

# The Virtual Table

*The Food Blogosphere as a Vehicle for the  
Creation and Communication of Environmental Values*

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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Philosophy in  
Culture, Environment and Sustainability**

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May 5th, 2014



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# Introduction

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This research sets forth to pursue an understanding of the intricate relationship between humans, food and the planet. As Wendell Berry so aptly put it, “how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used. This is a simple way of describing a relationship that is inexpressibly complex” (Berry 1992:377). As the rift between humanity and the environment grows, food remains a consistent link between Earth and individual. If and how this link is portrayed in the growing online food community provides insight to why food is a space in which individuals feel they can exercise citizenship, community, and freedom, as well as to the potentially transformative nature of the food blogosphere.

Today, the relationship of reciprocity between humanity and our surroundings has become more difficult to identify, and, more often than not, is characterized by one side taking more than it gives. It’s difficult to locate in the hustle and bustle of the everyday, to isolate in the opaque anthropocentrism that often supersedes the natural world which encompasses it. The act of eating is one way in which humanity consistently interacts with habitat; “food is both a symbol and a product of our environment and of humans’ relationships with the natural world” (Cramer 2011:317).

Food is unique in that it is more than a vehicle to the satisfaction of a basic human need; it’s a portal to other people, places, and times that transcends temporal and geographical space (Belasco 2005). The vast landscape of the World Wide Web mirrors this lack of foundation in physical space and provides a platform for the communication of not only recipes and reviews, but also of values relating to food. Food is a space where choice and practice meet and where individuals have an opportunity to exercise citizenship. It is a space in which identity, convenience and consequence intersect (Belasco 2008:7). Food goes far beyond its function as basic sustenance, it is more than that; it has the power to bring people together, with

one another, but also, with the Earth. The internet enables and facilitates the enactment of these relationships, specifically within the food blogosphere, providing a space where modernity and nostalgia coincide, and at times contradict.

The relationships that we as humans have with the world we inhabit are becoming increasingly complex and difficult to negotiate. As many of us become more and more estranged from our surroundings, a state of alienation manifests itself in a variety of ways. The most indicative of these ways, I suggest, is the critical situation of the global environment.

The way that we perceive our realities can be said to be how we make sense of the world we live in, thus shaping our actions. In turn, our actions play a significant role in shaping the world and its environment (I use the term 'environment' here to denote biological surroundings). This multi-faceted and interactive relationship is reflected in Scottish psychiatrist, R.D. Laing's statement that, "Our behavior is a function of our experience. We act according to the way we see things. If our experience is destroyed, our behavior will be destructive. If our experience is destroyed, we have lost our own selves" (Laing 1967:28). Laing describes a self-fulfilling prophecy of self-destruction. The loss of 'self' here can be seen as a result of the unprecedented changes that humans have affected in the environment. However, it follows from Laing's statement that if experience can be destroyed, it can also be constructed. This then, demands the establishment of a constructive, rather than destructive, experience.

I suggest that we are at a tipping point, and that an alternate way of relating to the planet is more critically necessary than ever before. The question, however, of how remains; how can we break from the unsustainable trajectory that we are following and find a way to mediate and nurture a positive relationship between self and surroundings? The universal nature and necessity of food presents an opportunity for transformation. Janet Cramer theorizes that,

Human relationships with food, and especially, the process of producing and preparing one's own food, are fundamental to understanding or re-conceptualizing a relationship between humans and the earth that is more sustainable (Cramer 2011:330).

The following thesis aims to explore the ways in which food blogs act as a venue for the communication of an environmental ethic relating to food. Food blogs portray active producers of food, rather than passive consumers, especially blogs that aim to communicate values of sustainability and environmental consciousness. These blogs exemplify the exercise of citizenship, freedom, and pleasure which often characterize a reach towards The Good Life, an elusive promise of times past, and the re-establishment of more meaningful relationships between human beings and our surroundings. The food blogosphere is a virtual space that embraces the modernity of the internet and globalization but often simultaneously eschews industrialization and technology by portraying food and eating in rustic and nostalgic ways that evoke 'simpler' times. This dichotomy is indicative of the complexity and tension that characterizes the choosing, making and eating of food today.

While Bourdieu posits that food choices and values are embodied in the habitus and are largely a function of class, food blogs often operate on a more reflexive level, by nature of being discursive. The following thesis draws from a growing pool of scholarship which explores the hybridization of the theories of habitus and reflexivity, in order to create an understanding of phenomena that allows for both practice and agency.

Narratives about food, featured on food blogs, are treated in this thesis as microcosm of a much larger debate about culture, identity and citizenship in the face of environmental crisis. The arena of the food blogosphere provides an excellent vantage point for pursuing an understanding of the way in which something as constant and predictable as eating can expose a multitude of values, ethics and also, unease in the face of environmental uncertainty and distress.



## **Research Questions**

The over-arching questions that have guided this thesis are as follows; how are themes related to environmental sustainability portrayed on food blogs? To what extent do people relate to the environment through what they eat and how is this relationship communicated in the food blogosphere? And finally, how does blogging about food empower writers and readers?

## **Rationale**

Sustenance is a universal, biological need and is therefore worthy of scholarship in and of itself. However, what we eat is shaped by more than just physiological need alone; it is also based on cultural, religious, economic and political factors which affect the availability and consumption of foods (Barthes 1975, Mintz 1985, Rozin & Meiselman 1996, Beardsworth & Keil 1997, Germov & Williams 2008, Parasecoli 2008). Food is a universal ritual, but the way in which it is practiced differs immensely, “food habits – how we produce, procure, prepare, and consume food – represent powerful systems of symbols whose associations are closely held, in their own way, by nearly everyone” (Miller & Deutsch 2009:7). The way in which these practices are communicated via the food blogosphere gives insight to the complexity of the process behind making dinner.

The dichotomy of a lack of food sovereignty for several nations in the global South paired with a marked increase in food awareness and discourse in the global North and increasing concerns about health, food production, agriculture and the environment worldwide provides a fascinating starting point for research. Today, in the global North, an unprecedented interest in all things food is burgeoning. The currency of this specific topic is reflected in an increase in food centric discourse (Parasecoli 2008, Johnston & Baumann 2010, Rousseau 2012a,b), the popularity of television shows, books and magazines about the making and eating of food and the proliferation of food

blogs which celebrate an excess of culinary delights. This gastronomical explosion has also necessitated the birth of a new term; “foodie”, reserved for those who embrace and celebrate all things food.

While food flourishes in discourse, so does the debate on how to select it. Consumers are faced with more options than ever before and encounter a myriad of choices and decisions with every bite. Michael Pollan, the American author, activist, professor and journalist has written a number of bestsellers on this topic, most notably, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* (2006) which highlights the heightened complexity of the seemingly innocuous question; ‘what’s for dinner tonight?’ French social scientist Claude Fischler notes the way in which answering that question has become an increasingly individualistic choice as the limitations of season and location have long become a thing of the past. As consumers face fewer limitations and more choice the pressure of deciding what to eat adds to the anxiety and guilt associated with eating (Fischler 1980, Coveney 2000, Germov & Williams 2008), especially as the ‘right’ choice often implies sacrifice on the part of the individual.

The way in which food is portrayed in the global North provides insight to the push and pull of opposing values and beliefs in modernity (Johnston & Baumann 2010, Lindenfeld 2011). Accounts and descriptions of food and eating are wrought with paradox and contradiction and therefore provide an excellent point of departure for research. Furthermore, exploring how themes of environmental sustainability are depicted in the food blogosphere can lead to a better understanding of if and how some people are using food as a means to reconcile the divide between humanity and habitat (Cramer 2011) and how they are communicating that journey to a wider public.

The motivation behind embarking on this research is not purely intellectual. It is also driven by a love of food and a profound interest in the ways that it manifests itself in our everyday lives. Food is universal and therefore has immense potential. Understanding how individuals exercise and communicate this potential is imperative to understanding the ways in which the food blogosphere contributes to changing values and perceptions of food

and the environment.

The following chapters aim to address the aforementioned questions in a systematic way. The next chapter provides background and context information, followed by a review of the literature and the establishment of theoretical foundations. The thesis then continues on to outline the methodology and findings from this research and ultimately concludes with a discussion of the findings and their implications.

# Chapter I: Background and Context

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This chapter functions to place this thesis within a wider context and provides a setting for the pursuit of the research questions. It explores food as a link to the environment, the ways in which people communicate through food and the foodie movement and then goes on to establish the food blogosphere as a space for communication.

## **Food as a Link to the Environment**

Nature sustains life. One of the most tangible ways in which it does so is through food. However, the connection between nature and sustenance, like that between environment and humanity has become murkier and more difficult to locate in the shadows of globalization and rampant consumerism. In order to begin to recognize the complex balance between habitat and inhabitants it is vital to begin with the fundamental tenet that nothing exists in isolation; interconnectivity and interdependence are the cornerstones of a functional ecosystem and balance is crucial to the endurance of such an ecosystem to sustain its parts (Odum & Barrett 2004). The current state of imbalance in this intricate system can largely be attributed to human activity, especially the activity that has followed the large scale industrialization of the 1800s. The industrial revolution spurred massive changes in the ways in which people live their everyday lives, including the ways in which they procure and consume food.

Industrialization and urbanization has added to the increasing divide between people and their food. When previously it was not uncommon to intimately know the source of everything on the kitchen table, the move into cities made the origins of food harder to track (Vileisis 2008). In addition to that, modern technology has allowed constraints of the past, such as locality and seasonality to be overcome and food can last longer than it ever has

before, distancing itself from its roots not only geographically, but also temporally. This distance is reflected in an overabundance of prepackaged chicken breasts and precut broccoli florets that no longer evoke their living, breathing origins. The industrialized food system operates on a previously unfathomable scale, further separating consumer and producer, and adding to the anonymity of the food system and the ambivalence of the consumers who buy into it. The growing divide between food source and food consumer has led to more confusion when navigating the supermarket aisles. This confusion adds to a sense of inability to make food and eating decisions that will positively benefit oneself, society, and the environment (Lockie 2006).

The problem with the link between food and environment becoming increasingly obscure is that it allows the continuation of a food system that exceeds its environmental limits and is unsustainable on such a large scale. The impact of the steady rise in production and consumption has already taken its toll at many different levels of participation. In a recent report written by the European Commission's Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) it was found that "the average Western diet with high intakes of meat, fat and sugar is a risk for individual health, social systems and the environmental systems" (SCAR report 2011:132). The trajectory of the contemporary food system is unsustainable.

There has been, and is a reaction to, the impersonal nature of large scale food production and its environmental ramifications. Concerned consumers and suppliers have recognized the importance of knowing where one's food comes from. People are turning towards food which is organic, local, non-GMO, and farm to table food concepts as a way to exert more control over what they eat and what is made available by food suppliers. But consumers are not the only ones who have become aware of these alternatives and navigating the terminology and labeling at the grocery store has become increasingly difficult, with standards that vary greatly and marketing tactics that can often be misleading to costumers. The commercialization of organic, local,

chemical-free, sustainable and natural food has added to the already perplexing question of what to eat?

## **Communicating through Food**

Food is a nonverbal form of communication as well as a testament to individual identity, and what a person eats, can tell you a lot about who they are – as Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote in *Physiologie du Gout, ou Meditations de Gastronomie Transcendant*, "Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es," or, "Tell me what you eat: I will tell you what you are" (Brillat-Savarin 1826/2002). Food and identity are closely related, as is the communication of that identity to others. Heritage, values, politics, socio-demographics and culture are all at play when deciding what to eat.

Socializing about food through stories, recipes, and ideas gives insight to an individual's identity, values, beliefs, culture and heritage (Cramer et al. 2011). Food is a form of communication, "substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification; and as soon as this happens, we have communication by way of food" (Barthes 1975:25). Because of its everyday nature, food is an accessible topic, and often serves as a gateway to topics which concern other aspects of lived experience.

The internet is a tool which allows those insights to be shared with more people than ever before and the exponential growth of the food blogosphere is a testament to the fact that food matters to people. This thesis sets forth to explore why and how it matters.

## **The Foodie Movement**

### **Defining Foodie**

The foodie movement has its origins in the emergence of a food counterculture in the late 1960's which has been described as a response to the

modernization and depersonalization of the global food system as well as a reflection of growing environmental concern for the planet (Belasco 2005). Coveney explains the shift as,

A closer examination of the effects on health of affluence gave vent to an urgency about the need to return to ‘nature’ which provided a platform for a counter-culture movement heavily promoting the ethics of ‘Wholefood’. Nutrition became the terms in which these ethics were explained as food goodness and food quality, which were quickly commercialized by the mainstream food industry (Coveney 2000:121).

The frames of goodness and quality are still put to use today to describe environmental ethics relating to food and eating. The extent to which the food blogosphere embodies the spirit of the food counterculture that emerged in the 60s is explored later on in this thesis.

In a story published in the *New York* magazine on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1980 renowned food critic Gael Greene refers to the clients of a particular restaurant as ‘foodies’ (Popik 2009). Later, in 1984, the term ‘foodie’ was coined by British authors Ann Barr and Paul Levy in their publication, *The Official Foodie Handbook: Be Modern – Worship Food*. They defined foodies as “children of the consumer boom [who] consider food to be an art, on a level with painting or drama” (Barr & Levy 1984:6). Over the next thirty years, the term was steadily adopted and has been used for all manner of food lovers.

Today, the term foodie is much contested, but for the purpose of this research, I will define it broadly as; a person who has a keen interest in food, and all food-related activities, as well as a desire to know more about food and food-related endeavors. The above definition has been developed using the answers of thirty eight self-defined foodies, who partook in an online questionnaire orchestrated for the purpose of this thesis. When these foodies were asked to share their understanding of the term, responses covered a wide range of descriptions but consistently throughout, respondents used words like love, pleasure, exploration, passion, enjoyment, appreciation, and even

obsession to describe their relationships concerning all things food. One respondent put it this way,

[A foodie is] someone who not only enjoys eating, but enjoys learning about food, where it came from, how it's prepared, and what it contains. This person is interested in the quality of food, the innovation of dishes, and the artistry of putting ingredients together to create a dish (Respondent #32: online survey 09.09.2013).

The aforementioned definition is compatible with other definitions of foodies used in academic research. In their study of *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*, Johnston and Baumann interviewed foodies and found that they “perceived themselves as well-informed, discovery-minded, discerning consumers (and most often food producers as well) who lead food-focused lives and present themselves to others as uncommonly passionate about food” (Johnston & Baumann 2010:67). These points were echoed in the data which was collected through the online questionnaire. Consistently respondents portrayed their interest in food as a defining part of who they were. One respondent articulated this by defining a foodie as, “somebody who likes food and sort of “lives” for it – it’s part of who they are if they were describing themselves to someone –it’s important” (Respondent #14: online survey 09.09.2013).

While virtually all of the definitions of foodies collected through the online questionnaire were defined in a way that was positive, interviews carried out with food bloggers in the second part of this study exposed opposing understandings of the term that associated it with aristocracy and elitism and simultaneously discussed how this might be changing. One blogger wrote,

In my mind the term foodie describes people who are able to afford fancy food/dining- a bit of an elite term- People who are able to talk about fancy food and wine- and perhaps even enjoy cooking it at home.



But I think it is changing, especially with the rise of chefs on TV, and the food network. For example, I think a student who is really into food blogs and likes to cook might be considered a foodie, without having been to lots of fine dining establishments (Eva: email interview 11.11.2013).

Another food blogger expressed their disdain for the term, defining it as, “[a] term... invented by marketers trying to make a profit by exploiting the recent surge in interest of food” (Edith: email interview 29.10.2013).

These conflicting definitions begin to expose some of the tensions that exist in the realm of food and in the ways that individuals define their interest and pursuit of knowledge relating to food. For the purposes of this research, and for the lack of a better term that collectivity labels those with a love and appreciation for food, the term foodie will be applied to people who have a deep interest in food and all food-related activities, as well as a desire to gain knowledge about food and eating.

The ways in which the foodie movement has manifested itself today are wide-reaching and while trends relating to food and an increase in food discourse have arisen from a number of different conditions and causes, some are more intimately linked with the foodie movement than others. Food media has exploded in recent years (Parasecoli 2008, Rousseau 2012a,b) and uses a multitude of mediums including, but not limited to, magazines, television, news, apps, movies, literature and last but not least, food blogs.

Evidence of the burgeoning foodie movement in the United States is reflected in the fact that 76% of respondents in a survey carried out in 2012 by the National Association for Specialty Food Trade (NASFT) reported enjoying talking about new or interesting foods, while another 53% stated that they regularly watch food television (Sloane 2013). These numbers represent the currency of the topic and its reach; food matters.

### **Foodies: A Sustainable Movement?**

Food is a “site of struggle” (Greene & Cramer 2011: xiii). The politics

of the kitchen table are often complex and can indicate a great deal about a person's values and beliefs. Up for debate are personal relationships with food, health and nutrition, localism versus globalism, whether one is for or against genetically modified foods, the use of chemicals to grow and preserve food, along with a plethora of other topics relating to procuring, preparing and consuming food. One trait of some (but not necessarily all) foodies is an awareness of the implications of eating certain foods, not only on personal and household levels but also on broader community, national and global levels. Another characteristic of foodie's is that they are consumers who are searching for a personal connection to what they eat. Foodies pursue a link with food that is more meaningful, more conscientious, more real and more authentic (Terrio 2005, Johnston & Baumann 2010).

Conflicting perceptions of consumerism and citizenship represent a source of friction in foodie discourse. Johnston and Baumann (2010) claim that foodie's simultaneously strive for distinction and democracy in their pursuit of a more meaningful relationship with food. While themes of localism, organics, sustainable agriculture and animal welfare do matter to some foodies, ultimately their research suggests that for foodies, taste is the bottom line. This thesis focuses on food bloggers who explicitly champion the aforementioned environmental themes and aims to explore the ways in which these bloggers relate to and communicate consumerism and citizenship with regard to making sustainable food choices.

## **The Blogosphere**

### **Bloggng: A Way to Communicate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Web-blogs, now popularly referred to as blogs, are sites on the World Wide Web that feature personal opinions and information in the form of posts (Chauhan 2013). Blogging emerged in the late 90s at the same time as internet publishing technology was developed that enabled individuals with little computer experience to start their own websites. Previously, knowledge of

HTML and FTP systems was required for individuals to publish their own content (Blood 2002). Blogs are different from standard websites because they are not static and readers are encouraged to interact with the content published, by posting comments and starting discussions (although this is not a prerequisite for all blogs) about the topics of each entry. This built in interaction between blogger and reader, the ability to publish immediately and organization by date is what sets blogs apart from other websites (Hookway 2008).

Today, we live in what has been termed an information economy (Benkler 2006, Lanham 2006) within the post-industrial age of information. Blogging is one manifestation of this, and content about virtually anything can be published at the whim of the blogger. In her book, *Food and Social Media: You are What You Tweet*, Signe Rousseau points out that we have entered an age of 'prosumption', where we have the ability to be both producer and consumer of information (Rousseau 2012a). This is embodied in the blogosphere where the gap between producer and consumer of information is blurred by the instantaneous nature of posting, commenting, replying and searching for facts and information that supports or denies claims. Hyperlinks and blogrolls allow readers to move quickly through sources and to be redirected to different sites, with different information (Herring et al. 2005). The fluidity of the internet has allowed for an immense amount of information to be sifted through at one time; attention has ultimately become the currency of the information economy (Lanham 2006). The ways in which bloggers captivate their readers is vital to the success of their blogs.

People start and maintain blogs for a wide variety of reasons. In the latest *State of the Blogosphere* report (2011) published by Technocrati, an online index and search engine for blogs, survey respondents reported that the most common type of blogger is the hobbyist, or people who blog because of a personal passion or interest, as opposed to economic incentive. The next largest segment of bloggers are professional bloggers (18%) who use their blogs as a source of income. Income can be generated on blogs from

advertisements being published on the site for products and services that may or may not be related to the content of the blog. Next, 13% of bloggers are entrepreneurs, blogging for companies and organizations which they own and the last significant segment of the blogosphere is made up of corporate bloggers (8%) who blog for the company's and corporations that employ them (Technocrati 2011). Food bloggers can fall under any of the above categories.

The blogosphere is a term which refers to all blogs collectively; the term food blogosphere has been used in this research to refer to all food blogs collectively.

Blogging has been celebrated for its accessibility; the internet has an estimated 34.3% penetration rate worldwide (Internet World Stats 2012). It is also commended for the freedom that it allows. The fact that there are no editors shaping the content of blogs, no length requirements, or set structure that one is obliged to follow (Tobias 2009) makes the domain of blogging one that is uninhibited. Blogging can vary from personal expression to a presentation of facts and evidence; the possibilities are virtually endless.

While blogging is celebrated for the freedom that it affords it is also critiqued for its lack of standards. There are concerns about intellectual property rights, internet ethics, legitimacy and a lack of fact checkers in the blogosphere (Rousseau 2012a). Indeed, blogs are often highly contested and readers must keep in mind that they are reading the published content of an individual or individuals who may have no ethical obligations to fulfill before they hit the publish button. Like in other areas of traditional media, "truth in the blogosphere is threatened when opinion is misrepresented as fact, when bloggers plagiarize, when conflicts of interest are not disclosed, or when a blogger lies about his or her identity" (Kuhn 2007:22). Internet users, with bloggers being a subset of this group, are free to take content from websites without permission or trace and to reproduce and recreate it elsewhere without adhering to any guidelines regarding citation or credit. Ethical issues relating to the blogosphere were considered throughout this research project, and are discussed further in the methodology chapter of this thesis.

## **Blogging about Food**

### **Typology of Food Blogs**

Food blogs cover a variety of topics; recipes, restaurants, product reviews, storytelling, food issues, special diets, regional food and food photography represent just a few of the subjects encountered over the course of this thesis. In 2013 Foodista, an online recipe, cooking and food news source administered a *State of Food Blogging* survey, which was taken by 679 food bloggers. I have used this survey, in conjunction with the Food Blogging questionnaire that I distributed for this thesis, in order to give some insight to the current food blogosphere and to use as a point of comparison to the data that I collected. In the Foodista survey 91% of respondents listed recipes as one of the topics of their food blogs. The second highest ranking segment was restaurant reviews and healthy living (both with 44% of respondents listing these as topics), followed by ‘other’ (39%), drinks (34%), food industry (31%) and specialized diets (23%) (Wetherell 2013). These findings were echoed in the survey results received over the course of the data collection for this thesis, with the majority of respondents to the Food Blogging questionnaire having recipe blogs (69.7%) and review blogs (24.4%), while smaller contingents listed food industry and specialized diets as their topics or specified other, non-listed topics. It is important to note that in the Foodista survey, respondents were able to choose more than one topic, while in the survey carried out for the purposes of this thesis respondents were asked to choose one answer or specify ‘Other’.

### **Motivations for Blogging about Food**

Food blog authors are driven by a range of motives; the results of the 2013 *State of Food Blogging* survey found that authors overwhelmingly list a “passion for food” as their main motivation for blogging, with 87% of respondents listing that as a driving factor behind blogging about food. Other answers that elicited many responses were to “create a name for myself in the

food world” (47%), because of a “passion for writing” (46%), “in hopes of turning my blog into a job” (46%) and to “have a voice so I can say what I want to say” (45%) (Wetherell 2013).

When asked, “Why is it important for you to blog about food?” in the online questionnaire developed for this thesis, responses paralleled those of the Foodista survey. A majority of participants cited a passion for food as their main motivation for blogging. One respondent wrote, “... my blog is an extension of my love that everyone should be able to cook well and enjoy it” (Respondent #41: online survey 25.09.2013) while another emphasized the unifying nature of food,

I want to celebrate everything that is wonderful and delightful about food. In this world ridden with terrorism, hatred, war, and clashes of religion and color of skin – this is a foolproof way to bring people together on one common platform – love of food (Respondent #12: online survey 09.09.2013).

Ultimately, there were five re-occurring themes that emerged as motivations for food blogging from the data collected for the purposes of this thesis. These were; a desire to share a love of food, a method of documentation, a way to forge relationships, a celebration of food, and a way to satisfy self-interested personal needs and wants. Only one respondent cited money as a motivating factor in writing their food blog. This trend was also reflected in the results of the Foodista survey with a minority of 18% of respondents citing economic incentive as a reason for blogging about food. It is important to distinguish that in the Foodista survey, respondents were asked to select all answers that applied to them, while in the questionnaire distributed for this research, respondents were allowed to insert free text in order to answer the question.

## **Community**

Blogs have been described as ‘community resources’ (Tobias 2009) and have been celebrated because like food, they have the ability to bring people together. The internet allows for new types of collaboration and socializing, which isn’t limited to one geographical space (Rousseau 2012a) and opens up a myriad of possibilities when it comes to sharing, but the information being shared in the food blogosphere is not limited in any way to just food. Because food blogs are about something that is every day and necessary, bloggers often write in a way that gives readers insight to their personal lives. Food bloggers invite readers to get to know them in a more intimate, daily-basis (Rousseau 2012a). Stories from home kitchens are seen as real, authentic and honest (Tobias 2009), answering the desire for a more personal relationship with food in the face of an increasingly impersonal and anonymous food system.

Exchanges between bloggers and readers take the form of comments back and forth in the comment field of food blogs. Readers write reviews and tips about recipes, what worked and did not work for them, as well as comments about other topics which may or may not be related to specific posts. In this way, readers function to keep bloggers in check. Comments are immediate, they generate dialogue and they move blogs from the public realm into a more communal realm (Tobias 2009). The interaction between readers and bloggers are part of what sets blogs apart from other forms of food media and discourse. This again highlights the social aspect of food blogging and of food in general,

On the evidence of the vibrancy of food blogging communities, the emphasis on creating a social experience through a mixture of offline (cooking and eating) and online (blogging or tweeting about cooking and eating) pervades much of the food world (Rousseau 2012a: 96).

## **Nostalgia in Modernity**

Food blogs are an interesting phenomenon to study because at times,

they display manifestations of nostalgia in modernity. The Greek origin of the word nostalgia means ‘return home’ (nostos) and ‘pain’ (algos) (Nostalgia 2014), and refers to a sentimental yearning for times past. Nostalgia is a characteristic of modernity in that it is a coping mechanism that we employ as a reaction to the changes that modernity entails, which at times are overwhelming. It is a way to anchor oneself in the past. One reaction to the large, impersonal scale of the food industry is to reach out towards ‘simpler’ times, when the relationship between food and its origins was far easier to track and the choices one was faced with when deciding what to eat weren’t as daunting as they are today. Food on blogs is often portrayed as rustic and simple, straightforward, fresh and natural. Tania Lewis makes a similar observation in her discussion of lifestyle television shows which focus on food, “all emphasize the link between locality and food, often demonstrating a nostalgia for traditions of cooking that have become ‘endangered’ by the rise of industrialized and globalized food practices” (Lewis 2008:232). Similar emphasis can be seen on food blogs, both in the topics written about and through images posted.

The blogosphere echoes the world of food in that it brings people together and, like food, it doesn’t adhere to any specific temporal or geographical space. This lack of grounding allows bloggers to define the space in their own terms. Ironically, blogs often depict a departure from the same modernity which encompasses and enables them. The food blogosphere provides an excellent point of departure for study in that it comprises parallels and simultaneously contradictions. It is also a space which functions to preserve, document and share food traditions and heritage (Rousseau 2012a), thus providing a wealth of data to study.

### **Communicating an Environmental Ethic through the Food Blogosphere**

The food blogosphere is one space in which people can express their environmental ethic relating to food. This is not a trait of all food blogs, but



some bloggers (who will be discussed in detail later on in this thesis) use their blogs as a platform to share their values relating to food and the natural environment. As previously discussed, food choices can be seen as an expression of identity and belief systems, “the symbolic potential of food and eating is virtually limitless, and food items and food consumption events can be imbued with meanings of great significance and surpassing subtlety, according to the occasion and the context” (Beardsworth & Keil 1997:52). This can be extended to food choices featured on food blogs, and thus a discussion of meaning in online food discourse can be pursued.

Blogs which have an environmental focus in some form were specifically sought out for the purpose of answering the initial research questions outlined in this thesis: How are themes related to environmental sustainability portrayed on food blogs? To what extent do people relate to the environment through what they eat and how is this relationship communicated in the food blogosphere? And finally, how does blogging about food empower writers and readers? The following chapters aim to answer these questions; beginning with a review of the literature, followed by an outline of the methods used for data collection, a presentation of the findings from the data collection and finally, a discussion of the data.

# Chapter II: Food for Thought

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The intention of the following review of the literature and discussion of theory is to place this thesis within a larger context. By highlighting studies that have been carried out on foodies and the environment, communication via the blogosphere, and pre-existing scholarship on food blogging it is my hope to show how this research fits into existing bodies of knowledge and to illustrate the gaps which it intends to fill. The previous research outlined in this chapter has shaped and informed the theoretical foundations and method of this thesis.

## **Foodies and the Environment**

By looking at past literature that pertains to the linkage between foodie culture and the environment a better understanding of the relationship can be established. Much of the scholarship that has been carried out on this topic is linked to ethical consumption and consumer attitudes.

Prior research on foodie discourse has been carried out by Johnston and Baumann in their 2010 publication of *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*, which explores the dichotomy of the foodie movement as simultaneously accessible and exclusive. Johnston and Baumann explored foodie discourse and identified two frames which foodies base their decisions about which foods they eat; authenticity and exoticism. Through methods of discourse analysis and in-depth interviews with self-defined foodies in the United States, Johnston and Baumann concluded that, “While eco-eating is certainly a staple of foodie culture, the ultimate valuation for most foodie culture remains *taste*” (2010:206). While their work is not focused exclusively on implications of the foodie movement on the environment, Johnston and Baumann do touch upon these issues by arguing that the foodie movement exists within a larger context of ethical consumption. Their

research highlights some of the frames which exist within foodie discourse and calls for more scholarship on the manifestations and implications of the foodie movement.

The research carried out by Johnston and Baumann has informed the formulation of the central research questions as well as the methodological approach of this thesis. While the findings from the initial part of the research (the online questionnaire) were largely in agreement with that of Johnston and Baumann, the second and third stages of data collection narrowed the focus from foodies and food bloggers in general to bloggers who explicitly communicated messages relating to environmental sustainability and food. While Johnston and Baumann found that decisions relating to food were based on frames of authenticity and exoticism, the data that was collected from interviewing food bloggers and close reading their blogs suggests that other frames are also employed and are important in the decision making process when deciding what to eat, and what to feature on blogs.

Johnston and Baumann argue that authenticity is valued in the foodie movement because, “it settles a tension present in contemporary culture... democracy vs. distinction” (2010:93). While the findings of this thesis also suggest that authenticity is valued for both food bloggers in general and food bloggers with an environmental focus alike, the analysis goes on to explore the valuation of authenticity in the light of an increasingly impersonalized and anonymous food system and its relation to *The Good Life*. Johnston and Baumann base their analysis on the theoretical framework of Bourdieu and focus largely on the contradiction of democracy and distinction in the foodie movement. The analysis of the data collected for the purpose of this thesis attempts to incorporate theories of modernity and reflexivity, in addition to distinction and habitus in order to explore the extent to which the link between food and the environment are portrayed online.

Using the theoretical foundations of Bourdieu, Giddens and Beck illuminated the data collected for this thesis and exposed the need for a hybridized approach to understanding the ways in which humans relate to the

natural environment through food and eating. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu posits that what people eat, and the way in which they eat is largely informed by class structure, “taste is amor fati, the choice of destiny, but a forced choice, produced by conditions of existence which rule out all alternatives as mere daydreams and leave no choice but the taste for the necessary” (Bourdieu 1984:178).

Beck and Giddens describe reflexivity as a condition of modernity and as a reaction to the increasing need for the definition of self-identity in the face of globalization and modernization. Giddens writes,

Each of us not only ‘has’, but lives a biography reflexively organized in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life. Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question ‘How shall I live?’ has to be answered in day-to-day decisions (Giddens 1991:14).

Through making choices and decisions the self is constantly being redefined and reiterated. The decisions portrayed on food blogs can thus be understood as reflexive and are implicated in the definition and communication of identity.

While some food bloggers portray their decisions as a function of reflexive thought and conscientious decision making, the fact still remains that outside the ungrounded space of the food blogosphere these bloggers exist within specific geographic and temporal boundaries. These boundaries may affect their ability to engage in and communicate discourses of ethical and environmental eating. The same can be said for the readers of blogs. While they may be able to access and partake in the content of the blogs online, their structural position may disallow them from practicing the strategies for environmentally conscientious eating that are championed. Structural realities may also affect the ability for people to become bloggers and maintain blogs, or access them at all.

One way to study the link between food and the environment is to take

a closer look at ethical consumption, which Johnston and Baumann (2010) identified as the larger context in which the foodie movement exists. Given that consumption, of both food and other products, is such a central part of our lives it has also become an area in which to express values and address some of the current issues which we face today (Carrier 2012), including the contemporary environmental crisis. Ethical consumption is purchasing based on consumer ethics and values. In this way consumers 'vote' with their dollars, rewarding what they perceive as ethical through purchasing and renouncing what they do not consider in line with their ethics by abstaining from purchasing. There have been several studies which consider the consumption of food within the larger frame of ethical consumption, these studies are useful examples of the ways in which consumers exercise power over the decision making processes related to food and eating. They also expose how varied conceptions of ethical food consumption are.

In 2012, Johnston et al. published a study entitled, *Place, Ethics and Everyday Eating*. This study used in depth interviews to investigate the implication of place in eating ethically. The data collected suggests that eating ethically can be attributed in part to geographical and physical location as well as to social position. This study frames food choice as a marker of cultural sophistication and is largely informed by Bourdieu. However, it concludes that food choice is based on personal taste, privilege, place, as well as ethical and moral concerns, thus attributing consumption choices not only to habitus but also to deliberate consciousness.

This study is interesting in light of the topics addressed in this thesis firstly because of its focus on geographic, physical space. Johnston et al. found that ethical consumption is connected to place because of geographically based food and consumption cultures. Consequently, affluent populations may have more opportunity to engage in ethical consumption because the area in which they live will provide more opportunity for participation in the consumption of ethical food. In this thesis, the internet is the space in which consumption is studied, and while bloggers themselves are certainly located in

physical space, their blogs exist within the blogosphere. While it is not my intention to refute that physical location plays a role in ethical consumption, as it certainly does factor into what bloggers have available to them and chose to feature on their blogs, the internet removes the confines of a neighborhood, and thus may remove some barriers to participation in the discourse of ethical eating. As previously discussed, not everyone has access to the internet or the food blogosphere, but the existence of the food blogosphere within the larger context of the internet eliminates some of the traditional boundaries of geographic space.

Secondly, the way in which *Place, Ethics and Everyday Eating* not only relies on habitus and routine to explain the ways in which people chose food, but also gives space to cognitive processes in explanations of food and eating decisions parallels the theoretical foundations of this thesis. This multi-faceted approach to theory suggests that conscientious reflexivity plays some part in the ways in which people make choices about food. This is congruent with the findings from this thesis and has informed the theoretical framework and analysis employed to study the ways in which the link between food and environment are portrayed in the food blogosphere.

Beagan et al. (2010) published the study *People are just Becoming More and More Aware of How Everything's Connected: Ethical Food Consumption in Two Regions of Canada*. This qualitative study focused on three different ethno-cultural groups in two regions of Canada and explores the reflexive nature of ethical eating; ultimately suggesting that reflexivity is influenced by both temporal and spatial location. Beagan et al., like Johnston et al. (2012), conclude that ethical eating should be considered as simultaneously embodied and reflexive.

The approach to ethical eating as both embodied and reflexive has informed the theoretical foundations and the enquiry of the data in this thesis. Beagan et al. found that “values, including those concerning what matters in food production and consumption, can operate at both discursive and practical levels, but are more readily articulated at the discursive level” (2010:755).

This conclusion is reiterated in the findings presented in this thesis. Because the nature of this research focused on the discourse of the food blogosphere, the reflexive and conscientious aspects of making decisions about food and portraying those decisions online were observed with more ease than internalized factors contributing to the processes of making decisions about food and eating.

For reasons outlined previously, the study's conclusion that reflexivity is influenced by both temporal and spatial location provides an interesting contrast to the internet's lack of grounding in time and place. If reflexivity is influenced by temporal and spatial location in a physical sense, in this case, in two regions of Canada at the point in time of the study, then is it influenced by a lack of temporal and spatial location, and if so, how? Similar to its lack of foundation in specific physical space, the internet also fails to follow the traditional limitations of temporal space, as readers can access blog posts from previous weeks, months and years as they chose to through the archives available on most food blogs. Whether or not this affects reflexivity on the part of bloggers and readers is considered further in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

Julie Guthman's "Fast food/organic food: reflexive tastes and the making of Yuppy chow" (2003) problematizes the way in which fast and slow foods are portrayed in opposition to each other. Guthman explores this binary through the study of the rise in popularity of organic salad mix in California and discusses the ways in which fast food is portrayed as compulsive, bad and fatty, while slow foods are conversely characterized as reflexive, good and thin. Ultimately, she concludes that this contributes to the hegemonic discourse which portrays people who eat fast food as thoughtless and ignorant. Guthman argues that the binary framing of these two extremes doesn't allow for the more nuanced reality of the current food climate.

Guthman sheds light on a disconcerting trend in studies which consider ethical eating and the ways in which it is characterized and portrayed. Her critique of the dualistic rendering of fast versus slow and compulsive versus

reflexive eating is one which is necessary in light of an overwhelming amount of literature which suggests that these two things exist on opposite poles. The discussion in this thesis also aims to take a more nuanced approach to the data and to appreciate the complexity of the food blogosphere and the opinions, values and beliefs that are communicated through it. This thesis focuses on food bloggers that have a stated commitment to highlighting environmental implications of the food system through their blog; because of the discursive nature of the blogosphere more space has been given to theories of reflexivity and deliberate consciousness. The design of the theoretical framework implemented in this thesis in no way should imply that one way of eating is more deliberate or thoughtful than another.

Deirdre Shaw (2007), a scholar who focuses on consumer behavior, explores the existence of imagined communities in her scholarship which focuses on how consumers ‘vote’ with their dollars and how consumption acts as a vehicle for citizenship. She carried out a study interviewing ethical consumers to explore the ways in which they perceived themselves and their consumption choices. The findings suggest that although consumption choices are individual, consumers consistently characterize themselves as part of a larger movement or, as Shaw terms it, an “imagined community of like-minded consumers” (2007:135). This thesis builds on the notion of imagined communities, and explores how food bloggers who in some way relate their blogs to sustainability and environmental awareness perceive themselves in relation to larger movements, such as the foodie movement and the environmental movement. It also aims to explore how writing about food and food experiences is a space in which individuals feel that they can make public statements about their consumption choices to different ends.

The findings of Shaw’s study suggest that although ethical consumption choices are described as individual in interviews with consumers, the same consumers consider themselves to be a part of larger movement of people working towards ethical consumption. The bloggers that were interviewed as part of this thesis often described their choices relating to sustainability and



ethics as individual. However, they also use their blogs to communicate these choices in a way which reaches out to like-minded readers, and simultaneously aims to raise awareness of these issues with readers who may not have considered the ways in which the environment is implicated in their eating choices.

Shaw's study also broaches the way in which voting with the dollar is a contrast to abstaining from consumption altogether. She terms these two different ways of signaling values and morals to the market as 'boycotting' and 'buycotting'. The data collected for this thesis exhibits commitments to both boycotting and buycotting. The bloggers interviewed and the blogs read for the purpose of this thesis exemplify the simultaneous desire to consume less overall but also when consuming to consume in a way which is in line with ethical concerns and values and which contributes to change in the current food system. These strategies are evidenced in both the interviews and the blogs of participants and are two of the ways in which messages of how to practice environmental sustainability are communicated online.

Johnston et al. (2011) explore the ways in which consumers perceive so called 'ethical eating' in their article entitled "Good Food, Good People: Understanding the Cultural Repertoire of Ethical Eating". They used the same data from the aforementioned study of *Place, Ethics and Ethical Eating* to determine the ways in which different populations, both "privileged" and those who have "limited resources" use, and don't use, ethical eating as a way to address social and ecological problems. Like Guthman (2003), Johnston et al. problematize the dichotomy of unethical eating as being a characteristic of the poor, and ethical eating being a characteristic of the affluent. Ultimately, they point to the fact that privileged populations are typically better positioned to partake in ethical eating, but it doesn't follow that they necessarily do. In the interview process Johnston et al. recognized three reoccurring themes relating to ethical eating; local and seasonal eating, organic and sustainable diets and the issue of animal welfare. Mention of social justice, labor and community did occur, but infrequently compared to the three main issues

identified above.

In addition to supporting the claim that eating and preparing food should not be considered as only a function of habitus and embodied practice but also of reflexivity, this study recognized similar themes in its exploration of ethical eating as the data collected for the purpose of this thesis. All of the aforementioned themes related to ethical eating, in addition to others, were also identified through the close reading of food blogs during the data collection phase of this thesis. Their identification speaks to the similarities between the discourse of ethical eating and the discourse used in the food blogosphere to highlight and raise awareness of the environmental implications of food and eating. To a lesser extent, issues of social justice, labor and community were also identified as markers of ethical eating. The same is true for the data collected for this thesis. While these issues were mentioned they were not featured as consistently as issues that related directly to sustainability in the food system. The similarities in the data collected are a testament to the fact that parallels can be drawn between research carried out on ethical eating and this research which considers its portrayal in the food blogosphere.

Janet Cramer's study of discourses of consumption and sustainability on the Food Network (2008) explored whether or not, and how Food Network programming promotes sustainability. Cramer treats food and food discourse as a space in which a relationship between humanity and the environment can manifest itself, a sentiment which is echoed in this thesis. Cramer ultimately found that there were four reoccurring themes relating to sustainability featured on the Food Network; civic agriculture, seasonality, vegetarianism, and most prominently, sensuality. These themes existed within a dominant discourse that links consumption with The Good Life. Cramer concluded that personal relationships with others are far more frequently portrayed within Food Network discourse, rather than personal relationships with the Earth.

Like Cramer's study, this study looks towards information that exists within the public arena and explores the extent to which it promotes

sustainability and how it does so. Although there are marked differences between the realm of television and the blogosphere, as well as in the motivation behind Food Network programming and blogging, the foundational element of communication is shared by both. Cramer calls for further scholarship on the way in which sustainability is communicated in relation to food in the public sphere; this thesis is an answer to that call. The food blogosphere is considered as a space which can be used for the broadcast of messages pertaining to the way in which food and the environment can be linked in ways that are beneficial to both habitat and inhabitants.

Cramer recognizes food as a link between humanity and the environment, this thesis does the same. One of the over-arching questions driving the research presented in this thesis is; how does blogging about food empower writers and readers? Cramer considers the transformative element food by exploring, “how food choices define cultures and how changes may be made to view food and the cultural values in different, more beneficial, ways” (2008:318).

Cramer ultimately found that themes relating to consumption, such as food and gluttony, food as competition and meat eating were more frequently depicted than those relating to environmental awareness and sustainability. The findings of this thesis suggest that there are alternative ways of depicting The Good Life that are not inherently linked with consumption, but rather, with consuming differently. This evokes formulations of alternative hedonism and re-defining self-interest in the face of burgeoning Western consumerism (Soper 2008). Because this thesis focuses predominantly on food bloggers and blogs that emphasize environmental aspects of food and eating, it cannot draw any conclusions about the differences of these blogs compared to blogs that do not focus on these themes. However, the way in which sustainability is portrayed sheds light on the ways in which some blogs promote and construct methods and meanings of environmental awareness and sustainability.

## **Communicating via the Blogosphere**

Increasingly, scholars are looking towards the blogosphere as a source of data in which bloggers, writers and readers can express their beliefs, values and thoughts to a wider public in an open forum. While academic research on food blogging specifically has been limited, other blog studies serve to illuminate how a multitude of themes are portrayed on blogs and how they are communicated via the blogosphere. They also function to provide a wider context for some of the issues that this thesis aims to address.

Herring et al. (2005) explore blogs as form of communication in their study which mapped blogs using a Social Network Analysis method. One of the aims of the study was to describe and explore the blogosphere as a whole, in order to characterize it. Herring et al. (2010) found that the majority of blogs online (70.4% of the sample size) were what they termed 'personal journal' or lifestyle blogs. Food blogging falls under this umbrella as it is personal and reflects the everyday lives of bloggers. The study found that while blogs were more conversational than other traditional web sites or pages, they are typically perceived and described as more interwoven and interlinked than they are in reality. These representations may undermine the individualistic and personal nature of blogging.

In this study blogging has been treated first and foremost as an individual pursuit but the importance of community and perceptions of it, both with regards to the food blogosphere and sustainable food habits merits further examination. In the data collected through the close reading of blogs for the purposes of this thesis there was little evidence of a sense of community found on the blogs. While bloggers often wrote about their local communities and the ways in which they supported them, and perhaps wrote for an imagined community of like-minded readers, evidence of an online community built around the blog was sparse. The most obvious area in which this would manifest itself would be in the comments field of the blog, but an examination of the number and type of comments that readers left on blog posts, as well as the discussions or comments which were left in reply to these did not suggest a

community of readers. This finding corroborates with the way that bloggers described their choices when interviewed; as predominantly individual.

Blog analysis and studies have been employed to study subcultures. They have been particularly useful in reaching populations that may otherwise be difficult to capture and doing so in an unobtrusive way. One example of this is Paul Hodkinson's (2007) study of the online Goth community. By observing and interviewing Goth bloggers on the LiveJournal blogging platform Hodkinson explored the transitions between forums and blogs, and thus community and individuals online. Hodkinson employed an ethnographic approach in order to achieve closeness to his informants. His study informs both the method and approach of this thesis.

Food bloggers can be understood as belonging to a subculture. The place that this subculture manifests itself is online. The ethnographic approach that Hodkinson used in his study provided an opportunity to gain a holistic understanding of the ways in which the Goth subculture used blogging as a means for communication and community building. Although a deep ethnographic approach was not adopted in the data collection process of this thesis, the spirit of gaining a holistic understanding of the bloggers and blogs within the food blogosphere was treated with utmost importance and guided the decision to implement the close reading of blogs.

Hodkinson found that in the case of the Goth subculture, LiveJournals were employed as a means to enhancing and encouraging participation in offline, as well as online, activities. This finding did not corroborate with the findings of this thesis. As previously discussed, evidence of community building on the blog was lacking. This suggests that the foodie movement and the culture of food blogging may not be a subculture in the same way as the Gothic subculture. Interest in food and food discourse spans a larger segment of the population than the more narrow interest of Goth culture and, as the necessity of food is a basic need (unlike participation in Goth culture) it may result in differing levels of participation and modes of engagement.

Another study which explores the construction of identities online is

Mia Lövheim's (2011) study of religion on the internet. This study underlines the importance of communication in the blogosphere. Lövheim found that blogs "represent an interesting example of how new media technology may provide new arenas and forms of participation in a public discussion on cultural values and social norms"(2011:339). While her study focused on religion, this study aims to explore how blogs are used as an arena for discussions about food and sustainability and the way in which they represent a space in which transformation can be facilitated.

In her study of students partaking in a gap year abroad, Helene Snee (2013) treats blogs as narratives. In doing so she examines how gap year experiences were framed for readers on blogs. Specifically, she examined the space between active reflexivity and pre-existing attitudes and belief, setting forth to determine whether narratives of gap year experiences could be attributed to habit or to an active change in disposition of the blogger. She found that there was more evidence supporting the consumption of places and experiences as habitual rather than reflexive. Snee utilizes the theories of both Giddens and Bourdieu in her analysis of her findings, as does this research thesis.

Although dealing with a much larger volume of data and blogs than this thesis, Snee also aimed to explore the narrative element of blogging. The method of close-reading used to collect qualitative data in this thesis was employed in part to preserve the structure and personal nature of blogging. Snee used blogs as a source of data because they allowed access to the unsolicited sharing of opinion and experience, thus allowing for the collection of data that was unmarred by the prompts of a researcher or interview questions. When looking at the ways in which sustainability is depicted on food blogs, a similar methodological approach allowed for data which was uninhibited by researcher bias or prompting.

Food blogs are often founded in part as a creative outlet for their writers. The content, form and style of a blog are important in that they are used as mediums of communication and thus, attract readers. Sal Humpherys'

(2008) study of Yarn Harlot, a lifestyle blog focused on knitting which reflects the day to day activities of its writers, explores grassroots creativity.

Humpherys found that the more aesthetically and stylistically appealing blogs were, the more likely they were to attract readers and generate social and networking connections. For all six of the blogs that were closely read for this thesis, aesthetics and style play a large role. The reason that many of these blogs were located as subject matters was because they had been heralded for their aesthetic appeal.

Humpherys urges readers and researchers to take a more inclusive approach to studying the content of social software and to be wary of undermining the value of the multiple factors that contribute to successful content such as photos, videos, and text; all of which have been considered in this thesis. His study speaks to the potential and importance of personal lifestyle blogs, such as food blogs, as a valuable source of data and a significant method of communication. This study explores some of the same themes and considers the potential of food blogs to be an impetus for change as well as a creative outlet which empowers both bloggers and readers.

## **Existing Scholarship on Food Blogging**

Scholarship specifically pertaining to food blogging is limited and published works regarding the portrayal of the environment and sustainability on food blogs is non-existent. However, works on food blogging in general are useful in that they give insight to the nature of the food blogosphere, its effects and reach

Cox and Blake (2011) explored aspects of food blogging as “serious leisure”, which involves a methodical approach to the acquisition and expression of specific knowledge – in this case, food. The “serious leisure” label implies a certain amount of skill and resources being dedicated to a pursuit. In the case of the bloggers and blogs studied for this thesis this is an appropriate label; the blogs exhibit significant amount of planning and

organizational skills, as well as sophisticated knowledge about the topics blogged about and blogging in general. This suggests that the maintenance, care and keeping of a blog are activities that require a certain level of skill and will. The “serious leisure” label also denotes that bloggers enjoy what they do, something that was overwhelmingly apparent in the results of the online questionnaire, in the interview and on the blogs studied.

Cox and Blake (2011) note that, “food blogging is a fluid practice, and its meaning arises partly from where the author positions themselves” (2011:9), an important observation in light of the data collected for this thesis. The fluidity of the blogosphere allows for the merging of many different approaches and attitudes. The ways in which bloggers framed their blogs and presented themselves through their online content contributed greatly to the construction and maintenance of online identities and the ways in which environmental consciousness was communicated.

Meghan Lynch (2010) published, *Healthy Habits or Damaging Diets: An Exploratory Study of the Food Blogging Community* – a qualitative study of how nutritional health behaviors were exhibited and portrayed on ‘healthy lifestyle’ food blogs. Through close readings of food blogs that fell under the ‘healthy lifestyle’ umbrella Lynch found that there were reoccurring themes of a preoccupation with food and guilt present on food blogs. Lynch’s study exhibits how bloggers have the ability to endorse certain behaviors and attitudes and how these behaviors are in turn shared and perpetuated by the surrounding virtual community.

First and foremost, this study influenced the methods used in this thesis. The initial stage of data collection in the Lynch study was based on qualitative data, but the second stage consisted of the close reading of blogs, line by line, in search of anticipated and emergent themes. This was also the method employed on the six food blogs studied for this thesis; the addition of email interviews with each of the bloggers allowed for a more in depth exploration of some themes.

While the scope of this thesis disallowed the study of the extent to



which attitudes of environmental awareness are perpetuated and endorsed in the virtual community, it is relevant in that it points to the power that bloggers have to sway and influence public opinion. If blogs can function to spread attitudes about dietary restraint, it follows that they can also function to spread other messages, like those relating to environmental awareness and sustainability.

Jennifer Lofgren (2013) studied “Changing Tastes in Food Media: A Study of Recipe Sharing Traditions in the Food Blogging Community”, a Master’s thesis that employs mixed methods to explore the community aspect of the food blogosphere. She ultimately found that, “the food blogging community operates as a structured diversified and dynamic community in which members acquire and share cultural capital and social capital” (2013:85).

Unfortunately, evidence of the community aspect of the food blogosphere was not captured in the data collected for this thesis. While there were certainly a large number of followers and ‘re-bloggers’ subscribing to the blogs studied, the community quality of comments left on posts was sparse. Despite this, it is impossible to know the amount of silent followers, also known as lurkers, who regularly read the blogs. These people may follow and keep updated on the content of blogs, but do not make their presence known by commenting, linking, liking or pinning. Lofgren’s conclusion that the blogosphere is a space in which cultural and social capital is shared supports an understanding of the food blogosphere as a space with potential to reach and affect the attitudes and values of people – whether they are bloggers or not. Anita Blanchard’s study of the Julie/Julia blog contrasts that of Lofgren’s by suggesting a deficit of community in the example of one food blog.

Anita Blanchard (2004) published, *Blogs as Virtual Communities: Identifying a Sense of Community in the Julie/Julia Project*, a case study of the Julie/Julia blog that explores how readers of the blog did or did not constitute a virtual community. Using an online survey during the active period of the now renowned Julie/Julia blog Blanchard asked readers the extent to which

they felt they were members of a virtual community. She found that the majority of readers could be classified as lurkers – people who read the blog but did not participate in the comment section of the blog. These inactive readers did not perceive themselves as part of a larger community of readers, while only a minority of active readers did.

The findings of this thesis are more in line with that of Blanchard and also harken back to the conclusions of Herring et al. (2005) who found that blogs are often described as more interwoven and connected than they are in reality. Considering the community aspects of blogging is important in generating an understanding of the ways in which blogs can influence public awareness and opinion. The blogs studied for this thesis did not exhibit a strong sense of community but, it does not automatically follow that they do not function to communicate important messages about environmental sustainability and awareness to larger audiences.

Watson et al. (2008) takes a postmodernist approach to food blogging and the creation of meanings and attitudes towards consumption, by using a “nethnography” approach to one restaurant experience food blog. In doing so, Watson et al. studies the consumer in the context of their culture, uninhibited by traditional foundations of theory, in this case, in the food blogosphere. Although this thesis focuses primarily on recipe blogs, Watson et al.’s findings are applicable and useful to consider.

Watson et al. discusses the way in which experience is shared on food blogs; by sharing a love and appreciation of food, as well as values and morals relating to food, bloggers reach out to others that share this part of their identity. Watson et al. concludes that, “the analysis of the blog suggests that food is still acting as a symbol, no longer of social status, but of the individual quest for creative self-expression and identity” (2008:299). This postmodernist approach to food blogging gives more weight to the individual blogger in using blogs as a space to create an identity and communicate self. The ways in which some food blogs are used to create and communicate the identity of the ethical or environmental citizen are explored in this thesis. Watson et al. also

note that the open form of communication used in the food blogosphere opens a forum for interpretation by readers. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, a study into the differing interpretations of blogs by readers may shed more light on the real effects and consequence of information communicated via the food blogosphere.

Existing research has helped shape, focus and define the aims of this thesis. Through the review and examination of pre-existing literature the methodology for this thesis has been developed and a theoretical foundation rooted in the theories of Bourdieu and Giddens and Beck has been built. The following chapters which outline the methodology, findings and discussion of the findings rest upon the groundwork established through this review.

# Chapter III: Methodology

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The following chapter discusses the research strategy and design utilized in this study, the methods of data collection and analysis, ethical considerations and the challenges and limitations of this particular approach.

## **Research Strategy**

This purpose of this study is threefold. It aims to both explore and describe phenomena in the online food blogosphere with the ultimate goal of generating knowledge about how relationships between humans, food and the planet are communicated and why food is a space in which individuals feel they can exercise citizenship.

Due to the scope of the questions and the versatility of the themes being pursued an interdisciplinary approach was adopted. Food has been extensively examined in the fields of natural sciences, anthropology, sociology, history, and more recently, in the realm of media and communication studies. Now, food studies is emerging as an interdisciplinary field in its own right, (Belasco 2008, Miller & Deutsch 2009) which encompasses a wide array of research endeavors and methods pertaining to the relationship between humans and food.

Food itself has been described as a ‘methodological tool’, a way to gain insight to people’s emotion and a way to understand their expression of personal, group, ethnic or national identity (Miller & Deutsch 2009). While the approach employed in this study does not use food directly as a tool, it uses the way in which people communicate about it as a lens through which to understand their selves and their relationships.

Both qualitative and quantitative data collections methods were used in this study. The numerical data collected has been used primarily to generate descriptive statistics about the food blogosphere and self-defined foodies. The non-numerical data collected is more heavily relied upon because it provides

deeper insight about how online food bloggers perceive their world, and their role in it. Qualitative research also allows the researcher to access and study data in its natural setting, in this case, online.

The approach of this study was non-experimental. The role of theory in this research is inductive, and the predominantly qualitative approach to the collection of data determines the order of collecting data, and then inferring conclusions, with the ultimate goal of generating theory. The ontological orientation of the study is constructivist and it is epistemologically grounded in interpretivism.

The role of the researcher was established clearly throughout all stages of data collection. The motives behind research were consistently stated and divulged completely and entirely.

## **Research Design**

To fulfill its aim of being both descriptive and exploratory this research follows a case study design. The case study design allows for an in-depth study of a particular phenomenon, using several sources of data and can be used to generate insight as to why that phenomenon exists and what it means (Baxter & Jack 2008). The cases used in this study were food blogs and their authors and the methods of data collection were survey, interview and close reading.

## **Methods of Data Collection**

Three methods of data collection were employed in this study; an online questionnaire, an email interview and finally, the close reading of blogs. Three methods were employed that complement one another and provide greater detail and depth in concert with one another, as opposed to alone. Using several methods also allows for triangulation of data, and ultimately serves to increase the reliability and validity of the findings. Below

is an outline of why each method was used as well as how it was designed and distributed.

### **The Online Questionnaire**

The survey is a valuable tool by which a researcher can efficiently assess a large amount of data on a wide variety of subjects (David & Sutton 2011). The instrument put to use in this study was an online questionnaire. The questionnaire (see appendix A) was useful in that it covered a range of topics, from the foodie movement to food blogging, in addition to collecting demographic information. It was distributed online and therefore, used a minimal amount of resources and eliminated the need for transcription and collation after data collection. Because the population that I was trying to reach was food bloggers, it made sense to approach them in their own domain, online. The questionnaire being online also meant that it could reach a larger amount of people than traditional telephone, group administered, or household drop-off questionnaires.

In order to reach a population of food bloggers, I made contact with the founder of the Association of Food Bloggers, an organization which aims to bring together a community of “reputable” food bloggers, who follow a set of guidelines and code of ethics. By sampling from a population of people who meet a set of member requirements (outlined by the Association of Food Bloggers, see Appendix B) it was my objective to limit some of the sources of error associated with sampling. A hyperlink to the survey was posted on the Association of Food Blogger’s Facebook page on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013 with a brief invitation to partake.

The survey was live for three weeks, and over that time 41 responses were collected. The majority of respondents (89.7%) were women and the most represented age group was 45-54 years of age, with 35.9% of participants falling into that range. A more detailed discussion of the demographics and results of the questionnaire can be found in the Findings chapter. A convenience sampling technique was employed because of the limitations on

the scope of the research and because it seemed to be the best way to reach the targeted population, in their own domain online. The survey instrument was uncontrolled, meaning that participation was completely voluntary and participants were 'self-selected'. This type of non-probability sampling does not lend itself to generalization or statistical inference, but proved useful at the early stages of this thesis to identify and explore themes related to the research questions and to gain a better understanding of the food blogosphere.

The survey was designed to explore several themes central to food blogging and the foodie movement as well as to generate some numerical data on the demographics of food bloggers and foodies. The questionnaire was developed at an early stage of research and therefore is quite wide-reaching in its approach. It was important to develop questions which would highlight issues that were worth exploring further, in interviews and content analysis. The questionnaire consisted of sixteen questions; the majority of which were multiple-choice, followed by open-ended questions and finally, one ranking question. Participants were asked to provide information about their identification with and definition of the term foodie; the data collected from those questions shaped the way that key terms are defined in this thesis. The other questions, which were about the food blogs of the participant's, and the way in which bloggers perceive the blog's function and success were used to explore the different meanings and purposes of food blogs as well as to gain insight on why people communicate about food online. Demographic questions were used to generate descriptive statistics about food bloggers and to provide insight to structural positions of foodies and bloggers. The questionnaire drew inspiration from other survey instruments used to research the phenomena of food blogging and foodies (see Johnston & Baumann 2010, Wetherell 2013).

The questionnaire was short and took approximately five minutes to complete, this was stated in the informed consent form along with the fact that participation was completely anonymous, voluntary and participants could chose to discontinue at any time. The purpose of the questionnaire and a brief

outline of the research were provided as well as contact details; these things were meant to put the respondent at ease. The design of the questionnaire put less sensitive questions at the beginning and concluded with questions about demographics, which could be perceived as more sensitive, in order to build rapport with the respondent before asking them to divulge personal information.

Before the survey was implemented it was piloted by several people. Amongst them, someone with expertise in survey design, along with others involved in scholarship and academia and bloggers that are comfortable in online settings. The feedback given after piloting regarding wording, order, question-type and function were taken into account and changes were made before the questionnaire went 'live' online. This measure was taken to ensure the usefulness of the data collected and to limit, to the best of the researcher's ability, any confusion, uncertainty or ambiguity in the questionnaire and other non-sampling sources of error.

There are four main sources of error when using a survey instrument; coverage, sampling, non-response and measurement errors (Schonlau et al. 2002). Coverage error in this instrument is related to the fact that not all members of the food blogosphere (the population of inference) were reached. As this was a convenience sample, the only food bloggers that were reached were those who were members of the Food Bloggers Association and who visited the Association's Facebook page and then voluntarily partook in the survey posted on that page in the aforementioned time frame. As this questionnaire was distributed using a non-random sampling technique and because of the relatively small size of the sample, it is likely to be biased; therefore no causal relationships, inferences or conclusions about the food blogging population as whole can be made from the data collected. The non-response rate (how many people did not partake in the survey) of the questionnaire cannot be calculated as this was a convenience sample and no sampling frame was utilized. It is difficult to make any conclusions about measurement errors as it is unknown how participants were affected by the



purpose, wording or sensitivity of the questionnaire and if these elements affected the way in which they answered. By piloting the survey instrument, the researcher attempted to limit measurement errors. Other measures taken to put the respondent at ease have been discussed above.

The data collected through the online questionnaire functioned to provide some useful insights as to why it is important for people to blog about food, how they go about it, and how they identify with and define the term foodie. While a larger, random sample would have been more useful in terms of generating statistics about food bloggers, that information would have little effect on this thesis, as it doesn't aim to merely describe a population, but to explore the way in which that population works, with emphasis on environmental awareness. Retrospectively, it would have been useful to ask more questions pertaining directly to the environment and its portrayal on food blogs. Nonetheless, the responses collected serve to enrich the essential backdrop to this thesis and reflect the complexity of the food blogosphere.

### **The Structured Email Interview**

The email interview was employed to gain a more in-depth understanding of food bloggers, specifically those whose food blogs relate directly to themes of sustainability and environmental awareness. After the initial online questionnaire had been distributed, it became apparent that I would have to target bloggers with a stated commitment to environmental issues, in order to collect data that more explicitly addressed the research questions. The structured email interview was used because of the nature of the study. It was important to be able to compare responses of the bloggers interviewed, and therefore it made sense to administer the questions with the same wording and in the same order to each of the participants. Email interviewing also allowed me to overcome the issue of geographical dispersion of participants and again to meet with participants in their own domain, online. Given the scope of the thesis, the cost and efficiency of email interviews was also taken into account.

Six bloggers participated in the email interview; all of them were female, from the United States of America and fell into similar income and education brackets. A more detailed discussion of their demographics and their responses to the interview questions can be found in the Findings chapter of this thesis.

The structured interview (see Appendix C) was designed to extract information about bloggers, their blogs, and the ways in which bloggers understand environmental sustainability and how that understanding manifests itself in their blogs, their relationship with food and in other parts of their lives. The same demographic information collected in the online questionnaire was also collected in the interview as to illuminate the structural positioning of the interviewees. The interview consisted of 21 questions and probes, and was designed to take about 30 minutes to complete, give or take, depending on how much the interviewee decided to elaborate. Interviewees were encouraged to ask for clarification or expansion on any of the questions outlined and in cases where answers provided were unclear or warranted more information the researcher replied to the participant with further probes.

Before the interview was distributed it was piloted by several people, acquaintances who are involved in both academia and in the food blogosphere and some who are not. The feedback given after piloting regarding wording, order, question-type and function were taken into account and changes were made before the interview was sent to informants. This measure was taken to ensure the usefulness of the data collected and to limit, to the best of the researcher's ability, any confusion, uncertainty or ambiguity in the interview questions.

Interviewees were solicited individually, via email, or online contact forms associated with their food blogs. To find appropriate bloggers to interview I used the internet search engine, Google and searched for phrases such as "Sustainable Food Blogs" and "Environmental Food Blogs" – these searches often generated a mix of results, much of which were unusable. While a few blogs were located this way, others were found by manually

sorting through “Best of” lists and blogrolls (links to other blogs) found on food websites and food blogs to determine whether blogs matched the criteria of being in some way related to, or highlighting the environment. Ultimately, twenty invitations were sent out to bloggers that in some way had themes relating to environmental sustainability featured on their blogs in hopes of finding a sample of five to ten bloggers willing to participate in the research. Initially, an invitation to participate was sent out which described the purpose of the study and the intent of the interviewer as well as the process, and invited recipients to voice any questions or concerns. Participants who responded to the invitation were sent an online informed consent form and when this was returned, interviewees were sent the instructions and the interview as both text in the body of the email and as an attachment. Participation consisted of partaking in an email interview and allowing the researcher to closely read the contents of the interviewee’s blog. Six bloggers agreed to partake, gave informed consent and responded to the interview.

Using a non-probability, convenience sample increases the likelihood of researcher bias (Schonlau et al. 2002). As does the technique that the researcher employed to find blogs that fit the criteria. For the purpose of this thesis, finding participants willing to partake was prioritized over ensuring the variability and generalizability of the sample. The convenience sampling method in no way provides adequate coverage of the food blogging population or the population of food bloggers who in some way highlight themes relating to the environment. Again, this was not the intent of the thesis or of the research carried out. I attempted to circumvent measurement errors by piloting the interview before it was distributed, by building rapport with the interviewee (via the initial invitation to participate, the informed consent form and subsequent probes following the response to the interview), and, as in the questionnaire, by ordering the questions of the interview in a way that moved from general to personal or sensitive (demographic information). The informed consent form outlined that participation was anonymous, voluntary and that participants could opt out at any time.

While the responses gathered cannot be used to draw conclusions about a population, the information that the interviewees provided gives insight into the foodie movement, the food blogosphere and how some people use the food blog as a space to explore and exercise community with their surrounding environment. While using the email interview had many practical advantages, employing a less structured interview would have perhaps encouraged more nuanced answers from interviewees. The impersonal nature of the email interview may have also hindered the respondent's willingness to open up to the interviewer (Meho 2006). Despite the shortfalls of email interviewing, for the purposes of this thesis the practical advantages outweighed the limitations of the approach.

### **The Close Reading of Blogs**

Looking towards the content of food blogs which related in some way to the environment was the final stage of data collection. This approach was employed in order to explore the ways in which environment and relationship between individual and environment were portrayed on food blogs. While using blog analysis to study phenomena is a relatively new trend (Hookway 2008), blogs can provide a fascinating wealth of data. Blogging often has an informal style, and provides a window into everyday events in the lives of individuals. In the case of food blogging, blogs provide a picture of the way in which one person, family, or community relates to what they cook and eat. One of the purposes of this thesis to gain an understanding of the ways in which relationships between humans and the environment are represented online, and closely reading the content of food blogs was an unobtrusive way to observe unsolicited reflections and narratives pertaining to these themes. The blogs studied gave the researcher access to the lived food experiences of the interviewees, as well as how they communicated these experiences to wider public.

The bloggers that allowed their blogs to be accessed and read were the same bloggers that partook in the email interview part of the research. The

method of locating this sample has been outlined above. Both the invitation for participation and the informed consent form stipulated that the blogger was agreeing to both being interviewed and that the content of their blog could be accessed, read and discussed for the express purpose of graduate research.

Close reading takes many forms, in this case I approached the blogs qualitatively, reading through the posts in chronological order to identify themes, frames, categories and relationships relating to environmental sustainability and its portrayal on food blogs. Because of the small size of the sample, I was able to consider each blog as whole, as opposed to having to limit the content with date ranges and other filters.

The existence of sampling error has been identified and discussed in the above section. While this method could be critiqued for its lack of rigor or standardized approach to the data, by approaching food blogs qualitatively the data was collected in its natural setting which allowed the researcher to access and understand the research questions and their answers through the frame of the food blogger, the content that they publish online, their actions and their perceptions. Researcher bias was curbed by the practice of combing through all of the blogs for keywords and themes that were consistently mentioned or discussed in blog entries. By establishing a set of themes based on their degree of exposure in the blogs I aimed to approach the blogs in a systematic way which limited bias.

The practical challenges that arise when dealing with blog analysis include the sheer volume of information, choosing what to include in the catchall of 'content', and also issues associated with the verification of identity and the issues of authenticity and accountability associated with food blogging discussed earlier in this thesis (Snee 2010). The volume of information was limited simply by the small sample size of blogs read. It was necessary to impose a cut-off date for data collected; as blog content is constantly being updated. That cut-off was December 1st, 2013. Content on a blog is varied and wide ranging, it includes text, photos, video, audio, comments, hyperlinks and advertisements. It was decided that the analysis would focus on text entries,

photos and video, as well as comments. None of the blogs included audio content and while an analysis of advertising and hyperlinks to other sites, pages, and blogs would be a fascinating point of departure for research it did not directly relate to the research questions being pursued in this thesis. Finally, verifying that the bloggers were who they actually said they were was impossible, but that can be said for offline research endeavors too. All of the potential contacts were solicited individually and directly via their own email address, the email address of the blog or an online contact form linked directly with the blog. Regarding content published on the blogs, it has been treated as the blog author's own unless stated otherwise.

## **Triangulation**

Employing three different methods; the online questionnaire, the email interview and close readings, increases the credibility and reliability of the data collected. By using three methods it became feasible to cross-check results. Comparing definitions, the way in which food bloggers perceived their blogs and their relationships to communication and food to the ways in which food and the environment were portrayed on blogs allowed insights to the reflexivity of bloggers as well as to their pre-existing beliefs and dispositions relating to food and the environment. In addition to triangulating methods of data collection, the analyses of the findings were carried out using a triangulation of theory, complimenting the interdisciplinary nature of the thesis. The complexity of the research questions and the intricacy of the data collected dictated a multi-dimensional approach to the interpretation of the findings.

## **Data Transcription and Analysis**

By collecting data online, via the aforementioned channels, the need for transcription of the data was limited. Blog content that was analyzed was taken offline and stored securely, as were results of the online questionnaire

and email interviews. This precaution was taken in case the online sources of the information were closed down or became inaccessible. This was only done after informed consent had been given by participants. Numerical data from the questionnaire and interviews was used to generate some descriptive statistics, despite the use of these statistics being limited because of sampling technique and size (see above). Non-numerical data from the questionnaires, interviews and blogs were analyzed by counting the number of times certain words were used; through these reoccurring topics, themes and frames were recognized.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the online questionnaire, the email interviews and from all of those bloggers whose blogs were closely read (the same bloggers that were interviewed). The informed consent forms (see Appendix D) stipulated that data would be anonymous and saved in a password protected format. In the case of the questionnaire responses, no identifying information was collected. In the case of the email interviews and blog analysis informants and their blogs were given pseudonyms post-data collection. The purpose of the data collection was clearly stated and it was made clear that participation was entirely voluntary and could be terminated at any time.

The questions posed in the online questionnaire and email interview were generally not of an overtly sensitive nature, the only questions that may be considered sensitive were demographic questions. It was stated clearly that all participation in these survey instruments was entirely voluntary and participants always had the option of skipping questions that they felt uncomfortable with.

Blogs present a unique set of ethical concerns. The content published is public but it is also personal and therefore, can be considered sensitive. Bloggers may have a false sense of privacy in that they expect their blogs to

be read by a certain audience, in the case of food blogs, those who are looking for a recipe or are interested in food. They may not be expecting the contents of their blog to be used as a part of graduate research. Although the information exists in the public domain and therefore I was not obliged to obtain informed consent to read or use the content, I chose to do so. In this case, it was important for me to be as open and forthright as possible with bloggers and to ask permission to use the content of their blogs as a means for research.

Due to the personal nature of the blogs and the possibility of using direct quotes from the published content of the blogs, as well as from the email interviews with the blog authors it was elected that the informants and the name of their blogs would be anonymized through the use of pseudonyms. Also, no links to the blogs used have been given in this thesis. This was clearly stated in the informed consent form. While this limits the possibility of people tracking down the real identities of the bloggers and their respective blogs, it would be possible to search for the phrases and words that have been reproduced in this thesis in order to find the bloggers and their domains. The tension between acknowledging authorship and the identity of the bloggers became an ethical concern over the course of the research. Ultimately, it became more important to protect the identity of the bloggers than to acknowledge their authorship. By anonymizing the bloggers and their blogs the threshold for them to share real, honest opinions was extended and it is my hope that this caveat put informants at greater ease throughout the whole research process. If any bloggers had expressed a need or want to be explicitly recognized by name in this thesis, this would have been done without hesitation.

## **Challenges and Limitations**

The term ‘digital divide’ has been used to describe the economic inequality between those who have access to information technologies, such as



the internet, and those who do not (Warschauer 2010). This divide exists globally and within nations and communities. Originally, this thesis aimed to reach 'foodies', but over time the focus changed from foodies to food bloggers, with the reasonable assumption that food bloggers would in some way identify with the foodie label. The research carried out for the purposes of this thesis captures those foodies who have an online food blog as well as food bloggers who do not identify with the term foodies. It does not capture those foodies without food blogs, but instead focuses on those who chose to communicate to a wider public about their interest in food and eating.

The methods employed for this thesis were designed in light of the research questions and aim to enable the answering of those questions. While the data collected was not all equally as valuable in pursuing these answers, as a whole the multi-layered approach employed in the collection of data provided a context, in addition to a lens that allowed me to study the food blogosphere from different angles and in different lights.

# Chapter IV: Findings

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The following chapter presents the results from the online questionnaire, the email interviews and the close reading of blogs. A discussion of these findings can be found in the following chapter.

## **Questioning People Online**

The following outlines the findings collected via the online questionnaire survey tool, which was completed by 39 members of the Association of Food Bloggers. The structure of the survey has been outlined previously in the methods section of this thesis. These findings will be further analyzed in the Discussion chapter of this thesis.

Firstly, an overview of the demographics of the informants who participated in the “Food Blogging” questionnaire will be outlined. Forty-one participants gave their informed consent and 39 participants then completed the online questionnaire that was distributed via surveymonkey, an online survey tool. 89.7% of the questionnaire participants were women while the remaining 10.26% were men. The most represented age span was 45 – 54 years of age, with a total of 35.9% of participants falling into that range. This was followed by 35-44 year olds (30.77%), 55-64 year olds (17.95%), 25.34 year olds (12.82%), and finally 65-74 year olds (2.56%). None of the participants who completed the questionnaire fell into the 18-24 years or 75 plus categories.

Income and education were measured through two multiple choice questions, “What is your approximate household income per year, after taxes?” and “What is the highest level of education you have completed?” The majority of participants fell into the \$50,000 - \$99,999 range, with 42.86% of informants categorizing themselves in that bracket. This was followed by 25.71% of participants in the \$100,000-\$149,999 range, 17.14% in the \$0 -

\$49,999 and then 8.57% and 5.71% of participants falling into the \$200,000 plus range and the \$150,000 – \$199,999 range respectively. Levels of education corroborated with levels of income, with the majority of participants (46.15%) having completed a Bachelor’s degree, followed by 33% of participants having obtained a Graduate/Professional degree, 10.26% having completed an Associate’s degree (a two-year academic degree), 7.69% having completed high school and 2.56% having a Vocational degree. All of the participants had at least completed high school.

Employment was measured through another multiple choice question, “Which of the following describes your employment status best?” Participants were given 7 options, listed here in order of most to least respondents; employed, working 40 or more hours per week (42.11%), employed, working 1- 39 hours per week (28.95%), homemaker (18.42%), retired (7.89%), disabled, not able to work (2.63%) and unemployed and student, categories which no participants identified with. Because most of the informants were from North America I chose to use standards of working hours per week that are typical in that region. In the United States, there is no official definition of full-time and part-time work; it is left up to the employer’s discretion. However, it is typical that 40 plus hours a week is considered full-time work and 1-39 hours per week is considered part-time work.

Civil status and the number of children in the household were also measured. The overwhelming majority of respondents were married (79.49%). This was followed by 12.82% of respondents who identified themselves as single, with the remaining participants (7.68%) falling into divorced, separated or widowed categories. The majority of respondents had no children (age 17 or younger) living in their household (69.23%), followed by 1 child (20.51%), and then 2 and 3 children each having 5.13% of respondents.

Participants were also asked about which geographic region that they live in, and, as was characteristic of all the data collected, most respondents live in North America (79.49%), followed by Europe (12.82%), Australia (5.13%) and finally Asia (2.56%). No participants responded that they lived in

South America or Africa. This concludes the demographic snapshot of the respondents to the online questionnaire. These questions were posed at the end of the online survey after participants had been asked questions relating to foodies and food blogging. The responses to those questions are outlined below.

Respondents were asked to describe the type of food blog that they have through a multiple choice question. The majority of participants have recipe blogs (69.7%), followed by review blogs (24.24%), and blogs related to the food industry (3.03%) and specialized diets (3.03%). 16 participants also chose to insert a comment under the ‘Other (please specify)’ option and those responses ranged from specifying which types of recipes individual blogs focus on (“Hot Dogs!” (Respondent #7: online survey 09.09.2013)) to a description of combinations of the aforementioned categories to additional categories altogether, like the history of food and foodways and blogs about “the makers and growers” (Respondent #28: online survey 09.09.2013) of food.

Several of the responses collected in the “Other (please specify)” text box of this food blog type question related to the purpose of this thesis to explore how themes of environmental sustainability are portrayed on food blogs. In addition to the blogger that described their blog as “Telling about the makers and growers” (Respondent #28: online survey 09.09.2013), thus highlighting food source, one blogger responded that their blog focused on “only organic food recipes” (Respondent #21: online survey 09.09.2013) and another that their blog was about “growing and preserving food/urban homesteading” (Respondent #38: online survey 11.09.2013). These blog topics and themes reflect the other data collected through the email interview and close reading methods, discussed later in this chapter

On average, the respondents to the online survey have been blogging about food for 4.6 years, with participants representing food bloggers who had just started blogging to one blogger that had been blogging about food for 18 years. It should be noted that in calculating the average numbers of years

blogging about food, mixed (or decimal) numbers were rounded down. Ultimately, respondents represent a wide range of levels of experience with food blogging.

When asked, “How do you measure the success of your blog?” participants were allowed to select more than one answer from the six multiple choices provided and also given an “Other (please specify) option. The choice which received most hits was personal satisfaction, with 22 respondents (64.71%) listing that as the way in which they measure the success of their blog. This was followed by the number of unique visitors (19 respondents, 55.88%), number of followers (15 respondents, 44.12%), number of comments (11 respondents, 32.35%), number of shares on social media (10 respondents, 29.41%), and finally the number of links to my blog (9 respondents, 26.47%). Six participants specified “Other”, listing all of the above, the quality or type of comments and cash earned as other measures of the success of their blogs.

The majority of participants (92.68%) answered in the affirmative when asked, “Do you consider yourself a foodie?” Only 3 participants (7.32%) answered that they did not. The follow-up posed was, “If you answered yes to the previous question, please state your understanding of the term ‘foodie’ below.” A discussion of the results from that question can be found in the Background and Context chapter of this thesis, but it is useful to revisit some of the responses here. Themes that were consistently present in the responses to this question were love (sometimes described as appreciation, passion or obsession), pleasure and enjoyment, as well as exploration and a desire to develop and share knowledge relating to food, all framed as being associated with different aspects of food and eating. A response which highlights the aforementioned themes is,

[A] Foodie is someone who lives and breathes food. Passionate about food and flavors, [a] foodie is one [who] shares their love about food with others – knows of cooking techniques, understand[s] flavor combinations and are ready to be adventurous with trying new things (Respondent #6: online survey 09.09.2013).

Another respondent highlights the transformative nature of food,

I love growing, buying, preparing, cooking and sharing food. I love eating out and I love how food brings people together. We might disagree on how to raise children, politics or religion but we can always find something to agree on where food is concerned. Feed someone and then talk (Respondent #31: online survey 09.09.2013).

Only three respondents specifically define foodies in a way which relates to the environment. One respondent describes their definition of foodie by speaking of an, "...appreciation for the bounty of the land and the culinary skill of those who prepare food" (Respondent #29: online survey 09.09.2013) while another defines foodie as "One concerned with the best practices in food production for ecological and economic sustainability, with food preparation that provides a healthful diet and presentation that entices the appetite and promotes conviviality" (Respondent #16: online survey 09.09.2013). Another participant stated that a foodie is "Someone with an above average interest in all things food related including the preparation of, choices that ascribe to sustainability, taste, popularity and of course a love of eating!" (Respondent #11: 09.09.2013). Because only a minority related being a foodie to the environment and sustainability, the definition of foodie used in this thesis (outlined in the Background and Context chapter) does not include any form of environmental awareness as a prerequisite for being a foodie.

The question, "Why is it important for you to blog about food?" was asked in order to determine some of the motivations behind food blogging. The responses to this question have been briefly discussed in the Background and Context chapter of this thesis but I aim to outline them in further detail here. As outlined previously, the five reoccurring themes that emerged from the answers to this question were; a desire to share a love of food, a method of documentation, a way to forge relationships, a celebration of food and a way

to satisfy self-interested personal needs and wants. The universality of food came across in the responses to these questions and for some bloggers food is way in which they can connect to themselves as well as other people. This is reflected in answers like, "...sharing food with family and friends is a natural way of life; people bond over food. I want to share that with others. And as a busy mom, it's also important for me help other women make good food choices for their families" (Respondent #34: online survey 10.09.2013). Another participant writes, "It's a creative outlet for me to explore and share my interest in food, as well as a means to connect with other like-minded individuals" (Respondent #13: online survey 09.09.2013).

Only two answers suggested that a motivation for blogging was in some way to connect with the environment, or contained themes which related directly to the research questions posed in this thesis. One participant blogs "To show others how much they can grow and use from a small piece of land" (Respondent #38: online survey 11.09.2013) and another "Because the new industry food market has disseminated a lot of false and deviant information about food and its real quality and origin" (Respondent #19: online survey 09.09.2013). Like in the previous question, a minority of respondents specifically touched upon themes of environmental sustainability in their responses.

The subsequent question explored, "What is the most important thing that you communicate to others, through your food blog?" The motivation for asking this question came from a desire to understand the main purpose behind a blog. While questions pertaining to type of blog gave some insight to this, it was important to further explore this with focus on the fact that blogs exist within a larger blogosphere and are accessible to a wider public. Participants were able to answer the question with free text.

Again, the answers to this question can be categorized under some overarching headings. For some, the most important thing to communicate was information, facts and general education pertaining to food. This is exemplified in the response, "facts about food sourcing and restaurants"

(Respondent #8: online survey 09.09.2013) or, “information and education about specialty cheese” (Respondent #40: online survey, 15.09.2013). For others, social and communal histories were communicated in order to incite value, appreciation and respect for food. One participant answered “That food is not just sustenance. There is history behind it and eons of folklore, legends and religious beliefs. Food should be appreciated and respected ...”

(Respondent #32: online survey 09.09.2013). Others reported that what was most important for them to communicate was a sense of emotion, love, and feeling for food, especially relating to sharing, family, and stories. One participant described this as “Feeling and story with food” (Respondent #19: online survey 09.09.2013) while another simply wrote, “The joy and wonder of it all” (Respondent #12: online survey 09.09.2013). Some respondents outlined the most important thing that they communicated through their blogs was exposure and promotion for restaurants and products, “Over time my blog has become more about giving exposure and promotion to smaller local restaurants, coffee shops, bakeries and food trucks” (Respondent #33: online survey 09.09.2013). Another group of participants responded that the most important thing that they communicate was a sense of love, ease, and enjoyment around food and cooking; “Happiness” (Respondent #39: online survey 15.09.2013) or “that everyone – no, EVERYONE – can cook” (Respondent #4: online survey 09.09.2013) while others still listed health, locality and home economics as the most important thing communicated.

While three respondents specifically answered that the most important thing communicated through their blog was the “importance of local food” (Respondent #38: online survey 11.09.2013), “try local” (Respondent #20: online survey 09.09.2013) and “buy local” (Respondent #28: online survey 09.09.2013), no other themes directly relating to environmental sustainability of the link between food and the environment were touched upon in the answers collected for this question. One respondent does however allude to communication of identity through food. They wrote, “We are what we eat and our relationship[s] are conditional on what we eat and drink” (Respondent



#19: online survey 09.09.2013).

Finally, a ranking question was posed which aimed to discern the importance of different factors when blogging about food. These factors were; quality of ingredients, local origin, healthfulness, convenience, cost and environmental sustainability. Participants were able to rank the importance of the aforementioned factors as not important (1), somewhat important (2), important (3), very important (4), and finally, most important (5). A weighted average was assigned to each factor to determine which ranked most important to the food bloggers that partook in the online questionnaire. The most important factor was the quality of ingredients (with a weighted average of 4.2), followed by local origin (3.6), healthfulness (3.1), environmental sustainability (3.0), cost (2.7), and convenience (2.5). This question gave some insight to what is valued in the food blogosphere. The responses to this question, along with the fact that only a minority of food bloggers specifically alluded to ways in which food and the environment are linked, informed the decision to focus the rest of the data collection on food bloggers that specifically cited a dedication or purpose that in some way linked food and the natural environment.

While the findings outlined above have not been used too extensively in the Discussion chapter of this thesis, they provided information about the demographics of foodies and food bloggers as well as provided an understanding of why people communicate about food online and how they do so. Developed at an early stage of conception, the data collected through the online questionnaire guided the subsequent stages of data collection and also highlighted some of the issues that are, and are not, important to foodies and food bloggers in general.

## **Interviewing Food Bloggers**

The email interviews were implemented in order to gain a better understanding of food bloggers who in some way highlight sustainability or

the link between food and the environment on their blogs. In light of the findings from the online questionnaire, outlined above, it was necessary to seek out bloggers with an express interest in communicating these topics. The email interview enables a more-in depth understanding of the ways in which themes relating to environmental sustainability are portrayed on food blogs, how people relate to the environment through what they eat and how blogging may or may not empower readers and writers.

Six informants partook in this segment of the data collection. It is useful to begin again with a demographic overview of the informants who participated in the email interview (and subsequently, allowed their blogs to be read closely and discussed). All six participants fell into the 25-34 years old age bracket, they are all women and all of them live in North America. All of them hold either a Bachelor's degree (5) or Graduate/professional degree (1). Three participants fall into the \$0 - \$49,999 income bracket, one in the \$100,000 - \$149,999 bracket and two into the \$150,000 - \$199,999 income bracket. Half of the participants identified themselves as single, while the other half identified themselves as married. Five of the informants reported that they had no children under the age of 17 living in their household, while one informant had one child living in their household. As far as employment, three participants work part-time, three work full-time and one also identified as a student. This gives a brief demographic overview of those who participated in the email interview.

All of the blogs belonging to the informants can be related to or contain themes relating to environmental sustainability and awareness. When asked, "What type of food blog do you have?" informants outlined the topics that their blogs highlight. Four of the bloggers specifically mentioned their dedication to seasonal recipes, three bloggers specifically mentioned their focus on vegan and vegetarian recipes, two bloggers mentioned their commitment to whole foods, and two bloggers specifically highlight their focus on local food. All of the bloggers have blogs which focus on recipes but some bloggers also post other information, in addition to recipes. Additionally,

two of the bloggers specifically noted their interest and the promotion of aesthetics on their blogs. A more in depth discussion of blog type can be found in the 'Close Reading a Blog' section of this chapter.

The number of year's blogging ranged from 1.5 years to 6 years, with an average of 3 years of experience. The success of the blogs is measured by bloggers differently; the numbers of followers, comments, scope of social media reach, and hits were all mentioned as ways in which bloggers track the success of their blogs. One blogger measured success by the blog's ability to support her family while another mentioned the opportunity to publish a cookbook as her greatest marker of success. Half of the bloggers interviewed described the importance of the ways in which readers react to blog content as the most important measure of success to them and two of the bloggers specifically wrote about inciting change. One example of this is, "... most important to me is that it inspires people to think about the way they nourish themselves through food, and hopefully make positive changes in their own health by using my recipes" (Teresa: email interview 25.10.2013).

When asked, "Do you consider yourself a foodie?" five informants answered no while one conceded that according to her understanding of the term (outlined below) she was indeed a foodie, but simultaneously she is "not a huge fan of the label" (Emma: email interview 27.10.2013). Another participant who does not consider herself a foodie, wrote that "... I'm always a bit conflicted when people refer to me as a foodie because I want people to think of my recipes as accessible, and not too fancy for them" (Eva: email interview 11.11.2013).

The above findings can perhaps better be illuminated with an outline of the ways in which the informants understand the term foodie, a question posed to them later in the email interview. Half of the participants understand foodies to be either passionate or caring about what they eat. Two of the participants link the term 'foodie' to elitism and one participant rejects the term altogether as, "... invented by marketers trying to make a profit by exploiting the recent surge in interest of food" (Teresa: email interview

25.10.2013). What is apparent in the answers to this question is that the bloggers interviewed have very different conceptions of the word foodie, ranging from positive to negative. Laura, from Food Now, writes about the difficulty of defining the term, “[A foodie is] someone who cares about what they're consuming, or just has an appreciation for culinary arts. There are artists and art-lovers, and they're two totally different people, so it's hard to put one definition on it” (Laura: email interview 23.10.2013).

When asked, “Why is it important to you to blog about food?” many different motivations were outlined. Two participants use their blogs as a creative outlet, while another hopes to inspire more people to cook for themselves by showing them how easy it is, another aims to broadcast the “message that is it possible to improve your health through food” (Teresa: email interview 25.10.2013) and another aims to highlight the importance of ethically sourced food. One hopes to promote local farms and businesses and another focuses on “creating community through food” (Eva: email interview 11.11.2013). What all of the blogs have in common is their foundational aim to communicate messages to a wider public. In communicating to a wider public, the bloggers hope to, at the very least, educate or show their readers something, and at the most, to affect change in the lives of their readers.

Communication is common to all of the blogs, and like in the online questionnaire segment of data collection, the question, “What is the most important thing that you communicate through your food blog?” was posed to participants. A common theme in all of the answers was a desire to share a love of preparing and eating food with a wider audience. In addition to that, the ease and accessibility of cooking and eating as pleasure was highlighted. A foundational element of all of the responses was a commitment to inspiring others to be more active in food related endeavors through the different mediums of the food blogosphere. One respondent wrote, “I hope to communicate that connection between how food is produced, how is it prepared and how it nourishes the body, soul and community. I hope to also communicate that food can be both pleasurable and nourishing at the same

time” (Edith: email interview 23.10.2013). The bloggers that were interviewed have all found that food-related activities and blogging are sources of satisfaction and pleasure in their lives; they strive to communicate this and to inspire others to use food as a source of enjoyment and pleasure too.

As outlined previously, the bloggers that partook in this segment of data collection all have, in some way, exhibited environmental conscientiousness on their food blogs. While this was apparent in some of their answers to this question, it was never singled out as the most important thing that they communicate through their food blogs. Emma, who writes *Close to Home* underlined that to “support local farmers and producers” was one of the most important things communicated via her blog, but she also mentioned her hope to inspire someone to “try something new, whether it is a new food or a new recipe.” (Emma: email interview 27.10.2013). Edith (quoted above) highlighted the connection between food preparation and production and body, soul and community but also a desire to communicate that food can be simultaneously “nourishing and pleasurable” (Edith: email interview 23.10.2013) to a larger audience. While messages of environmental awareness, concern and sustainability are featured on the blogs, they are not the single most imperative message broadcasted by the bloggers.

The above questions were the same as the questions posed in the online questionnaire. The following questions were posed in addition to those that were asked in the survey and were written in order to gain a deeper insight into these blogger’s relationships with food, eating, and the environment. The first question posed to the bloggers was, “How and when did you become interested in food?” This question was written with the aim to begin the interview lightly, with a question that each individual could hopefully relate to and answer with relative ease. More than half of the bloggers (4) cite a love for and interest in it that has stemmed from a very young age, which they attribute specifically to members of their family or friends. The remaining two bloggers had specific life events that turned them on to food and eating; one experienced pleasure from eating a vegetarian meal for the first time and

another felt her interest grow when she moved into her first apartment and was faced with the responsibility of procuring and producing her own food. Informants either were “always” interested in food and cooking or could pinpoint a specific event which triggered a serious interest in food.

In terms of an interest in food with relation to the environment, half of the informants did allude to this shift in their answers. Laura, who blogs Food Now wrote that when she moved into her first apartment, “I had dove head-first into food politics and activism, which got me caring about food in a less superficial way than a lot of “foodies” I know” (Laura: email interview 23.10.2013). Teresa, who writes the blog Bountiful Harvest explains that after she tasted a vegetarian meal, it “prompted me to experiment with vegetarian cooking, which eventually led to an interest in nutrition and holistic health” (Teresa: email interview 25.10.2013). Emma’s interest in sustainable and local food was developed when she was working on a project to “green” the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago as a student. Her focus on the museum’s Food Court led her to an interest in local food systems which later manifested itself as her blog, Close to Home.

The question, “Has your taste in food changed over the years? If so, how?” garnished affirmative responses across the board. All of the respondents reported that their taste in food has changed throughout the years and a majority of them mention that they changed their dietary habits in order to eat food that made them feel better, both physically, and in some cases, emotionally. Teresa, of the blog Bountiful Harvest writes that “... I have, and continue to, experiment with different ways of eating to see what makes me feel best, which is constantly changing as I age” (Teresa: email interview 25.10.2013). Half of the informants specifically discussed the way in which they eat in order to feel good and healthy while only one respondent, Emma who authors the blog, Close to Home writes about her choice to become a pescetarian after “reading books and watching documentaries that touched on the inhumane treatment of animals and the dirty secrets of factory farming” (Emma: email interview 27.10.2013).

To begin to understand how the bloggers conceptualized the relationship between food and the environment I asked them to give their understanding of environmental sustainability. It was not specified that they should give their definition with respect to environmental sustainability and food, and whether or not to do so was left up to the blogger's discretion. Further questions (to be discussed later on in this chapter) probed deeper into the ways in which environmental sustainability informed blogger's decisions about food and other parts of their lives. While some of the bloggers simply outlined their understanding as "an action made to take care of the Earth, so that she will continue to take care of us" (Teresa: email interview 25.10.2013) or "making choices that have a low impact on the environment and support for local communities" (Emma: email interview 27.10.2013), other bloggers went into a deeper description of what environmental sustainability means to them. Laura of the blog Food Now discussed the environmental reasons that led to her becoming vegan, as well as the over-consumption that has become characteristic of the American lifestyle. Edith, who writes the blog Food Roots outlined the ways in which her family makes decisions relating to environmental sustainability at household, community and global levels. All of the informants had an answer to this question and all of them displayed an understanding of the term which in some way highlighted the lessening of their environmental impact on Earth.

The question which followed asked, "Does your understanding of environmental sustainability influence the decisions that you make about food? If so, how?" and prompted the interviewees to elaborate on their commitment to environmental sustainability in the way that it relates to food, the common denominator of their blogs. The answers highlighted several themes that were also seen throughout the close reading of their blogs (discussed below); local, organic, ethically sourced and vegetarian food were mentioned in the answers of the bloggers. In addition, the bloggers cited their environmental awareness as an important part of how they make decisions about food as well as their hope that the same awareness would and could in

some way be communicated to their readers.

The third question posed along these lines was, “Does your understanding of environmental sustainability influence decisions in other parts of your life? If so, how?” It was important to determine whether the commitment to environmental awareness and sustainability was isolated to decisions about food, or if it played an important part in other areas of the lives of the bloggers as well. Across the board, the bloggers answered that it did in fact factor into decisions in areas of their lives other than food, albeit to different degrees. They explained how environmental sustainability affected decisions concerning clothing, household items, packaging, personal hygiene, and transportation, as well as initiatives to grow food, and to incorporate environmental awareness into activities outside of the home.

The next question was designed to gain a better understanding of the decision making process behind buying food. The question was, “When you shop for food do you base any of your purchases on ethical concerns? If so, which concern/s? Why?” This question was posed in this way to discern if and how these bloggers practice reflexive consumption and which criteria they consider when shopping for food. As one of the bloggers aptly remarked, “I think everyone bases their purchases on their ethics – the difference is what someone’s ethics are” (Teresa: email interview 25.10.2013). The answers to this question gave insight into how people, who have a stated commitment to environmental sustainability, go through the decision making process when consuming. All of the bloggers wrote that they base their food purchases on ethical concerns. The extent to which they did so varied, from “shop[ping] a lot at farmers markets” (Sarah: email interview 27.10.2013) to following a long list of criteria; “all of our food has to be vegan, ethically sourced, organic or local, in season, and not contain any processed oils, sugar substitutes, or unpronounceable ingredients” (Laura: email interview 23.10.2013). All of the bloggers expressed a commitment to consuming in a way which lessened their environmental footprint.

A major theme that came up in the answers of bloggers was their



interest in supporting local and small businesses, often through farmer's markets and also Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes. This speaks to their commitment to sustainability in their communities. This was a theme that was apparent in the answers to several of the questions posed to the interviewees. Other commonalities, that don't necessarily relate directly to the link between food and environment, but ran through all of the answers to the interview questions was a preoccupation with health and also a desire to live a balanced life. A detailed analysis of these findings can be found in the following chapter.

### **Close Reading a Blog**

As outlined in the Methods chapter, I approached each blog belonging to the aforementioned interviewees individually. I read the blog in its entirety (up until my self-imposed cut-off date, December 1, 2013) and in doing so identified themes, frames, categories and relationships relating to environmental sustainability and its portrayal on the food blogs. I will present the findings from the close reading of blogs collectively, by discussing reoccurring themes that were present in the blogs. First, I will briefly introduce each of the six blogs as to provide an overview of the type and style of blogs that were studied.

The blog Bountiful Harvest was established in March of 2012. Its written by Teresa, "an amateur cook, and student of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine" (Teresa, n.d.), who started her blog in order to, "share my love of cooking healthy, nourishing and delicious food with my family and friends. You'll find that all my recipes are pretty simple and straightforward, and tend to lean heavily on seasonal produce" (Teresa, n.d.). Most of her blog entries follow a standard formula of addressing the reader directly, providing a brief introduction to the recipe she is about to give, and then the recipe, beginning with a list of ingredients, followed by preparation instructions and accompanied by photographs of food. The exceptions to this are a few

informational posts in the form of videos or lists which introduce different types of ingredients, such as grains, or leafy greens.

The tagline of the Food Now blog is, “[Food Now] is a food blog here to show you that vegan food isn't a fad” (Laura, n.d.). Established in December 2010, Food Now is a bank of vegan recipes, aesthetically pleasing photography and tips and advice on veganism. On the “About” page, Laura (the author of Food Now) writes, “The blog started out as a way to document, explore, and learn more about veganism, and cooking in general as neither of us had really done it before” (Laura, n.d.) , referring to her and her boyfriend’s quest to become vegan. Since 2010, Laura has been documenting this journey. Most of the blog entries follow a standard format of introduction, photos, recipe and instructions or, it will open with a re-post of a reader’s question (typically, about veganism) which Laura then answers in the post.

The Local Table is a blog which not only focuses on recipes, but also highlights food issues, such as current news in food politics as well as explorations of different food traditions globally. The blog was initiated in August 2011, “in response to the overwhelming amount of information I was hearing and experiencing about the state of our environment and how agriculture plays a major role in that“(Sarah, n.d.). The Local Table is organized into different categories; News, Interviews, Recipes and Blog, each highlighting different issues. The News section features articles and posts relating to current food events and happenings, often accompanied by photos of events or re-blogs of topical videos and shorts. The Interview section of the blog highlights different individuals interviewed by Sarah, the author of The Local Table; these people may be other bloggers, local farmers, small businesses, chefs or advocates for different issues in food politics. The recipes section of the blog follows the standard format of introduction, photos, ingredient lists and instructions. The Blog section of the blog is reserved for entries of a more personal nature; a hodgepodge of experiences, photos, tips and recommendations, it allows readers closer insight to who the blogger is and what she does.

Food Roots, established in July of 2007 is a blog which “explores the connection between culinary heritage, health and sustainable farming” (Edith, n.d.) through the promotion and sharing of traditional foods recipes. On the blog, Edith describes traditional foods as,

Those foods which nourished our ancestors throughout history and prehistory prior to the advent of the industrialization of food... Deeply nourishing, traditional foods as our ancestors knew them were unprocessed, naturally raised, largely raw and decidedly unrefined. These foods represent the natural diet of humankind and, as such, nourished the natural growth and evolution of the human species for thousands of years prior to the industrialization of food (Edith 23.09.09).

Blog posts range from recipes to advice and in depth introductions to ingredients and processes, such as fermentation and how to stock a pantry with traditional foods. The posts follow the formula of introduction, information or recipe and photographs. Some parts of the site also offered services such as meal planners and online cooking classes available for a fee.

Close to Home is a blog which highlights local food. Emma bases her blog on the concept of “One destination, One ingredient, One recipe” (Emma, n.d.) and explores food that is local to her geographic region. By travelling to farms located within 100 miles of where she lives, exploring them and then highlighting what they produce with a recipe that features that product she aims to reconnect readers with their food. Since 2011 Emma has been posting journals and photographs of her visits to local farms and small businesses, followed by recipes; a list of ingredients and directions accompanied by illustrative photos.

The Four Seasons takes an artistic approach to food. Presenting recipes through the mixed mediums of photography and watercolor, Eva “create[s] photographic recipe illustrations that are mostly vegetarian and laid out visually” (Eva, n.d.) and are inspired by season and locality. The Four Seasons

has been in existence since October 2011 and consists of recipe posts, posts with announcements from the author and other more personal narratives about travel and life in general.

All of the blogs that were studied included not only text but also photos and pictures to illustrate posts. Most of these photos were centered on food, highlighting the beauty of ingredients or the completed recipe. Most of the blogs exclusively published photos of food but some of the blogs, such as Close to Home and The Local Table also included photographs of farms and animals and also of events and people linked in some way to their posts. The aesthetic quality of a blog is of utmost importance in attracting and maintaining readers as well as providing an enticing visual to illustrate a point. A further discussion of the use of images in these blogs can be found in the discussion chapter of this thesis, but its function should not be underestimated in the way that it communicates the link between food and the environment.

The following findings are based on a thematic mode of analysis during the close reading of the above listed blogs. Themes were developed that were grounded in the data collected from the online questionnaire and research interviews, as well as past research. Other themes emerged during the close reading process. The themes presented here relate food and the environment to various degrees. Some of the themes do not directly relate to environmental sustainability but were so frequently recorded that I have chosen to briefly present them here in order to provide a context and contrast to themes that do suggest participation in the environmental discourse of food. Some of the themes found have been grouped together because of their similarities.

The themes which directly relate food and eating to the environment and display environmental awareness on part of the blogger were; visiting farmer's markets, seasonality and localism, veganism and vegetarianism, organic food, sustainability, eating conscientiously, animal welfare, alienation from the food source and whole foods. These themes are considered individually below.

The most commonly occurring themes that suggest environmental

awareness and linked food to the environment were those of visiting farmer's markets, seasonality and localism. These themes were often linked as most of the bloggers frequent local farmer's markets, or farms and the ingredients that they source there are by default both local and seasonal. The bloggers source ingredients that possess these qualities because they aim to diminish the environmental impact of their eating habits, want to support local business and also because they value the perceived traits of freshness and quality. Edith from Food Roots describes the pitfalls of not eating seasonally by writing,

When you can pick up a clamshell of strawberries in January, the novelty and specialness of the fruit is lost and you miss the wonderful feeling of biting into a truly fresh, ripe, sun-warmed berry in June. You can't fully appreciate a food after it becomes mundane (Edith 25.05.2008).

Often bloggers linked the qualities of food being from the farmer's market, locality and seasonality to better tasting food, and in turn, a higher level of well-being. Through consistent references to the farmer's market, local and seasonal food, as well as recipes and photographs which employed ingredients with these qualities and portrayed them in an aesthetically pleasing way, bloggers encourage their readers to also source ingredients with these qualities in mind. CSA (Community-supported Agriculture) boxes and Buying Clubs, clubs which allow members to collectively purchase items (in this case, food, often of sustainable origins) at lower prices are themes that were cited less but can be grouped with the similar themes of farmer's markets, locality and seasonality.

Veganism and vegetarianism were mentioned to varying degrees in the blogs, with half of the blogs focusing exclusively on vegan or vegetarian recipes and the others featuring them more often than meat-heavy recipes. There is the exception of one blog, Food Roots, which advocates a traditional foods diet which relies on local, sustainably farmed animals eaten sparingly. While the bloggers featured vegan and vegetarian recipes for different reasons

and to different degrees it is a theme which was also discussed and debated both on the blogs and in the comment sections of blogs. These themes were linked to political and environmental reasons but also to a higher level of well-being and a cleaner way of eating and living. Laura, who blogs for Food Now explains her reasons for being vegan simply as, “I want to do the least harm I can to the environment, animals, and my own body” (Laura 22.06.2011). A theme which directly relates to that of veganism and vegetarianism was that of dairy and meat substitution and finding ways to eliminate ingredients perceived as unsustainable by replacing them with alternative options. This theme was most prominently featured on the vegan blog, Food Now but other blogs also highlighted ways of making a meal feel substantial without animal protein.

Organic food was also discussed throughout the blogs. Organic food was presented in a positive light in virtually all of the blog posts that mentioned it. Organic food was most commonly used in the context of sustainable farming and heralded for its lack of reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Organic food was framed as being both healthier and tastier than its conventional counterpart and as being a better choice for physical and natural health. Many of the blogs only used organic fruits and vegetables in their recipes, and encouraged readers to do likewise. On Bountiful Harvest, Teresa describes a comparison between a non-organic and an organic apple,

We were all agreed that the organic apple was about 3 times more flavorful and sweet, with a thinner, less chewy skin. They were both crisp and firm, but the organic was juicier. I’ve heard people mention that organic produce tastes better, and now I know” (Teresa 05.08.2012).

Sustainability was often mentioned or noted on blog posts or in recipes. This was referred to in two ways; in a positive light which discussed ways of acting sustainably in the food system and also in a negative light, in posts concerning the unsustainable nature of the current food system. One example

of a positive manifestation of this theme can be seen in this excerpt; “Sustainable agriculture is my passion...Sustainably produced food – grass-finished and pasture-raised meats nourish the earth by sequestering carbon in the soil and improving the variety of native flora” (Edith, n.d.).

Another theme which was recurrent was one of eating conscientiously; this took many forms, eating conscientiously of one’s health, one’s wellbeing but also of the environmental impact of the food choices being made. By encouraging conscientious eating bloggers encourage raising one’s awareness of what one eats and the real implications of those decisions.

Animal welfare was discussed on all of the blogs to different extents and in different ways. Some bloggers advocated a completely animal-free diet while others advocated for humanely and sustainably farmed meat and animal byproducts. While this was often discussed in conjunction with topics of veganism and vegetarianism, I chose to treat as a separate topic as animal welfare does not necessarily mean an abstinence from eating meat or any other animal protein. Like with organic food, a higher standard of welfare for animals was associated with food that was better tasting and healthier, “Healthy milk, you see, comes from healthy animals fed their natural diet” (Edith 23.09.2009).

Alienation from the food source was another theme that was identified. It is important to note that food source was not always an allusion to the natural environment, but was more often referred to as farms or fields or agriculture, or farmers. Edith, from Food Roots touches on this,

It’s sad that we’ve become so disjointed from our food source that animals must be de-animalized before they’re served to us. In an effort to make food and nutritional health a priority we must get to know our farmers, ranchers, growers and butchers” (Edith 19.9.07).

While Sarah, from The Local Table describes this as a result of globalization, writing, “The food system has become so globalized that we have lost our

connection to the most basic essence of our being: food!” (Laura 01.08.2011).

Whole foods, meaning unprocessed or unrefined foods were often the subject of recipes and blog posts. All of the bloggers advocated for whole foods, not only because of health factors but also because of their lack of reliance on commercial processing and the perceived shorter distance between farm and table, and therefore a lessened environmental impact. Teresa of Bountiful Harvest writes, “If we want to be whole people (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually) and feel whole, then we need to eat whole food” (Teresa 26.06.2012). This again highlights the way in which environmental themes are almost always associated with the health and well-being of the individual.

Other themes which emerged, which are not linked directly to the connection between food and nature, are still interesting in terms of contextualizing the above data. These were themes of tradition and heritage, memory and nostalgia, health and well-being, the benefits of homemade versus store-bought foods, worker’s rights, frugality, and local community. Although these themes do not directly relate to the link between food and the environment, indirectly they often alluded to the themes outlined above and together worked in concert. All of these ‘other’ themes are important because they constitute, along with other themes discussed in this chapter, one construction of The Good Life.

The two frames which were most commonly employed on the blogs studied were frames of education and the frame of creativity. This finding works in congruence with the fact that two of the main motivating factors for starting and maintaining a blog were to educate and to also use the blogosphere as an outlet for creativity. All of the blogs that were studied in the close readings exhibited these qualities. Blogs educated readers with facts, tips and information about food, its origins, how to source and prepare it as well as information about other things relating to food and food-related endeavors and/or advocacy. While this took many forms, both direct and indirect, it was a constant characteristic of the blogs studied. Creativity was expressed in



many different forms on the blogs, through the style and form of text, through original content, photography, videography and painting as well as the conceptualization of the blog itself, which necessitates a substantial amount of skill and knowledge.

This chapter has outlined the findings from the online questionnaire, the email interviews and the close readings of blogs. The following chapter is a critical discussion of the above findings, which attempts to draw conclusions from the data and consider them within the larger context of the thesis and in light of its theoretical underpinnings.

# Chapter V: Discussion

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The purpose of this discussion chapter is to apply and discuss the implications of the findings outlined in the previous chapter. The end goal of this thesis is to explore how blogs promote ways of environmental awareness and meanings of environmental sustainability. Blogging about food is a way in which people create, maintain and communicate identities; characteristics of these identities are identified and discussed below.

## **Foodie as a Contested Term**

Foodie is a contested term. While nearly all of the respondents to the online questionnaire associated with the label, and defined it in a positive manner, the food bloggers who were interviewed in the second stage of data collection contested, rejected and opposed the term. Teresa, who blogs Bountiful Harvest, wrote,

The term foodie was invented by marketers trying to make a profit by exploiting the recent surge in interest of food. I think it is sad that anyone thinks its ok to make money from something that every single living thing on this planet is required to do to continue living – take in and digest nourishment (Teresa: email interview 25.10.2013).

A contrasting definition, given in the online questionnaire states that a foodie is, “One concerned with the best practices in food production for ecological and economic sustainability, with food preparation that provides a healthful diet and presentation that entices the appetite and promotes conviviality” (Respondent #16: online survey 09.09.2013). None of the food bloggers in the second stage of data collection associated with the term, whereas other food bloggers, who participated in the online survey, embraced it.

The opposing definitions expose some of the tensions that exist in the

construction of different identities in relation to food. The label of foodie is implicated in defining the extent to which, and the way in which bloggers engage in the world of food and eating. The findings imply that bloggers interviewed, who exhibited a stronger engagement with the discourse of an environmental ethic through their blogs were less inclined to accept the term foodie than those who did not. Bloggers cited the connotation of the term with elitism, as well as the creation of the word as a response to the increasing trendiness of food as reasons for their hesitation to adopt the term. I argue that bloggers rejected the term because the lack of seriousness they perceive it to imply does not comply with the creation and maintenance of the identity of a conscientious and environmentally aware blogger. The connotation with elitism is something that the interviewees want to distance themselves from, as they attempt to portray the accessibility of good food for all on their blogs. This aim was often synonymous with that of the bloggers who participated in the online survey, but the differing ways in which the interviewees perceive the current food system may have resulted in more skepticism towards labels which are associated with the said system.

The findings show that not all food bloggers are foodies, and one can reasonably assume, that not all foodies are bloggers. This thesis focused on the food blogosphere and its authors as a source of data, but foodies take many forms, not all of whom participate in the online world of food. Just as foodies take many forms, so do food bloggers. This is exhibited in the plethora of topics covered in the food blogosphere. Environmental concern and the communication of an environmental ethic was not a trait of all food bloggers, and past research shows that it is not a trait of all foodies either (Johnston & Baumann 2010). None of these categories are mutually exclusive; a testament to the complexities of the food world and the food blogosphere that it encompasses.

## **Food and Pleasure**

For foodies and food bloggers alike, food is associated, above all else, with pleasure. This was evidenced clearly in the responses to many of the questions posed in the questionnaire and interviews. A profound excitement and passion for food and all things related to it; sourcing, preparing and consuming it as well as sharing it, talking about it, and learning about it was obvious in the responses. Respondents consider food as a great source of enjoyment and happiness in their lives and also relate it to living The Good Life. One respondent defined a foodie as “a person who thinks that eating is not only a “survival act” but it’s part of the good life, so that we can’t just eat all but we must eat the best food in the best way” (Respondent #19: online survey 09.09.2013). Another implies this sentiment by defining foodie as “A person who considers food far more than just fuel and savors food and meals” (Respondent #40: online survey 15.09.2013). First and foremost food blogs should be considered as manifestations of a deep love and enjoyment of food.

Although their blogs make reference to and use a discourse of environmental ethic, the interviewees did not list messages relating to environmental themes as the single most important thing communicated via their blogs. Their responses suggest that communicating the ease, joy, and the adventure of trying new things relating to food supersede messages that communicate the practice of sustainability.

Pleasure was communicated via the two main frames identified in this thesis; the frame of education and that of creativity. Pleasure was portrayed as attainable from the enjoyment of learning something new, such as a new recipe or food preparation method and from being inspired through the creativity exhibited in the content of the blog. The ways in which these conceptions of pleasure are implicated in conceptualizations of The Good Life is further discussed later on in this chapter.

## **Frames in Environmentally Minded Food Blogs**

The two main frames which were observed in all six of the blogs studied through close readings were that of education and creativity. These frames were also evidenced in the responses to the online questionnaire. The education frame is somewhat inherent to the food blogosphere, as people publish information, facts, recipes and other content, such as strategies for eating conscientiously, in order to make it accessible to a wider public. In doing so, bloggers are creating and communicating a source of information. This is unsurprising, as a food blog most typically is a place that people visit to learn about making and eating food and the internet is, as a whole, a space in which information is shared. The education frame was consistently present throughout the close reading of blogs and in almost all of the posts that were read. It was most commonly observed as the presentation of facts, skills, and knowledge aimed at enriching the reader.

The desire to share knowledge was also apparent in the responses to the email interview. When asked about why it is important to blog about food, Laura writes, “I want to teach people easy ways to bring satisfying whole foods into their lives, without sacrificing too much time or money” (Laura: email interview 23.10.2013) and Teresa writes about how she aims to “share the message that it is possible to improve your health through food” (Teresa: email interview 25.10.2013). The replies suggest that the impulse to share information and to educate emerges from a desire to share something that the bloggers have found to contribute to their own overall well-being.

The frame of creativity was employed to inspire readers. With recipes, images and more, bloggers attempt to kindle the same pleasure that they associate with food and eating in their readers. Eva writes, “My hope is that I will present recipes in an appealing and artistic enough way that they will want to spend time in the kitchen cooking and then sit down with family and friends to enjoy it” (Eva: email interview 11.11.2013). To inspire others through creativity was one of the main reasons interviewees’ blog about food. Bloggers also used their blogs as creative outlets for themselves. Emma wrote

about how she uses her blog to, “Balance my life” (Emma: email interview 27.10.2013). Frames of education and creativity are utilized to enrich both bloggers and readers alike.

## **The Aesthetics of Food Blogging**

The food blogosphere is a beautiful place. Video, photographs and watercolors depicting the bounty of the Earth were characteristic of all of the blogs encountered during this thesis. The most common image used in blog posts depicted an ingredient, in all of its natural glory. Carrots with a hint of dirt, springy green leaves sprouting from the top. A single chick pea, the contours of its form evoking the integrity of the pea. A jar of lemons, their tangy goodness emanating from the screen. With little exception, the photographs used on food blogs portray food as beautiful and simple. Rarely are human subjects present, nor the clutter, mess or disarray which would suggest that the kitchen is anything but an oasis of calm. Similarly, the videos encountered in the close-readings were all simple, set to atmospheric music, and featured food most prominently. The format and style of blogs contributed to their appetizing and appealing looks.

We eat with our eyes before we eat with our mouths, this goes some way in explaining the popularity of a medium in which taste is so central, but also impossible to deliver via a nine-inch computer screen. Although you can rush into your kitchen, follow the recipe, and come up with one version of the same dish, the immediate satisfaction comes from the photos and pictures that have been posted on the blog. Photos represent an attainable goal, and readers are invited to imagine not only the way that an ingredient or dish could taste, but also how it would be to craft that dish themselves, with time and care so that it could look equally as beautiful, delicious, appetizing and nourishing on their kitchen counter as it does online.

The blog Close to Home specifically highlights nature in its photographs and art work. Eva, who is the author and artist behind the blog

uses watercolor to decorate and enhance the presentation of her recipes, which are photographed exclusively outside, set in the majestic and towering forest in which she now lives. The concept of Close to Home is to highlight seasonal recipes, following the contents of Community-sponsored Agriculture boxes. The tagline of the blog is, “A New York food photographer moves to the woods” (Eva, n.d.) which not only tells Eva’s story but also allows readers to imagine what it would be like to retreat to the forest and give their days to food, eating and art. Not only is the food presented as simple, straightforward and beautiful but often, so is the lifestyle of the blogger. The easiest way to experience the lifestyle presented is via reading the blog and by creating the recipes presented on the blog.

The food blogs studied in the close readings all portrayed food in a similar way. Images were rustic and nostalgic, creating a contrast to the artificial colorings and fluorescent lighting of the current industrialized food system. Animals were pictured on the farm, not on the conveyer belt and there wasn’t one photo of a can of tomatoes or a jar of peanut butter to be found. The aesthetics of the blogs are instrumental in communicating alternatives to the mass-produced foods of today, and construe food as simple, straightforward and natural. This construction was echoed in the content of the posts, the recipes given and the way in which bloggers communicate the ease and accessibility of abiding by environmental standards when making decisions about food.

## **Eating Well and Well Being**

Themes that were identified through the close reading of blogs as being linked in some way to the communication of an environmental ethic were always portrayed as being not only more beneficial to the environment, but also to health and well-being. Not only were they portrayed as being better for the environment and better for you, but also as better tasting.

The way in which these themes were framed as a win/win/win for the

blogger as well as their readers indicate that while environmental consciousness is an important message for bloggers to communicate, it is part of a broader discourse on the benefits of eating well. 'Well' being indicative of several factors operating at several different levels. This conclusion, along with the fact that environmental discourse was not perceived as the single most important thing communicated through blogs, suggests that discourse of environmental concern and ethics in the food blogosphere exist within a larger discourse which is re-defining what it means to eat well and aligning these definitions with new conceptions of The Good Life.

Food is, without exception, portrayed in a positive light on the blogs studied; this is a departure from the ways in which food is often portrayed in the news today. Concerns about health and nutrition, the ecological ramifications of the food system on the environment and unhealthy relationships with food are increasingly featured. The lack of food sovereignty for some nations coupled with an agricultural and production system of an unprecedented scale are the lenses through which we most often see food in the news. The food blogosphere offers respite from the doom and gloom which pervades contemporary food news stories. In articulating positive relationships with food, and as a part of that, the pleasure and well-being which can be derived from participating in healthy human-food relationships, bloggers inspire and affect change.

### **Locating the Source**

While bloggers did express concern about the disconnection between people and their source of food, the source of food was defined not as the ecological environment as a whole, but instead as farms, farmers and agriculture, all of which contain a human element. The ways in which people were disconnected from the source of food was featured far more prominently than the ways in which people have been disconnected from the environment as a result of the anonymity and large scale of food production today. This



result is interesting in light of the fact that themes of worker's rights and local community often came second to themes relating to environmental sustainability on the blogs. That being said, this finding echoes that of Janet Cramer, who found that personal relationships with other humans were more frequently depicted on Food Network television than personal relationships with the Earth.

Good food and eating well are being redefined as food which is closer to its roots, if closer to its roots denotes it being closer to sources of production, rather than the Earth or biological surroundings. Edith, from Food Roots writes,

When I spend my money locally, and purchase farm-direct, I ensure that my the agricultural roots of my community are well-fed and that the farmers, themselves, not giants of the agricultural industry or middlemen, profit from their hard work – tilling the fields, harvesting crops and raising animals properly. By connecting directly with food producers, I can ensure that the food with which I nourish my family is not only safe, but grown and raised under as close to optimal standards as possible. (Edith 02.03.10).

The human factor of food production is emphasized, but not the natural environment which is a pre-requisite for their existence at all. The bloggers tend to highlight ways in which environmental conscientiousness can be practiced that are perceived as accessible and doable for their readers. A larger discussion, concerning the greater reality that nature sustains life and that everything is inherently interwoven and connected is often shirked, in favor of employing frames which are easier to conceptualize and understand; the smaller picture, as opposed to the bigger one which encompasses it.

While food blogs operate and communicate strategies for the procurement and preparation for food that are more beneficial to the environment, allusions to the ecological conditions which sustain life were rarely observed. This suggests that bloggers have a limited engagement with a

discourse that relates the ecological environment to humans through what we eat.

## **The Good Life in the Food Blogosphere**

What emerged from the close reading of blogs was the articulation of one conception of The Good Life. Many of the themes that were observed and encouraged are framed in a way which portrays them as avenues towards a higher standard of living, and better well-being over all. The Good Life observed in this segment of the food blogosphere rejected the alienating forces of mass consumerism and the massive scale of the current food system and instead founded itself on alternative conceptions of authenticity, simplicity, nostalgia and pleasure. This was communicated through all of the content published; visual and textual as well as through the style and format of the blogs.

The ways in which good food and good ingredients were associated with a greater standard of wellbeing, better health and more taste have been outlined previously; the win/win/win of eating in a certain way is portrayed as an ideal which is simultaneously accessible and desirable. This forms the foundation of one notion of The Good Life attainable through food and eating. Another foundational tenet of this formulation is the rejection of mass consumerism and the industrialized food system, in favor of simplicity, small scale production and a genuine and real connection with the aforementioned source.

Edith from Food Roots writes, “If you want to eat well, there is always a way, but shopping under fluorescent lights in a mega-store just ain’t it” (Edith 3.9.07). Sarah, from The Local Table, alludes to the tenets of the slow food movement when she posts,

The snail grows in concentric circles and then stops when it has reached its greatest growth potential. It then goes backwards and strengthens its

shell. We have come to the same point as a species. We have grown plenty, and now is the time to go back and strengthen what we have. If the snail keeps growing, it would die- and we will too. We have to act as the snail, and think about sociability, not productivity (Sarah 06.09.2011).

Both bloggers propose a retreat towards an ideal which is perceived as more real, more genuine and more authentic and thus, more meaningful. The themes relating to adopting sustainable food habits are portrayed as a means to the end of achieving The Good Life. Simultaneously, other themes such as tradition and heritage, memory and nostalgia, the benefits of homemade food over store-bought, frugality and the importance of local community all suggest a departure from the characteristics of contemporary food system, and contribute to one ideal of The Good Life.

Consumerism was not portrayed as a characteristic of The Good Life on the blogs read for this thesis. Rather, a departure from a culture of consumerism was cited as a way to create and maintain relationships to food and eating that were perceived as better in many ways. Teresa describes her ideal as,

I have this fantasy (don't worry, it's not dirty) of mixing together flour and water, letting it sit out on the counter, feeding it every day, watching it grow... and creating a homemade sourdough starter. I then bake up a few beautiful, warm, crusty loaves of bread every week, nourishing my family and friends, and never relying on store bought bread ever again (Teresa 30.03.2012).

Her Good Life is about beauty, warmth, nourishing relationships and not having to rely on the contemporary food system. While she doesn't specifically cite an improved communion with the natural Earth, she does allude to yearning for a more authentic and meaningful relationship with her food.

One of the main conclusions that Johnston and Baumann came to in

their study of *Foodies* (2010) was that the choices foodies make are in part based on frames of authenticity. They describe this as a response to the contemporary tensions between democracy and distinction. The findings of this thesis agree with the claim that authenticity is valued by foodies, in this case food bloggers, but the reasons for which authenticity is valued are more complex than a manifestation of the tension between democracy and distinction. It is my argument that authenticity is valued because it is a way in which to negotiate the tensions between fast and slow, complex and simple, modernization and tradition and heritage, a disconnect versus a connection with one's food source and realness versus fakeness. It is valued as an avenue to The Good Life.

Evidence for the exercise of community within the food blogosphere was sparse, however, reference to the bloggers' local communities was widespread, and an important part of the blogs studied was the promotion of local businesses, farms, markets and products. This is a reflection of bloggers' commitment to their local communities. This grassroots approach to change was also a foundation of formulations of The Good Life, and greater participation in community activities was portrayed as a way to close the gap between product and source, and to escape the complexity of navigating the contemporary food system.

Through the formulation and portrayal of The Good Life through food, bloggers aim to incite a reach towards a simpler, more straightforward way of life; one avenue to do so is through practicing sustainability in the procurement and production of food.

### **The Food Blogosphere: A Reincarnation of Class Based Food Habits, or a Manifestation of Reflexive Thought?**

The findings of this thesis necessitated a dynamic approach to theory; the themes portrayed in the food blogosphere as well as the approaches towards foods articulated in the online questionnaire, the email interview and

on blogs suggest that individuals make reflexive choices in the procurement, preparation and communication of food. However, despite the blog's lack of foundation in specific geographic or temporal space, the bloggers themselves do operate within differing structures. The demographics of the food bloggers studied indicate that blogging and participating in discourses of environmental ethics about food may be associated with high levels of income and education. The implications of these structural realities may influence what bloggers chose to feature on their blogs and the way in which they do so. This is also true for the readers of the blogs; despite the accessibility of the food blogosphere, translating the strategies promoted online may be impossible for readers because of structural barriers which disallow an engagement in eating in the environmentally conscientiously ways outlined on blogs.

The findings suggest that considering the ways in which bloggers communicate environmental awareness and sustainability as wholly a manifestation of class based food habits is too simplistic. It fails to allow for the complexity of the multitude of factors which guide food choice, and to account for the evidence of deliberate thought and reflexivity portrayed on food blogs. Despite this, structure continues to exist and in part, affects agency. All of the bloggers that were interviewed and who allowed their blog to be closely read held at least a Bachelor's degree and reported being gainfully employed. While the small sample size prohibits these findings to be generalized to the food blogging population at large, it must be noted that all of the informants in this study have a certain level of financial stability and security which may allow them to be more engaged in the discourses of the food blogosphere and environmental eating.

The habitus is "a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions" (Bourdieu 1984:170). Along with the exercise of cultural capital, the habitus forms and reproduces class based distinctions. The only explicit reference to embodied habitus in the process of data collection came when interviewees were asked, "How and when did you become interested in food?" Some of the bloggers described this as a long-standing,

innate interest. Answers like, “Always” (Sarah: email interview 27.10.2013), or “Since I was little” (Eva: email interview 11.11.2013) suggest that bloggers consider their preoccupation and interest in food as an embodied characteristic.

Bourdieu posits that the, “the cognitive structures which social agents implement in the practical knowledge of the social world are internalized, “embodied”, social structures ... which function below the level of consciousness and discourse” (Bourdieu 1984:468), thus characterizing reflexivity as a quality of habitus, rather than a characteristic of conscientious, deliberate individuals. In doing so he fails to adequately explain departures from embodied habits and social structures. Laura, from Food Now decided to become vegan when she moved into her first apartment and initiated her blog to chart her journey,

Our food choices have always been scoffed at by others as ‘hipster food’ - as if it were some silly, fleeting trend. People make the connection between hipsters and vegans all the time - that we’re all upper class white kids that wastes all of mom and dad’s money on trendy items. We decided to make this blog to show everyone that veganism isn’t elitist, that it’s a totally doable lifestyle, and that it most certainly is not a fad (Laura 4.4.2011).

In this excerpt Laura not only comments on the ways in which she perceives veganism to be misconstrued as an exercise of distinction but she also testifies her commitment to firstly, adopting veganism as a reaction to the unsustainable nature of the current food system and secondly, to communicating the benefits and accessibility of her choice. The fact remains that Laura is both educated and gainfully employed, and this may have facilitated her ability to become vegan, however the way in which Laura describes her diet is as a function of choice and as a conscientious reaction to certain truths. Much of the discourse that Laura employs about veganism on her blog is underpinned by this statement; “REMEMBER: Humans have

choices (Laura 4.4.2011)” which is a further testament to Laura’s perception of her food choices being deliberate.

Laura went vegan in part as a response to her past relationship with food. In the interview, when asked how her food choices have changed over the years, she replied,

I grew up eating boxed mac n cheese and chicken & white rice with frozen peas. I guess I do eat in the same way now, except elevated/modernized. I love what my parents fed me, but I don't like how it left me feeling or the weight it made me gain (Laura: email interview 23.10.2013).

Deliberate thought and conscientious choice are consistently portrayed in the food blogosphere, as departures from the way things were and a move towards a greater standard of well-being, for both individuals and environment alike.

The scholarship outlined in the literature review suggests that the study of food choice is often framed within the discourse of distinction and represented as a marker of cultural sophistication. In their study, *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*, Johnston and Baumann (2010) found that the new markers of high status food are quality, rarity, locality, organic, handmade, creativity and simplicity. While many of these characteristics were recognized as themes that emerged from the close reading of blogs, the way which they were presented and framed in the food blogosphere suggested that these qualities were not used to create distinctions between high and low classes, but instead presented as one approach to establishing a way of eating that was beneficial to health and well-being, for the individual and for the environment. The themes were valued not because of their perceived status, but because of their perceived effects on the well-being of self and surroundings. The frames of education and creativity were employed as a means to educate and inspire, not to communicate distinction. On the contrary, they suggest that the communication of information through food blogs is a conscientious means to achieving an intentional end. This is illustrated in Eva’s answer to why it’s important to her to blog about food;

I am interested in inspiring people to eat healthfully and in creating community through food. My hope is that I will present recipes in an appealing and artistic enough way that they will want to spend time in the kitchen cooking and then sit down with friends and family to share it. I hope to make healthy, vegetable based recipes simple enough that they are approachable. I hope everyone is inspired to eat more vegetables after looking at my site. I think the more vegetables (and less processed food) people eat, the better for them, the better for the environment, and the better for the world! (Eva: email interview 11.11.2013).

The discursive nature of the food blogosphere has been discussed earlier in this thesis; this nature may contribute to more evidence which supports that argument that the food choices communicated online are a result of deliberate, cognizant, human agency.

The conditions of modernization and globalization have allowed for a system in which individuals have greater sway; decisions relating to the ways in which one eats can affect actual change (Adams 2006). The interrelatedness which is emphasized in the theories of Giddens and Beck reiterates that nothing exists in isolation. Theories based on reflexivity are more amenable towards explanations of social change; the interconnectivity of individuals allows for the easier transfer and movement of new ideas. In terms of this thesis, the nature of the blogosphere as an accessible and interconnected space provides a forum for the exchange and promotion of ideas and strategies relating to exercising an engagement with a discourse of sustainability in the food system. The lack of temporal and geographical place online removes some barriers to participation. Being able to access information from anywhere and from any time gives users a freedom which is unattainable in traditional media. Bloggers and readers are able to utilize the blogosphere in a way which gives them access to a greater amount of information than ever before, at less cost and more quickly. The fluidity of the blogosphere facilitates the spread and sharing of ideas and therefore, it should be considered as a potentially transformative space.



The close-reading of blogs suggested that for bloggers, blogging was sooner associated with accessibility, rather than elitism. Although bloggers exist within structural realities, their perception of their blogs and their commitment to communicating information about food is portrayed as conscientious choice. Bloggers chose to begin and maintain their blogs for many reasons; the most important being to communicate and inspire a love and interest for food. Blogging can be considered a venue for self-expression and thus, self-identification; it is however, participation in this venue that may be impeded by structure and habitus.

### **The Use of the Blogosphere to Convey Messages about the Link between Food and the Environment**

This thesis' initial aim to explore the transformative nature of the foodie movement has been redirected to explore the transformative nature of the food blogosphere. The data collected in the online questionnaire and the email interview suggest that the understandings of what it means to be a foodie vary widely and do not always imply a commitment to changing the current, unsustainable food system.

The action of blogging and the content blogged are equally important markers of the use of the blogosphere as a space in which to communicate messages about the link between food and the environment. Firstly, this research set out to determine whether or not the blogosphere acts as a forum for messages relating to environmental sustainability and food, the findings discussed in the previous chapter confirm that it is indeed. How it is, gives insight to the way in which identities are created and maintained online, as well as to how formulations of The Good Life, achieved through eating well, are emerging from the blogosphere.

The accessibility and interwoven quality of the blogosphere means that some barriers to participation in the discourse of eating in an environmentally sustainable ways are removed. Food blogs are approachable because they are

centered around something that without exception, every single person can relate to. The potential of food is immense; when eating, one not only encounters the basic building blocks of the energy and nutrition which allows us to live, but also an experience shared collectively, by every living thing. Food binds us together; the food blogosphere has potential to do the same. Although the presence of community on the food blogosphere was not substantiated with data collected for this thesis, the communication of messages, in this case to an unidentified wider public, speaks to the ways in which bloggers can potentially influence and affect positive change with regards to engaging with the food system in more sustainable ways.

While blogs did not explicitly link humanity and habitat through food, they did communicate ways to close the gap, and to consume with heed to the broader implications of food choice. The blogs studied in this thesis displayed an engagement which suggests some participation in the communication of environmental ethics but often existed within a larger discourse of anthropocentrism.

The food blogosphere should be considered as a space that has the potential to enable transformation and should be realized as a viable and valuable source of data for research that pertains to food and its implications.

## **Creating and Communicating Identity in the Food Blogosphere**

Writing about food and food experiences is a place that individuals feel they can make public statements about consumption choice to different ends – food is a way to relate to the world, morals and perceived responsibilities on a personal level and to communicate that to a wider public. In the case of the segment of the food blogosphere studied for this thesis, bloggers communicated sustainable ways to procure, prepare and relate to food. These ways can be perceived as examples of the exercise of community and citizenship, and the creation of identity. Identities created and maintained via the food blogs were identities of conscientious, concerned and responsible

consumers who were responding to the current unsustainable food system by practicing strategies for sustainability, and relaying these strategies to others.

Bloggers portrayed themselves as individuals, rather than a collective group or community in their interviews and on their blogs. The creation of identity was contained to the realm of the blogger herself, and did not attempt to encompass or include any more people than the individual in question. This finding supports the findings which suggest a deficit of community built around the blogs. Choices pertaining to foods and the ways in which they were presented and portrayed on blogs were individual. Readers were encouraged, directly and indirectly, to engage in habits which were more beneficial to the environment and lessened the environmental impact of eating and preparing food but attempts to organize readers into collective groups for action was not evidenced in the data.

Although evidence of communities built up around the blog did not emerge, that is not to say that the food blogosphere does not encompass a group of like-minded individuals. Bloggers employed similar styles and forms as well as aesthetically appealing content to attract and appeal to readers and followers. While there was little indication of blog communities, bloggers themselves portrayed themselves as being active within their local communities and often, as instrumental in promoting local businesses, purveyors and farms. Again, this was a theme which was often linked the conceptions of The Good Life; active participation at the community level was communicated as a characteristic of responsible and conscientious eating and as a way to exercise citizenship.

Citizenship is exercised in the food blogosphere not only in the act of communication itself but also through the content communicated. In articulating ways of eating and procuring food that are conscientious of the environment, bloggers espouse their stance on what it means to be environmentally responsible consumers.

Food choice is an area in which identity, convenience and consequence intersect (Belasco 2008). It follows naturally then that the food blogosphere,

where food choices are communicated, is space in which bloggers create and maintain identities for themselves. The blogs studied through close readings suggest that through the recurrent themes of environmental sustainability and the promotion of environmental awareness, bloggers create an identity for themselves as environmentally conscientious bloggers and eaters.

### **The Food Blogosphere: A Source of Empowerment?**

The unprecedented scale and anonymity of the food system has resulted in a sense of alienation. The writer, farmer and environmental activist Wendell Berry describes this phenomenon like this:

The products of nature and agriculture have been made, to all appearances, the products of industry. Both eater and eaten are thus in exile from biological reality. And the result is a kind of solitude, unprecedented in human experience, in which the eater may think of eating as, first, a purely commercial transaction between him and a supplier and then as a purely appetitive transaction between him and his food (Berry 1992:376).

Alienation manifests itself in a multitude of ways, but one observable response to this alienation is a reach towards more authenticity in the food system.

Themes which suggested a search for authenticity in the blogs close-read for this thesis are a focus on farmers markets, locality, seasonal food, organics, and whole foods. These themes were portrayed as qualities of real food, as products which could be traced (to some extent) back to their sources. The content featured on blogs also evokes authenticity; because stories are being shared from real kitchens, in real homes, made by real people, who are writing about real lived experiences that readers can relate to. The traditional barriers to participation that may be encountered when eating at a fine dining establishment or reading the glossy pages of a cookbook, in which the recipe never fails, are overcome. Authenticity implies meaning, and the construction

of meaningful relationships to food is more important now than it ever has been before.

The medium of food blogging allows for certain freedoms. Bloggers are able to express and communicate information as well their opinions, values and morals free from the barriers that the traditional media upholds, such as, limitations on content, length, images, etc. This freedom allows writers and readers alike to pursue information available without restraints. Apart from the inherently free domain of the blogosphere, freedom is also expressed in the blogs, in terms of the freedom that comes with eating responsibly and with the environment in mind. In doing so, eaters free themselves from the guilt and anxiety of not knowing where their food comes from. “To eat responsibly is to live free” (Berry 1990:375).

The ways that freedom through eating with an environmental awareness are communicated on the blogs varies, but the most obvious way it is expressed is through allusions and references to eating conscientiously, which in turn is related to better tasting food, better feeling bodies and a diminished environmental impact. Eating in this way is framed as more pleasurable than eating in a way which does not consider all of the factors at play when making a meal.

One important characteristic of food bloggers is their identification as active producers. This was inherent in their blogs, as they showcase the content, recipes and ultimately, foods that they produced. Bloggers produce not only their posts but also the food (and other content) featured on their blogs. Making one’s own food from scratch was always treated with positive connotation and homemade food was always portrayed as better for you and better for the environment than processed or store-bought foods. Production is associated with pleasure on the food blogosphere. And the ability to prepare one’s own food is again, associated with freedom.

The food blogosphere empowers both writers and readers in that it provides an outlet for creativity and an opportunity for the creation of identity. Bloggers use their blogs to communicate the pleasures of active production,

freedom and citizenship to their readers. Thus, readers are presented with an avenue to realizing these pleasures in their own lives.

# Conclusion

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Initially, this thesis aimed to delve further into the world of foodies, it quickly became apparent that one sure place to find them would be online. The food blogosphere presented an opportunity to access a discourse of food and eating that was unmarred by the conventions of traditional media and essentially, left up to the intentions of the blogger. The freedom which the blogosphere affords its members has allowed me to observe the ways in which the blogosphere is a space of transformation and also a space in which meanings, values and messages about food and eating can be shared with a wider public.

Narratives about food, featured on food blogs, are explored in this thesis as microcosm of a much larger debate about culture, identity and citizenship in the face of environmental crisis. The food blogosphere is one space in which strategies, ideas, and practices for a more environmentally conscientious relationship to food and eating are broadcasted and communicated. This thesis has considered the potential of the food blogosphere as a venue for affecting real change, and has found that this potential is being realized to different extents.

Through the frames of education and creativity, blogs present an abundance of information about food and eating. Along with that information, are understandings of eating well and well-being, food as a source of pleasure and the ways in which food can be used as an avenue to differing conceptions of The Good Life.

The friction around the label of foodie begins to expose some of the tensions that exist in the foodie movement and the food blogosphere. While some bloggers embraced the term, others rejected it entirely. This was found to be a reaction to elitist and unserious connotations of the word. The discussions around the foodie label shed light on the differing ways that one can understand food choice. A discussion of whether food choices are

embodied or reflexive has been pursued in this thesis; ultimately, I have concluded that while food choices are often portrayed as reflexive online, participation in these choices, and the food blogosphere as a whole may be affected by structure.

The creation and communication of identities and values via the food blogosphere are facilitated by the medium of blogging. The fluidity of the blogosphere allows bloggers and readers to approach information in a multitude of ways. Aesthetics on blogs function not only to grab readers' attention but also allows them to imagine the pleasures of cooking and eating in new ways. Food blogs not only act as a source of inspiration for their bloggers but also for their readers. Food bloggers use their blogs to communicate many things, including their environmental values. They also use them as a vehicle to communicate strategies for practicing more environmental conscientiousness in the procurement, production and consumption of food.

The matters studied in this thesis shed light on themes for future research. The blogosphere holds a wealth of data on a plethora of topics which is both accessible and wide-reaching. Research regarding community building online, via blogs as well as other social media outlets may expose new ways of exercising transformation, community and citizenship in an increasingly connected online world. Blogs represent a valuable lens through which to see everyday life, and while these topics may have been classified as mundane in the past, viewed through a critical lens, they expose meaning.

Due to the scope and focus of the thesis, there were many themes that I had to stop myself from delving into; the way in which gender matters in the food blogosphere and the notable deficit of male food bloggers would be an interesting starting point for research. How the food blogosphere portrays some foods as 'good' and others as 'bad' and the effects of this classification on readers and audiences is something that should be further considered. Community building on and offline around food blogs may provide insight to the ways in which the unifying nature of food is changing and evolving in



modernity. The way in which blogs are acting as repositories and archives for recipes, traditions and memories is one way to think about how people interact with technology to different ends. Endless possibilities for research in the blogosphere have arisen throughout the course of this thesis.

Extending beyond the blogosphere, food media represents an area that has great potential for further research. The ways in which television shows featuring food competitions are changing perceptions of food and eating, the appeal of food magazines, the emergence of new trends and food buzzwords, and the ways in which the environment is portrayed and discussed in food media discourse all present interesting opportunities for scholarship.

Food is a gateway to an excess of other topics. It is valuable not only for its life-sustaining and delicious traits but also as a lens through which to view the world. If we can harness the immense promise of food as a universal common denominator, we can begin to move towards practicing a greater, more beneficial, awareness of the Earth which encompasses us. The food blogosphere has the potential to act as one facilitator of that imperative transformation.

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# Informants: The Online Questionnaire

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Respondent #1. 08.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #2. 08.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #3. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #4. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #5. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #6. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #7. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #8. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #9. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #10. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #11. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #12. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #13. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #14. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #15. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #16. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #17. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #18. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #19. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #20. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #21. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #22. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #23. 09.09.2013. Online survey.

Respondent #24. 09.09.2013. Online survey.



Respondent #25. 09.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #26. 09.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #27. 09.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #28. 09.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #29. 09.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #30. 09.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #31. 10.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #32. 10.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #33. 10.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #34. 10.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #35. 10.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #36. 11.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #37. 12.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #38. 12.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #39. 15.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #40. 16.09.2013. Online survey.  
Respondent #41. 25.09.2013. Online survey.

# Informants: Email Interviews and the Close Reading of Blogs

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\*Please note that the following names of informants and their blogs have been anonymized as outlined in the Methodology chapter of this thesis.

## **Email Interviews**

Laura. Food Now. Email interview: 23.10.2013.

Edith. Food Roots. Email interview: 23.10.2013.

Teresa. Bountiful Harvest. Email interview: 25.10.2013.

Sarah. The Local Table. Email interview: 27.10.2013.

Emma. Close to Home. Email interview: 27.10.2013.

Eva. The Four Seasons. Email interview: 11.11.2013.

## **Blogs**

Laura. Food Now.

Edith. Food Roots.

Teresa. Bountiful Harvest.

Sarah. The Local Table.

Emma. Close to Home.

Eva. The Four Seasons.

# Appendix A: The Online Questionnaire

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1. Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D)
2. Do you consider yourself a foodie?
  - Yes
  - No
3. If you answered yes to the previous question, please state your understanding of the term ‘foodie’ below.
4. What kind of food blog do you have?
  - Recipes
  - Reviews
  - Healthy living
  - Food industry
  - Specialized diets
  - Other (please specify)
5. Why is it important for you to blog about food?
6. For how many years have you blogged about food?
7. What is the most important thing that you communicate to others, through your food blog?
8. How do you measure the success of your blog?
  - Personal satisfaction
  - Number of unique visitors
  - Number of shares on social media
  - Number of followers
  - Number of comments
  - Number of links to my blog
  - Other (please specify)
9. How important to you, are the following factors, when blogging about food? (1: Not important – 5: Most important)

Quality of ingredients	1	2	3	4	5
Local origin	1	2	3	4	5
Healthfulness	1	2	3	4	5
Convenience	1	2	3	4	5
Cost	1	2	3	4	5

Environmental  
sustainability

1      2      3      4      5

10. What is your age?

- 18 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 to 74
- 75 or older

11. What is your gender

- Female
- Male

12. What is your approximate household income, after taxes?

- \$0 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000 - \$149,999
- \$150,000 - \$199,999
- \$200,000 or more

13. In which geographical region do you live?

- North America
- South America
- Europe
- Asia
- Africa
- Australia

14. What is your civil status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed

15. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Elementary school
- High school
- Vocational degree
- Associates degree
- Bachelors degree
- Graduate or Professional degree

16. How many children age 17 or younger live in your household?

- None
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 4

17. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

- Employed, working 1 – 39 hours
- Employed, working 40 or more hours
- Homemaker
- Unemployed
- Student
- Retired
- Disabled, not able to work

# Appendix B: Association of Food Bloggers Membership Guidelines

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## Membership Guidelines

- Your blog must be food related in nature. It cannot be a blog that is about something else with some food related content.
- Must be in existence for 12 months with **CONSISTENT posting each month.**
- Must have an average of at least 4 posts per month
- Length should be between 300 – 600 words per post
- This must be legitimate content, with useful information, not a listing of products for sale
- Site cannot have negative / personal attacks in it
- Site cannot have any adult content (must be PG -rated)

# Appendix C: The Structured Interview

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**How and when did you become interested in food?**

**What type of food blog do you have?**

**For how many years have you been blogging about food?**

**How do you measure the success of your blog?**

**Why is it important to you to blog about food?**

**What is the most important thing that you communicate through your food blog?**

**What is your understanding of the term foodie?**

**Do you consider yourself a foodie?**

**Has your taste in food changed over the years? If so, how? Why do you think it's changed?**

**What is your understanding of environmental sustainability?**

**Does your understanding of environmental sustainability influence the decisions that you make about food? If so, how?**

**Does your understanding of environmental sustainability influence decisions in other parts of your life? If so, how?**

**When you shop for food do you base any of your purchases on ethical concerns? If so, which concern/s? Why?**

**Finally, I have a few demographic questions for you. Please highlight/bold the appropriate answers.**

**What is your age?**

18 to 24  
25 to 34  
35 to 44  
45 to 54  
55 to 64  
65 to 74  
75 or older

**What is your gender?**

Male  
Female

**What is your approximate household income per year, after taxes?**

\$0 – \$49,999  
\$50,000 - \$99,999  
\$100,000 - \$149,999  
\$150,000 - \$199,999  
\$200,000 and up

**In which geographical region do you live?**

North America  
South America  
Europe  
Asia  
Africa  
Australia

**What is your civil status?**

Single  
Married



Divorced  
Separated  
Widowed

**What is the highest level of education that you have completed?**

Elementary school  
High school  
Vocational degree  
Associates degree  
Bachelor's degree  
Graduate or professional degree

**How many children under the age of 17 live in your household?**

None  
1  
2  
3  
4  
More than 4

**Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?**

Employed, working 1 – 39 hours per week  
Employed, working 40 or more hours per week  
Homemaker  
Unemployed  
Student  
Retired  
Disabled, not able to work

**Thank you so much for your time and effort. Again, if you have any questions or if you need any clarification, please don't hesitate to contact me at [andreeme@student.hf.uio.no](mailto:andreeme@student.hf.uio.no).**

# Appendix D: Informed Consent Forms

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## **Informed Consent for the Online Questionnaire**

### **Consent Form**

The purpose of this research project is to better understand why people communicate about food and how environmental sustainability factors into the decisions that people make about food. This is part of a research project being conducted by Andrea Elisabeth Medaas at the University of Oslo, Norway. You have been invited to participate in this research because you are a food blogger.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

The procedure involves filling out an online survey that will take approximately 5 minutes. Your responses will be confidential and I will not collect any identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address. The survey questions will be about your demographics, food blogging, and what is important to you when making decisions about food.

All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with University of Oslo representatives.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Andrea Elisabeth Medaas at [andreeme@student.hf.uio.no](mailto:andreeme@student.hf.uio.no).

**ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.**

**Clicking on the “agree” button below indicates that:**

- **You have read the above information**
- **You voluntarily agree to participate**
- **You are at least 18 years of age**

**If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the “disagree” button.**

- **Agree**
- **Disagree**

## **Informed Consent for the Email Interview and Close Reading of Blogs**

### **Informed Consent Form**

The purpose of this research project is to better understand how bloggers relate to the environment through food, how they communicate about it, and how environmental awareness factors into the decisions that people make about food.

This is part of a graduate research project being conducted by Andrea Elisabeth Medaas at the University of Oslo, Norway. You have been invited to participate in this research because you are a food blogger that focuses on healthy and sustainable eating and cooking.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

If you choose to participate in this research study your participation will involve allowing the researcher to analyze the content of your blog and participating in an interview via email. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. To protect your confidentiality, your name and the name of your blog will not appear in any publications. You and your blog will be assigned pseudonyms to disguise your identity.

The interview questions will be about your demographics, food blogging, and what is important to you when communicating about food. All data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, the interviews will not contain questions that will personally identify you.

The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with University of Oslo representatives. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Andrea Elisabeth Medaas at [andreeme@student.hf.uio.no](mailto:andreeme@student.hf.uio.no).

**ELECTRONIC CONSENT:** By replying to this email with an “AGREE” you indicate that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by disregarding this email or replying “DISAGREE”.