴¹

The fallout was both personal and economic. Nearly 930,000 Washington residents faced the possible loss of food benefits. Grocery stores, farmers markets, and local food economies also stood to lose the federal dollars that circulate through SNAP purchases.²⁴² The shutdown highlighted how policy decisions can destabilize everyday food access for low-income families, while also revealing that charitable food aid cannot substitute for a fully funded public benefits system. The fallout from the shutdown revealed how quickly federal policy decisions can push responsibility for hunger onto local food systems. Across Seattle and Washington, food banks,

²⁴¹ Office of Governor Bob Ferguson, “Governor Ferguson Statement on November SNAP Benefits Beginning to Flow to Washington Households,” November 7, 2025, <https://governor.wa.gov/news/2025/governor-ferguson-statement-november-snap-benefits-beginning-flow-washington-households>.

²⁴² Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, *Impact of Federal Government Shutdown on SNAP in Washington State*, Infographic (Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, 2025), https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/FINAL_SNAP_Impact_Infographic_Oct28.pdf.

nonprofits, restaurants, and small food businesses moved into emergency mode, raising funds, expanding food distribution, offering free meals, and directing residents to temporary food resources.²⁴³ Many of Seattle's small businesses rose to the occasion and offered care to community members in need. Lil Woody's, a Seattle fast food staple, offered free burgers to families; Friday Afternoon Tea created a community pantry organized around the principle "leave what you can, take what you need"; Lenox in Belltown offered free SNAP dinners throughout November; TOASTED. Bagels & Coffee offered free breakfast at its locations; and Rootstock NW gave away and delivered free groceries.²⁴⁴ Other restaurants organized food drives, free meals, and donation-based tabs to help people survive the gap.²⁴⁵ Food organizations also responded quickly: Northwest Harvest posted resources, called for donations and food drives, and later reported record-breaking demand across the state's emergency food system.²⁴⁶ Wa Na Wari and other community-rooted organizations also circulated resources, helping people find food support through existing networks of care. Nationally, many Black people also took to social media to encourage opting out of holiday spending and celebration as an act of solidarity with families facing food insecurity.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Laura Clise, "Free Meals and Food Drives at Small Businesses Throughout Greater Seattle," *Intentionalist*, October 30, 2025, <https://intentionalist.com/blog/free-meals-and-food-drives-at-small-businesses-throughout-greater-seattle/>; Alejandra Guzman, "WA Businesses Step up to Feed Neighbors as SNAP Benefits Run Low," Text.Article, FOX 13 Seattle, FOX 13 Seattle, November 3, 2025, <https://www.fox13seattle.com/news/wa-businesses-feed-neighbors-snap>; Melody Ip, "How to Help Washington Families Affected by SNAP Cuts," *Seattle's Child*, November 6, 2025, <https://www.seattleschild.com/washington-snap-benefits-shortfall-community-response/>.

²⁴⁴ Ruby de Luna, "As SNAP Freeze Looms, Washingtonians Step up to Help Their Neighbors," KUOW Puget Sound Public Radio, October 31, 2025, <https://www.kuow.org/stories/as-snap-freeze-looms-washingtonians-step-up-to-help-their-neighbors>.

²⁴⁵ Guzman, "WA Businesses Step up to Feed Neighbors as SNAP Benefits Run Low"; Ip, "How to Help Washington Families Affected by SNAP Cuts."

²⁴⁶ Natasha Dworkin, "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Washington's Emergency Food System Mobilizes Amid SNAP Disruption and Record Demand," *Northwest Harvest*, November 11, 2025, <https://www.northwestharvest.org/news-insights/wa-emergency-food-system-mobilizes-amid-snap-disruption-record-demand/>.

²⁴⁷ Gerren Keith Gaynor, "'We Ain't Buying It': Anti-Trump Groups Call on Economic Boycott Ahead of Thanksgiving Weekend," Yahoo News, November 11, 2025, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/ain-t-buying-anti-trump-093000277.html>.

The shutdown made visible both the power of community care and the danger of relying on emergency generosity to solve what is ultimately a policy-made crisis. A burger shop, tea house, bagel counter, food bank, or neighborhood arts organization can assist in their city's survival. However, they cannot replace the scale, stability, or dignity of a fully funded SNAP program. They exposed the limits of charity as a substitute for public benefits, but these more informal responses matter. They matter because they show that food access is made in the everyday practices of neighbors, workers, organizers, artists, and small business owners who refuse to let abandonment be the final word.

As I close out this project, I am cautious about reading Seattle's emergency response to the SNAP crisis as refusal. The response matters, but it is not enough. Restaurants offering free meals, community pantries organized around "leave what you can, take what you need," grocery deliveries, resource lists, and food drives helped people survive a manufactured gap in food assistance. These acts are examples of care, urgency, and a refusal to let neighbors go hungry. Yet they also revealed the limits of care under conditions of abandonment. A burger shop, tea house, bagel counter, food bank, arts organization, or neighborhood pantry should never have to stand in for a fully funded public benefits system. Seattle's response, then, should not allow the city or the state to appear exceptional or absolved. The crisis exposed how quickly responsibility for hunger is pushed downward onto communities, workers, small businesses, nonprofits, and already strained food banks. It also showed how easily public officials can celebrate community resilience while leaving intact the policies and political conditions that make such resilience necessary. The generosity of local businesses and organizations mattered because people needed food immediately, but emergency generosity cannot substitute for food justice, stable public benefits, or a state accountable to poor, disabled, elderly, working-class, Black, queer, trans, and

immigrant communities. I understand the city's response as a contradiction. It was a practice of care within a structure of organized neglect. It showed how people build temporary infrastructures of survival when formal systems fail, but it also showed the danger of mistaking survival work for justice. The point is not that Seattle refused hunger on its own. The point is that the SNAP crisis made visible the uneven and exhausting labor required to keep people fed when the state withdraws support.

This is where the emergency response becomes important for thinking about quare food refusal. Food access is never only about markets, neighborhoods, or individual choice. It is also shaped by political decisions that determine whose hunger becomes manageable, whose care labor becomes expected, and whose survival is made contingent on emergency response. Across this dissertation, I have argued that refusal is not always loud, spectacular, or easily recognized as protest. Sometimes refusal appears through feeding, withholding, sharing, redirecting, gathering, or building something small enough to protect people in the immediate moment. This understanding of refusal allows me to critique Seattle's institutional response to food access without romanticizing emergency care. Institutional approaches often measure food insecurity through access, eligibility, nutrition, proximity, and service delivery, while missing the affective, relational, and political dimensions of how people actually survive hunger and create nourishment. The SNAP disruption made this logic visible at a citywide scale. As formal systems faltered, many residents, food workers, small businesses, and community organizations moved through existing networks of care to make sure people could eat. That movement reveals the relational knowledge and collective responsibility that formal food policy often fails to recognize. It also exposes the failure of institutions that make such emergency care necessary in the first place.

This response does not erase the violence of the shutdown, nor should it be mistaken for proof that community care can replace public infrastructure. To celebrate these efforts without naming the conditions that required them would obscure demand for unpaid labor, especially from the very communities already stretched thin by food insecurity, racial capitalism, and uneven access to care. The point is not that Seattle's small businesses and community organizations solved the crisis. They did not. The point is that their response exposed the crisis for what it was: a policy failure made survivable only because people built temporary systems of nourishment in the gaps left by the state. That is the tension this project asks us to hold. Black queer food geographies are made in the space between abandonment and abundance, institutional failure and collective care, the limits of public systems and the intimate practices through which people still insist on feeding one another. To take these practices seriously is not to romanticize emergency care, but to recognize the forms of knowledge, labor, and relation that dominant food systems routinely overlook. It is also to expand what counts as food politics, what counts as refusal, and what counts as knowledge. It is from this tension that my project makes its central contributions.

At face value, it may be easy to assume that my work primarily offers a more robust framework for understanding food, one that places love at the center. While it certainly does this, reducing it to that contribution alone would miss the fuller scope of the project. Across the chapters, this dissertation has traced queer food refusal as it moves across institutional, digital, and intimate geographies. Chapter One establishes the theoretical ground for this movement by showing how dominant food studies, public health, and geographic frameworks often approach food through access, nutrition, consumer choice, and measurable space. Against those frameworks, I bring Black feminist geographies, Black food geographies, queer food studies, and

critical trans politics together to argue that food is a spatial, affective, and relational practice. This foundation allows me to ask what becomes visible when Black queer food practices are treated as theory, method, and critique rather than as anecdotal evidence or cultural supplement. Chapter Two then situates these questions in Seattle, a city whose progressive self-image and celebrated food culture often obscure the histories of anti-Blackness, gentrification, displacement, and symbolic inclusion that shape everyday food access. My analysis of Public Health Seattle and King County shows that even when institutions recognize racial and spatial inequality, their responses often remain tethered to frameworks of nutrition, proximity, eligibility, and service delivery. These frameworks matter, but they cannot fully account for the affective and relational conditions through which Black queer people actually experience food, safety, and belonging. Seattle becomes a contradictory geography where food utopianism, public health policy, racial displacement, and queer inclusion branding meet the mundane practices of people who continue to feed and sustain one another in the city's gaps.

Chapter Three extends this argument into the physical and intimate terrains of Seattle's foodscape. Through interviews with chefs, food workers, home cooks, artists, and community members, I show how queer food refusals materialize in cooking, sharing, gathering, withholding, feeding chosen kin, and creating food worlds that are not always public-facing or institutionally legible. These practices are survival strategies and forms of worldmaking. They build alternative geographies of care, pleasure, memory, and belonging that exceed Seattle's official food narratives and the public health frameworks that often reduce food justice to access alone. Chapter Four moves to the digital sphere by treating Instagram as a digital food geography. Instead of approaching social media as a neutral archive of food images, I show how hashtags, feeds, captions, algorithms, and visual economies organize what becomes searchable,

visible, valuable, and consumable. The sparse presence of #BlackQueerFood does not just mark absence or lack. I read it as a form of strategic opacity, a refusal to surrender Black queer food life to the platform's demands for branding, visibility, and legibility. In this chapter, quare food refusal appears through partial visibility: in what is posted, what is withheld, what circulates, and what remains difficult to find. My interview with Steph further shows how Black queer culinary practice can use digital space without being fully captured by it. Her cannabis-centered food practices foreground pleasure, healing, embodiment, and self-definition while also revealing the limits of platform visibility as a measure of Black queer food life.

All of the chapters show that Black queer food geographies are made in the movement between visibility and opacity, institution and intimacy, policy and pleasure, survival and worldmaking. Quare food refusal names the practices that emerge in those movements. It helps me understand why a delayed SNAP payment, a public health framework, a rainbow badge, an Instagram hashtag, a private dinner, a farm school, a community gathering, or a home-cooked meal cannot be analyzed separately from one another. Each is part of a broader geography in which Black queer people negotiate the terms of safety, nourishment, and belonging. Across these sites, refusal does not always appear as explicit protest. Sometimes it appears as choosing not to disclose, refusing to be branded, feeding someone without asking the state for permission, gathering beyond institutional view, or creating pleasure where only deprivation is expected. This is the central synthesis of the dissertation: Black queer food practices reveal that nourishment is never only about food. It is about the spatial and relational conditions that make life feel possible, protected, pleasurable, and worth continuing.

Due to its interdisciplinary nature, the project's contributions extend across several fields. Rather than offering food simply as a new object of study, I use food to rethink how knowledge,

space, refusal, and care are produced in everyday life. In conversation with Black Studies and Black feminist thought, this dissertation treats ordinary practices as sites of theory-making. Cooking, feeding, gathering, posting, withholding, and choosing where to eat become ways Black queer people interpret their conditions and make claims to survival, pleasure, and belonging. In conversation with Black feminist geographies, I show that food is also a spatial practice. Through food, Black queer people map where they feel safe, where they feel watched, where they gather, where they refuse exposure, and where they create belonging despite exclusion. Space, then, is not produced only through policy, property, policing, or urban development. It is also produced through intimate acts of feeding, sharing, withholding, and making place with others.

This project also shifts the conversation from survival alone toward worldmaking. Survival remains central to Black queer life under conditions of racial capitalism, food insecurity, and spatial exclusion, but my project asks what else is happening in the practices people create to endure. What about Black queer people who may never attend a protest, speak in the language of activism, or appear in official accounts of food justice? How are they generating forms of resistance to what Ashanté Reese calls the “slow walking, everyday death” of anti-Blackness?²⁴⁸ These questions require a wider understanding of political life, one that can recognize resistance in daily acts of care, pleasure, kinship, and self-definition. The stories I trace are about making do, but they are also about making worlds: creating spaces of intimacy, autonomy, joy, and relation that exceed the terms of institutional recognition. In a political and technological climate that extracts labor, exhausts attention, and leaves people overstimulated yet depleted, the cultivation of pleasure and joy becomes more than comfort. It becomes a practice

²⁴⁸ *Black Food Geographies*.

of sustaining life and imagining possibility. This is where quare food refusals become one of the project's central contributions. As an analytic, quare food refusals names the quiet and often partial practices through which Black queer people reject the demand to become fully visible, legible, or incorporable into dominant food systems, public health frameworks, digital platforms, or urban narratives of inclusion. It helps explain why withholding, selective sharing, opacity, intimate gathering, and ordinary feeding practices are not merely private acts. They are methods of care, protection, and worldmaking. These contributions push food studies, queer studies, feminist studies, geography, and public health to take seriously the intimate and affective practices through which marginalized communities survive harm and imagine more livable worlds.

Methodologically, quare food refusals contribute a way of reading what does not always appear clearly in interviews, archives, policy documents, or digital platforms. It asks researchers to be patient and take seriously silence, absence, withholding, hesitation, partial disclosure, and selective visibility as meaningful forms of knowledge rather than as gaps to be corrected. That means I do not treat the absence of a coherent #BlackQueerFood archive, the privacy of intimate gatherings, or participants' decisions about what not to share as methodological limits alone. I also read them as evidence of how Black queer people manage access, protect pleasure, and determine the terms on which their food lives can be known. Quare food refusals therefore shifts method away from extraction and toward attunement. It requires us to listen for affect, notice the politics of opacity, and respect the ways participants theorize through what they reveal and what they keep for themselves. As a methodological contribution, it offers feminist, queer, and Black studies scholars a framework for studying minor, quiet, and partially visible practices without

forcing them into full legibility. It is a theory of knowledge production that insists opacity, partiality, and withholding are the conditions through which different ways of knowing emerge.

In between interviews, analysis, and making the time to begin writing this dissertation, I noticed this growing tension between conceptualizing refusal and how much of it to share in my findings. What does it mean to make something legible when its intention is to not fully be seen? What is the balance of responsibility to my research and my commitment to the Black and queer communities in which I reside? As I sought to find the answers to these questions, I grappled with fear and guilt about whether rendering these food practices knowable in the dissertation might betray the very forms of opacity that make them possible. In “Ethnographic Refusal,” Simpson develops refusal through Indigenous sovereignty, arguing that not everything should be rendered transparent for anthropological consumption and that withholding can be a necessary assertion of jurisdiction over representation itself.²⁴⁹ I agree with Simpson. Black and LGBTQ+ experiences come to academia and public discourse through long histories of extraction, surveillance, and misrepresentation, which makes the question of what should remain withheld just as important as what should be shared. Simpson’s essay recognized that ethnographers have an ethical obligation to be boundaried and say when “enough is enough.” We researchers must be able to discern when further representation would do harm or serve the wrong audience. Her foundational argument helped me process the decisions I have made to produce this project and will guide my future work as I continue to build out the discipline of Black queer food studies. The anxiety I had to contend with was not a methodological weakness. They were a calling to a more sovereign political and epistemological practice, one attentive to where the limits of disclosure should be drawn.

²⁴⁹ *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822376781>.

I needed to make it a point to stay grounded in Black feminist principles of care and accountability, understanding that ethical research must attend to the lives of those it seeks to honor. My attentiveness to opacity is an effort to practice the kind of care that allows Black queer food to remain protected while holding institutions accountable to generating solutions that better align with the lived needs, desires, and spatial realities of Black queer communities. Ashanté Reese spoke of this ethic of care as a refusal that operates quietly, through everyday decisions about what is shared, what is protected, and what remains outside the terms of academic recognition.²⁵⁰ She explicitly builds on Audra Simpson to argue that refusal can open up “other arrangements of the possible,” meaning other ways of relating, knowing, and writing that do not reproduce dominant techniques of knowledge.²⁵¹ When I consider what refusal means for me as I build on the ethics of Simpson and Reese, I feel secure in what I have chosen to share in these previous chapters. I have shared stories that illuminate Black queer food geographies without requiring total exposure. I have written about moments of gathering, nourishment, intimacy, digital practice, and spatial negotiation that reveal how Black queer people make life possible in and against conditions of constraint. These chapters have centered scenes of cooking, eating, posting, moving, and dwelling that show the affective and relational dimensions of food, while remaining attentive to what should not be fully rendered legible. The stories I told do not aim for full disclosure. I strive to honor the worlds Black queer communities have already made by documenting their significance without violating the boundaries that sustain them.

The stories of queer intimacy within Black life that have unfolded in these pages are generative, strategic, social, and hopeful. They are generative in that they reveal how Black queer people create forms of nourishment and belonging that exceed dominant understandings of

²⁵⁰ Reese, “Refusal as Care.”

²⁵¹ Reese, “Refusal as Care.”

food as consumption, health, or access alone. Across these chapters, queer food refusals emerge in the making of intimate gatherings, in the cultivation of pleasure and appetite, in digital practices of selective visibility, and in the everyday creation of spaces where Black queer life can be fed and felt. They are strategic because they often depend on partial legibility: on knowing when to share, when to withhold, and how to navigate institutions, public culture, and platform economies without surrendering the terms of self-definition. This is notably visible in my chapter on Instagram, where the relative absence of a coherent #BlackQueerFood archive does not signal lack, but rather a refusal of the platform's demand that Black queer food life become fully searchable, consumable, and publicly available on its terms. They are social because they take shape through relation, through the interpersonal and communal labor of cooking, eating, hosting, posting, teaching, and loving one another in ways that make Black queer worlds possible. This sociality appears throughout the dissertation, from the intimate food gatherings and collaborative learning at Quillisascut to the community-building practices of spaces like Art Trip and the Black Farmers Collective, where food is never merely an object of consumption but a medium through which care and collective life are organized. And they are hopeful because they point to the fact that these worlds are not simply imagined as future aspirations, but are already being enacted in the present through ordinary yet insurgent practices of opacity. This hope is visible in the everyday scenes traced across the project: in the choice to gather and nourish one another outside formal institutions, in the cultivation of intimate food spaces that do not seek full public recognition, and in digital practices where selective legibility becomes a way of protecting Black queer life while not forsaking the labor that makes relation possible.

These facets of Black queer food speak directly to Carole McGranahan's theorization of refusal as a practice that is generative, affiliative, and oriented toward other possibilities.²⁵² By allowing quare food refusals to be named and theorized within an academic context, I contribute to a potential food justice framework that is grounded in the rich food traditions that already sustain Black queer life. I potentially orient public health discourse towards other food equity possibilities that place affect and embodied discourse at the forefront of their policies. I agreed with Simpson about having limits on what to share but the relationship between academia and Black queer food has only begun. Instead of treating refusal as an outright rejection of academic scholarship, this dissertation takes that burgeoning relationship seriously by treating refusal as a condition for it. Good ethnographic research does not require full exposure. It's attentive to making sure knowledge is produced without extraction.

Black queer food knowledge is a reminder that refusal is what makes more fulfilling relation possible. It is not the end of it. It is an important distinction because the work of sharing quare food refusals is necessary, even as it must remain boundaried. Food justice frameworks, particularly those shaped by policy, systems, and environmental approaches, often ask how food access can be expanded through infrastructure, availability, affordability, and behavioral change. These questions matter, but they are not sufficient. They do not always ask how Black queer people already create nourishment through intimacy, pleasure, secrecy, selective visibility, and care. Nor do they adequately account for how safety, desire, and belonging shape whether food access feels livable at all. Quare food refusals therefore offer public health and food justice scholars another way to understand food equity: more than the distribution of resources, also as

²⁵² "Theorizing Refusal."

the creation of conditions in which people can eat, gather, withhold, share, and make meaning without being disciplined by institutions that were not built with them in mind.

This is why bringing quare food refusals into academic discourse is not a call for more representation. Following Dean Spade's critique in *A Normal Life*, visibility and inclusion are not inherently liberatory when they leave the administrative, institutional, and material conditions of violence untouched.²⁵³ Representation alone can leave intact the same archival and methodological structures that render Black LGBTQ life peripheral, excessive, anecdotal, or illegible. Adding Black queer people to existing food studies, public health, or food justice frameworks is not the point. It is to queer the methods, archives, and analytic habits through which food knowledge is produced in the first place. Black queer food life has been understudied and undervalued because of the fallacy that it lacks intellectual richness. Dominant methods often do not know how to recognize knowledge that appears in partial, intimate, sensory, affective, or fugitive forms. To write quare food refusals, then, is to build an archive that remains attentive to its own limits. It is to document without overexposing, to theorize without extracting, and to insist that Black queer food practices have something to teach fields that have too often treated them as marginal to the real work of food justice. I have not reached the limits of this archive. Not even close. This dissertation is only one beginning, an opening toward a broader Black queer food studies that can hold contradiction, care, pleasure, and refusal together. As I continue this work, the ethic that guides me is not total disclosure but accountable attention. Boundaries matter. Awareness matters. So does remembering that my participants are not simply sources of data, but co-theorists whose lives, choices, and silences have shaped the very terms of this project. To treat them as co-theorists is to remain responsible to what they have shared and

²⁵³ Spade, *Normal Life*.

what they have not shared. It is to understand that the future of Black queer food studies depends on developing methods capable of honoring what Black queer communities have already known: that food can protect, conceal, reveal, nourish, and refuse all at once. It intentionally does not make everything visible.

As meaningful and important as this work is to me, I know it is not without its limitations. Even though I intend to continue to build out a Black queer food archive, this work is deeply subjective, shaped by my own relationships, memories, questions, and embodied experiences as a Black queer Texan moving through Seattle's food landscape. The stories I have told originate from a small group of participants, many of whom are connected through overlapping social, culinary, artistic, and community networks. This intimacy is one of the project's strengths, because it allows me to read food practices with care, context, and relational accountability. But it also means this dissertation cannot and does not claim to represent all Black queer food experiences in Seattle, much less all Black queer foodways more broadly. What it does offer is a situated account of how particular Black queer people navigate food, pleasure, care, visibility, and refusal within a specific city and historical moment. Future versions of this archive would benefit from a larger and more varied group of participants, including more trans, nonbinary, working-class, disabled, immigrant, elder, and youth perspectives. It would also benefit from a deeper engagement with Black queer food practices beyond Seattle, especially in rural areas, the South, and other cities where food, race, sexuality, and space are organized differently. This limitation is important because the archive I am building is not comprehensive. It is partial by design. Some stories are missing because they were never shared with me. Some were shared but I decided not to share them here in this project. Others remain withheld because they were simply not mine to tell. The project's attention to opacity means that incompleteness is

not a problem to be solved, it is an ethical condition of the work itself. Incompleteness clarifies what this dissertation is and what it makes possible. It is not a total map of Black queer food life. It is an opening, a set of routes, a beginning framework for recognizing the intellectual and political significance of food practices that have too often been ignored, misread, or treated as too ordinary to matter. Its situatedness is a vital component of the project's method. By writing within relationship, memory, and embodied experience, I show that Black queer food knowledge does not require distance or mass numbers to be rigorous. It requires an ethic of care that discerns what can be known, what remains unknowable, and what must be protected.

In addition to more diverse representations of Black queer people in food, future research might also investigate how Black queer food practices intersect with abolitionist organizing, mutual aid networks, and alternative food economies that reimagine nourishment outside capitalist and carceral frameworks. Chapter Three analyzed how Stephenie's Black queer food can point to cannabis foodways and carceral geographies because cannabis remains entangled with histories of criminalization, racial surveillance, and uneven legalization. Her culinary practice opens space to ask how Black queer cooks use cannabis as an ingredient and as a medium of pleasure, healing, experimentation, and critique. Future work could build on this finding by examining how Black queer food practitioners navigate industries that are legally permitted for some while still criminalized for others, particularly Black, queer, trans, poor, and formerly incarcerated people. It could also explore how food-based mutual aid, community fridges, informal meal networks, cooperative kitchens, underground food economies, and cannabis-centered culinary practices create alternative infrastructures of care. These practices should be researched because they challenge the assumption that food justice must be routed through grocery stores, nonprofit institutions, public health agencies, or state recognition. They

instead ask what nourishment might look like when organized through abolitionist commitments to care, redistribution, bodily autonomy, harm reduction, and collective survival. Future research on Black queer food geographies should therefore continue to ask what kinds of worlds are made possible when food is detached from punishment, surveillance, respectability, and profit. These include further theorizing Black queer food relationality as a framework for understanding how food mediates kinship, intimacy, and chosen family; examining digital food infrastructures and algorithmic visibility as emerging terrains of racialized and sexualized spatial politics; and exploring the role of pleasure, fugitivity, and affect in shaping Black queer culinary worlds across diasporic contexts.

Other conceptual and empirical trajectories extend beyond the scope of this study as well. Future research might further theorize Black queer food relationality as a framework for understanding how food mediates kinship, intimacy, chosen family, and care across different spaces and scales. A shared meal, a plate saved for someone, a recipe passed between friends, a dinner hosted after grief, or a refusal to make a gathering public can all become ways of building trust, marking belonging, and deciding who is responsible to whom. This framework would allow scholars to examine how Black queer relationships are made across different spaces and scales, from kitchens and dinner tables to restaurants, farms, digital platforms, mutual aid networks, and diasporic food traditions. It might also examine digital food infrastructures more critically, especially how algorithms, hashtags, platform design, and online visibility shape the racialized and sexualized politics of who becomes searchable, recognizable, or valuable within food culture. There may not be a coherent hashtag archive organized under terms like #BlackQueerFood, but Black queer culinarians are still sharing their food online. The question is how, where, and under what conditions those practices become visible. Their food may circulate

through personal pages, stories, private accounts, business profiles, event flyers, tagged locations, mutual aid posts, or community networks that do not announce themselves through easily searchable identity categories. Future research could therefore move beyond the hashtag as the primary unit of digital analysis and attend to the more dispersed, ephemeral, and relational ways Black queer food life appears online. This would make it possible to study digital food practices without assuming that visibility, searchability, or algorithmic coherence are the only measures of cultural presence. Finally, future work could explore how pleasure, fugitivity, and affect shape Black queer culinary worlds across diasporic contexts, tracing how food practices travel through migration, memory, ancestry, and place. Queerness manifests differently across continents and communities, and Black diasporic foodways are shaped by distinct histories of slavery, colonialism, migration, religion, language, region, and gendered labor. Accounting for these differences requires methods that are attentive to place, history, and scale. It would mean asking how Black queer food practices take shape differently in the U.S. South, the Pacific Northwest, the Caribbean, West Africa, Europe, or Latin America; how religion and respectability politics shape what can be openly named as queer; how migration changes relationships to ingredients, recipes, and kinship; how language affects the categories people use to describe sexuality and belonging; and how gendered labor determines who cooks, who serves, who is remembered, and who is erased. Such an approach would help prevent Black queer food studies from assuming that Black queerness or Black food life means the same thing everywhere. It would also make space to ask how practices of cooking, eating, gathering, and refusal shift when they move across the U.S. South, the Caribbean, West Africa, Latin America, Europe, and other diasporic locations. Any of these directions would expand the archive of Black queer food

studies while continuing to ask how nourishment becomes a method for making relation, protecting life, and imagining freedom.

Black queer food futures are already being made in the daily practices through which people feed, gather, remember, protect, and love one another under conditions that make those practices difficult. They materialize as lived arrangements of care: in kitchens and gardens, restaurants and digital spaces, mutual aid networks and family recipes, chosen kinship and the quiet decisions people make about what to share and what to keep sacred. To imagine Black queer food futures is to imagine food worlds organized not by scarcity, surveillance, punishment, respectability, or profit, but by care, pleasure, accountability, and relation. This dissertation has argued that those worlds are not waiting somewhere ahead of us. They are already here, in the meals Black queer people make for themselves and one another, in the refusals that protect them, and in the ongoing insistence that to eat, to feed, and to be fed is to declare Black queer life worthy of being sustained.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Demographics
 - a. (Age, Education, Employment, Place of Birth, Marital Status, Sexual Orientation, etc.)
2. Tell me about your relationship to culinary arts. When did it begin? Who inspires you?
3. What were meals like for you as a child? Who was responsible for meal prep? What kinds of food did you eat? Did you eat out? How often and where?
4. What were some of your favorite dishes to eat as a child? What dishes did you hate?
5. What was your attitude towards being in the kitchen/cooking when you were younger?
6. Do you consider yourself a “foodie”? Why or why not? What does “good food” mean to you?
7. How would you describe the foodways in Seattle? Do you feel connected to the food scene here?
8. How does being black influence your relationship to food?
9. How does identifying as queer influence your relationship to food?
10. What does ‘black queer food’ mean to you?
11. What are your dreams/hopes for your culinary future?
12. What does food activism mean to you? What does food justice look like to you?
13. What’s a dish or recipe you make that you feel represents who you are? Why?
14. What makes you feel the most connected to the food you create?
15. Any ingredients, tools, or kitchen appliances that are your favorites or must haves? Why or why not?
16. How has social media influenced your relationship with food?
17. How do you use social media to share the culinary aspects of your life?
18. Has the pandemic affected or impacted your culinary career? How so?