

VORACIOUS VILLAINS OR HUNGRY HEROES?  
DEPICTIONS OF FOOD CRITICS IN POPULAR MEDIA

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VORACIOUS VILLAINS OR HUNGRY HEROES?  
DEPICTIONS OF FOOD CRITICS IN POPULAR MEDIA

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	vi
Chapters	
1. Introduction.....	1
Studies Addressing the Research Problem.....	1
Deficiencies in Prior Literature .....	3
Rationale.....	5
Purpose Statement .....	7
Preview.....	7
2. Literature Review.....	9
Identity of Journalists .....	9
Food and Foodways.....	12
Food Critics and Non-Journalists as Critics.....	14
Depictions of Journalists and Food Critics .....	22
History of Food Critics.....	25
Ethics of Food Critics.....	30
Research Questions .....	40
3. Method .....	42
Rationale for Method Selection.....	42
Researcher’s Role.....	43
Research Design.....	45

Data Sampling.....	45
Data Collection and Management.....	46
Coding Procedures.....	48
Trustworthiness.....	49
Limitations.....	49
Summary.....	50
4. Findings.....	51
RQ1: Depictions of Food Critics.....	51
Attitude.....	52
Anonymity.....	58
Violence Against Food Critics.....	62
Gender.....	65
Race/Ethnicity.....	69
Journalistic Food Critic vs. Michelin Critic.....	71
Change of Heart.....	74
RQ2: Food Critics as Villains?.....	76
Antagonists.....	77
RQ2a: Ethics and Unethical Behaviors.....	83
5. Discussion.....	90
Major Findings.....	90
Theoretical Implications.....	92
Practical Implications.....	94

Limitations.....	95
Future Research.....	96
Conclusion.....	98
REFERENCES .....	99
APPENDIX.....	104

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By Andrew Koch

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ABSTRACT

There are copious types of visual media that viewers presently consume as entertainment. These various mediums showcase depictions that influence people's perceptions of both individuals and entire careers. In journalism studies, scholars look at these visual depictions in film, television, graphic novels, and others to categorize how journalism works and how journalists interact with the world. Depictions too often focus on hard news and mainline journalism at the expense of subfields such as food criticism. This study responds to a call to action to look into media beyond film, while carving out its own path and establishing that food critics are understudied. From non-journalistic beginnings, food criticism entered the fold of lifestyle journalism. In popular fictional visual media across time, close textual analysis of the depiction of food critics shows unique and shared themes, tropes, and story arcs specific to food critics, including: violence and anonymity. Depictions of food critics were homogenous regardless of the medium and were shown primarily as older white men with similar dress, attitude, and ethics. These depictions were overwhelmingly negative with few showing food critics doing their job well in a positive light. This thesis combats the neglect of depictions of food critics in journalistic study, as well as showcases the characterizations of food critics that separates them from other journalists and critics.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

A person walks into a crowded restaurant. Using a fake name, she has gotten her reservation, been seated, and is wearing a disguise to conceal her true identity. Armed with special tools and a wealth of experience at her craft, she carefully analyzes her surroundings, making mental notes. The actions she takes this evening could have grave consequences. Did you think you were reading the start of a spy novel? Perhaps this is some Cold War era story of deception and murder? No, this thesis is less about cloak and dagger and more about napkin and pen. That figure being described is none other than your local food critic just trying to do his or her job. But many depictions like that, in popular culture paint these journalists in a negative light, usually as antagonists. With an increase in films, television, and other popular visual media that focus on food, there has also been a noticeable increase over time in the depictions of food critics. However, depictions of food critics are more complex than simply labeling the group as villains and moving on. These depictions are worthy of further investigation.

### **Studies Addressing the Research Problem**

To understand the importance of a food critic, needs to understand foodways. Defined as the intersection between food and culture, foodways encompass food preparation, presentation, and consumption, in short, anything that can be related to food (Long, 2004). Understood by those in the anthropology, folklore, tourism, hospitality and food studies fields to be an important area of study, there are multiple scholarly journals dedicated to the study of foodways and food including: *Digest* and *Food & Foodways*. Certainly, food critics are related to this field. Their reviews directly affect how and

where people eat. Critics can help determine and evaluate a restaurant, judging worth and helping people to know how to spend their money. Following a review, the revenue of a restaurant is usually altered by around 11 percent, with smaller percentages of affected revenue up to four months following a review's release (Heiman, 1997). That monetary change that can come simply from the words of a critic represents a real and practical reason to investigate food critics further in scholarship, like in the area of depictions of journalists in popular culture.

Food criticism has been examined by scholars looking to provide a history and evolution of this style of journalism. Others wanted to show the real-world power food critics can hold whether concerning what their words can mean to restaurants or to the readers/viewers/listeners of their opinions. Others still wanted to talk to actual working food critics themselves, through surveys or one-on-one style interviews to get their opinion on the craft, ethics, and overall, what it means to be a food critic.

Various articles and books concern pop cultural portrayals of frequent archetypes and positive as well as negative depictions of journalists. Although scholars often do not single out food critics, critics in a general sense are often depicted as one of the more popular villains in films that feature journalism or journalists (Saltzman, 2005). When the question of why these depictions are negative is asked, this group of scholars posits that perhaps the best way to understand, explore, and potentially change the public perception of journalists is to look into journalistic depictions in popular culture like film, television, and other kinds of media. This bridging of understanding across multiple fields of study, in this situation journalism studies and foodways, can bring about better understanding to both through the interdisciplinary nature of the study (Saltzman, 2005). To understand

fully what exists in this field, though, we also need to understand what is missing from the existing literature.

### **Deficiencies in Prior Literature**

This first gap in literature simply comes from the very small quantity of studies that survey food critics, explore their style of journalism, and analyze how their job may have changed over time. Although the two previously mentioned studies that tried to do this do have value, they were both published in 1985. Certainly, in the over thirty years since these studies were published, food criticism has changed and evolved enough to warrant further study.

Besides being published in the same year, both studies were very similar in how they interviewed food critics. Both studies opted to focus on heavily populated areas and received 21 (Burry, 1985) and 22 (Schroeder, 1985) responses respectively. Since they were surveying active newspaper/magazine food critics at almost the exact same times, in prominent metro areas of the United States, it is more likely than not that at least some of the same critics were interviewed in both studies. This means that some of the only research concerning food critics and their opinions/thoughts on food criticism is limited to findings from over thirty years ago. Also, this focus on food critics exclusively in newspapers or magazines means that the researchers neglected to look at broadcast television or radio food critics. Television is not just an area where food critics can work, however; they, too, can be depicted there and can be studied there, as well.

Despite the rise in literature analyzing and documenting journalist depictions in film, television, and other mediums since the call to add scholarship to this, “long-neglected, fertile field for research virtually untapped by journalism and mass

communication scholars” (Saltzman, 2005, p. 6), there is still more to be analyzed. In fact, *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture*’s online database confirms this. Out of nearly 89,000 items on journalists, media, and public relations agents and spanning mediums including film, television, video games, books, art, music, and more (as of February 20, 2017), there are few entries for food critics. But it is still lacking. There are a number of texts that this thesis identifies and analyzes that are not currently present in this database, despite its seemingly all-encompassing size.

What these entries do signal however, is that those who are interested in furthering the study of the image of the journalist identify that a food critic is a journalist. Other journalists agree that critics are journalists, too. According to the Association of Food Journalists, “Good restaurant reviewing is good journalism” (“Food Critics Guidelines,” 2016). Too often, journalism scholarship focuses on hard news and traditional kinds of journalism (Zelizer, 2009), at the expense of study on lifestyle journalism. This is why this study on depictions of food critics in popular visual media will not focus on hard news, but instead on this understudied specific area of lifestyle journalism.

Food criticism, of course, is under this umbrella of lifestyle journalism that treats its audience as consumers first, “providing them with factual information and advice, often in entertaining ways, about goods and services they can use in their daily lives” (Hanusch, 2012, p. 5). That focus for journalism studies often on hard news at the expense of lifestyle journalism, like food criticism, means any scholarly ventures into it, like analyzing food critic depictions in popular visual media, could give profound insights into how journalism changes and evolves as time progresses. Scholars in the field

of journalist depictions in popular media say there is a lack of studies concerning two main qualitative areas. Firstly, the idea that additional research needs to be done concerning depictions outside of film, specifically: television, advertisements, cartoons, video games, comics, and other mediums (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). This study will address these concerns. The second point is that there needs to be closer looks at journalistic depictions outside the United States (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). The source material however, focused on depictions within the United States, so research still needs to be conducted to that end in the future. But to answer this lack of research concerning mediums outside of film, this study – while certainly incorporating film – sought to include other texts from different mediums including television series, cartoons, advertisements, and graphic novels.

### **Rationale**

This study fills the aforementioned gaps in research in multiple fields of study and is also able to connect journalism studies to other disciplines, such as hospitality studies, food and foodways studies, and tourism studies. Understanding journalistic depictions matters because, despite rarely being able to be a truly faithful representation of the person or profession, they can offer insight into how journalists and journalism are understood (Ehrlich, 2009). Works in popular culture concerning journalism “represent a long-running rumination upon our press’ achievements and failures, our expectations of it and our apprehensions about it” (Ehrlich, 2009, p. 9). These ruminations are a constant vision and revision of what journalism has historically been, what journalism is, and what it will become in the future. Despite food criticism not being often understood as journalism by some (Hanusch, 2012), it does not mean that identifying how food critics

are portrayed in media of is not important. Certainly, journalists from a practical standpoint will and should care about how these depictions influence and illuminate the public's thoughts and opinions regarding food criticism. Moreover, this work should help other scholars understand that other kinds of journalism outside the typical "hard news" variety should be studied as well (Zelizer, 2009).

Those scholars that focus their studies on depictions of journalists in popular culture, like Saltzman or Ehrlich, will see the value in this study, as well, to clarify if there is an overt difference or unique way *food* critics are depicted as opposed to other types of critics (e.g., art, music, theatre, or film critics). We have to keep in mind that the importance of these various texts that highlight or identify food critics are interesting and worthy of being researched separate from their effects. Analyzing texts has long been a qualitative research method that can lead to fascinating findings concerning character archetypes, tropes, recurring themes, and more (Saltzman, 2005). Ultimately looking closely at texts (films, television, etc.) and trying to understand the layered and multiple meanings of a text will come to be important to looking at and understanding journalistic food critic depictions and identity.

## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this textual analysis is to explore the complex depictions of food critics in popular fictional visual media. This study has specific parameters: The popular visual media will include: films (both live-action and animation), television series (both live-action and animation), graphic novels, advertisements, and Internet videos. Since this study will focus on fictional depictions, non-fiction such as documentaries will not be included. Also, this study will focus on visual media and will be excluding non-visual texts like novels, radio shows, and the like.

## **Preview**

Clearly, food critics are an interesting and understudied kind of journalist. The studies that focus on them are few in number and hail mostly from hospitality or tourism studies. Although there has been little research on food critics, their work with food makes them directly involved in foodways and the study of food. Despite this, there has not yet been a study looking at food critics and their depictions in popular culture, although it is an area where scholars are calling for additional research. From practical reasons, such as the monetary influence they potentially wield, to theoretical reasons, such as the thematic meaning of why they are so often portrayed as villains, food critics prove to be a worthwhile topic of study.

Ahead, I will delve into a number of areas that relate to the topics discussed to this point. This will proceed from the more generalized to the very specific. In chapter 2, I examine prior literature, including: journalistic identity, food and foodways, an operational definition of food critics, depictions of journalists/food critics in popular media, the long and varied history of food criticism both in and out of journalism, and the

ethics of food criticism as well. The chapter concludes with the research questions that guide the analysis. Chapter 3 outlines the method used to conduct the research. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study in response to the stated research questions. Chapter 5 addresses the significance of this study, both theoretically to those journalism scholars who study depictions, and practically to those food critics doing food criticism.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This literature review examines and connects different fields of study relating to the study of food critic depictions in popular media. It will cover research across multiple fields: journalism studies, sociology, food studies, tourism studies, and more. Specific topics to be discussed include: Identity of journalists; food and foodways, food critics and non-journalists as critics; the history of food criticism; and finally, the ethics of food criticism. The synthesis of these intersecting literatures is used to propel specific research questions to guide this study's analysis.

### **Identity of Journalists**

Identity is an important and complicated issue to think about and discuss in journalism. Saying someone is a journalist is a lot harder to do with certainty than naming specific acts of journalism. Other scholars have run into this same problem, noting that, "The point here is not necessarily to advocate for an all-inclusive definition but rather to point out that even before we broach the topic of new media, there are already complex definitional issues afoot" (Hindman and Thomas, 2013, p. 543). Journalism is a broad field that is challenging to define and, by extension, so are journalists. Hindman and Thomas go on to question which, if any members of this journalistic grey area are truly journalists, from opinion columnists and panelists on late night talk shows to critics. Because of the expansive nature of the subject, it is perhaps more helpful to examine different potential journalists on a case-by-case basis. To understand journalistic depictions, we must strive to understand how journalists construct their identity to identify them or to contrast the ideals of a "good journalist" with what is seen on the film

or television screen. However, it is important to note that identity construction is a fluid process. As a result, it is an arbitrary and nearly impossible task to determine how one identifies what a journalistic identity is, but we can look at potential ways to help identify the identity as a general thought. Deuze (2005) suggests that journalistic identity could be understood as an occupational ideology centered around objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, ethics, and that provides a public service. But what do each of these points mean? While they each certainly have express dictionary definitions, those definitions are slightly tweaked and more specific when talking about journalism or journalists and apply to food critics as a certain type of journalist. First, I will look at how Deuze's five points relate to general journalist identity, then I will use them to understand food critic identity.

Being *objective*, or at the very least aiming for objectivity, is in large part how journalists garner credibility. Deuze (2005) uses other words in conjunction with objectivity to help contextualize it, such as: impartial, neutral, and fair. True journalists aim to report on stories without injecting their personal opinions, limiting their prose that cannot be expressed in facts, and are ultimately fair to the people and stories that they report on. This is not to say they aim to for stereotypes, such as getting both sides of the story or remaining balanced, because ultimately facts will win out over falsehoods and that is what journalists should report. While each of these aspects of a journalist is interconnected with the others, there is undoubtedly a link between objectivity and autonomy.

*Autonomy* is linked to objectivity in that to be fair, a journalist needs to be autonomous. Obviously, reporters have editors, but ultimately the stories they tell are

their own. True journalism is not beholden to sponsors, owners, publishers, or other businesses. The only thing that journalism has a responsibility to do is to be truthful. That dedication to the truth is very much at the heart of the next aspect of journalists, their ethical ideals.

Deuze (2005) gives a few other words to help contextualize *ethics* for journalists namely: validity and legitimacy. While journalists disagree amongst themselves what, if any, specific ethical guidelines should be followed, a sense of having ethics is still important and “legitimizes journalists’ claims to the position as (free and fair) watchdogs of society” (Deuze, 2005, p. 449). That function as a watchdog providing the news is indeed what Deuze would identify as a public service.

That *public service* idea comes from the perspective that journalism does good and that it is done for the people. Deuze (2005) talks about this, in a way, like objectivity, as an ideal to reach for. The goal there is to have the journalism affect change in some way. Whether to educate the ignorant, hold the powerful accountable, or to institute or abolish a new law to protect the community, journalism can have that power and be so drastically varied.

*Immediacy* is the way that journalists can ensure that their work, their public service, is best appreciated. Like a cheeseburger fresh off the grill, the news is meant to be enjoyed when it is new, and at its freshest, lest the cheese congeal, bun harden, and patty become cold. If waited too long to be reported on and disseminated to the public, some stories can lose their nuance, impact, or even relevance.

In the end, these traits will be important to note when looking at depictions of food critics because very often they can be highlighted as antagonistic characters and any

of these traits that they fail to show will be a visible reason as to why they are not a protagonist character. Again, though, it should be stated that identity is fluid and a complex and constantly changing process. Depending on how important journalism would be to someone's identity could also change how he or she sees themselves as a journalist or media professional. For some characters, being a food critic is their total identity, such as Anton Ego from *Ratatouille* (2007) (an animated film about a rat who becomes a chef). However, some people may be food critics (even in one specific episode) such as Homer Simpson from *The Simpsons* (and animating satire of a working-class family that also parodies all aspects of culture), and may even work at a newspaper, but being a critic is ultimately only a small part of his identity. Looking at these differences can help understand the ways characters perform their journalism, either as full-fledged and official food critics or as food "bloggers," which will be discussed a bit later on. What is central to each one of these characters, though, is their relationship to food and how they are familiar with it.

### **Food and Foodways**

Before one can understand the role of a food critic, one has to know the importance food has to people and to culture. Food journalism can give insight into entire communities that people might find hard to access otherwise: "food writing... demonstrate[s] the importance such stories can play in developing and maintaining notions of national identity. Thus, lifestyle journalism's role in discourses of identity is a crucial consideration for future studies in this area" (Hanusch, 2012, p. 8). This idea of sharing the specific identity is, of course, not necessarily because of the journalist, as cultural identity of all groups is really related to their food and foodways whether

southwestern American, Jewish, Mexican, Thai, or otherwise (Long, 2004). However, the journalist as writer and reporter is the one that can act as a liaison and interpreter between the food and thus identities between groups of people, which is a powerful role to play.

That important role often falls to television depictions of food and the people who talk about it. Although it would be difficult to label Anthony Bourdain a journalist, he does commit what we could call “acts of journalism” in sharing the stories around people and their food. After all, his newest show does take place on a traditionally journalistic network: CNN. Despite the lack of scholarship on the topic, there has been an interesting relationship that television and food have had over the years. While the depictions of food critics on television is a relatively new phenomenon, it has quickly become widespread with judges on every show that features cooking in a competitive environment: *Cutthroat Kitchen*, *The Next Food Network Star*, *Chopped*, *Guy’s Grocery Games*, *The Great Food Truck Race*, etc. Chefs have increasingly become more popular and glamorized in the last few decades with the roots in the celebrity chef going back to Julia Child in the 1960s through to today with chefs such as Gordon Ramsay, Bobby Flay, and others (Collins, 2009). Now, with multiple networks devoted to food and cooking, for instance, The Cooking Channel and The Food Network, and other main television channels having several shows that focus on food and cooking, such as *Hell’s Kitchen* and *Top Chef*, among others, it is safe to say that food saturates American popular culture. In part, that comes from increased leisure time. Increased leisure time means that people’s food choices are not just for sustenance, but also for fun (Yang, 2011). With more time then, people’s tastes grow and evolve and the role of a food critic who has had greater experience in the realm of dining will, of course, become

increasingly important. That means that critics, in theory, will be depicted more frequently in popular culture.

### **Food Critics and Non-Journalists as Critics**

So, what exactly is the definition of a food critic? Since there have not really been many studies that speak about them at length, and none have defined this style of journalism in specific terms, an operational definition is needed. For the purpose of this study, a food/restaurant critic will be defined as: a person who critiques food for a living and is respected in the field of writing, reporting, and reviewing all of the various facets of a restaurant, including food, drinks, atmosphere and service. Food critics are journalists, best identified as a kind of lifestyle journalist that treats their readers or viewers as consumers (Hanusch, 2012). Food critics however, do issue their own opinions. There is a greater deal of subjectivity to the way critics write and report, so how are they still understood to be journalists? Here, Deuze (2005) and his aspects of journalists discussed earlier might be a good way to help gain that understanding.

Good food critics are indeed *autonomous*. Not beholden to restaurateurs, chefs, or even their news outlet's advertising departments, they are independent thinkers who write their truthful experiences (Schroeder, 1985). That is not to say that they do not feel pressure from these sources though. Whether directly or indirectly, restaurateurs, chefs, and advertising departments have something to be gained from good reviews and have to be kept in check. Food critics are also autonomous because the meals are paid for by the publication for which they work rather than the restaurant they are reviewing and, if they do receive any special treatment, are encouraged to mention it in their writing ("Food Critic Guidelines," 2016). That is not just an ideal. According to the critics surveyed in

one instance, all critics' publications covered their bills to some degree (Schroeder, 1985). Of course, with all of these pressures to compromise for the good of people whose livelihoods are based around the restaurants or even for the good of the paper or news channel, a food critic's ethics are of the utmost importance to be maintained.

Good food critics are *ethical*. Like other journalists, not all food critics follow the same ethical procedures; however, there are widely accepted ethical guidelines according to the Association of Food Journalists (AFJ). Specifically, there are five main guidelines that apply to food journalists in general (and, to a degree, food critics more specifically).

Principals including:

- A) We take pride in our work, and respect the work of others.
- B) We do not abuse our positions.
- C) We avoid conflicts of interest.
- D) We recognize and respect diversity.
- E) We are committed to total transparency in our work. ("Ethics," 2016)

Moreover, the AFJ adds that, as journalists, food critics have the same responsibilities as any other kind of journalist and suggests that they follow the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists and Sigma Delta Chi among others. This dedication to remaining ethical as journalists, as Deuze (2005) explains, legitimizes the claims of journalists (and by extension food critics) as watchdogs of society and thus, providing that next point, a public service.

Ideally, food criticism provides a *public service*. It offers a way for the consumer who does not have infinite time and resources to hear a trusted and expert opinion to make the decision on their own if they should try out some restaurant. Reviews do not just assess food, however. Out of the criteria on which critics base reviews, quality of service, pricing, and sanitation are also important factors (Schroeder, 1985). Each of

those three, when addressed, shows that food critics, like any other kind of journalist, can act as a watchdog keeping the powerful (chefs and restaurant owners, namely) in check. Whether that be noting safe or disgusting conditions at a restaurant or calling out a restaurant for charging far too much for a certain cut of meat, this can help the consumer and thus the local community. When a new restaurant opens up, however, the need to examine it for the public's good is strong, but of course, this understanding of immediacy is where food criticism differs from traditional journalism.

Food criticism does understand *immediacy*, but in a different way from traditional journalism. Inherently, reviews can take time to complete: multiple visits are suggested to appropriately form an opinion and there is an understanding that critics should be fair and wait to review new restaurants at least one month. The Association of Food Journalists does have a suggestion concerning the journalistic value of immediacy and offers an alternative to this to be timelier. The guidelines suggest that the critics instead focus on things besides the food: the chef, décor, or clientele and instead label it as something other than a review, for example a "first impressions" piece ("Food Critic Guidelines," 2016). But of course, when an honest to goodness review does inevitably emerge, objectivity is not adhered to, as taste is a matter of opinion.

*Objectivity* is the one point from Deuze (2005) that food criticism does not really follow. Food criticism by its very nature is subjective because taste and the experiences of food are inherently individualized. For instance one's memories of food can lead to favorites as well as intense distaste. Similarly, genetics can also contribute as some people find the taste of cilantro pleasant, while others find it tastes of soap. However, Deuze describes this journalistic trait of objectivity as the special sauce that gives

journalists credibility. Objectivity, he says, means that journalists are fair, neutral, and impartial (Deuze, 2005). Food critics, while not completely objective, can be impartial with various restaurants and, more importantly, are concerned with fairness and honesty. Fairness and honesty are literally the first two listed goals on the “Food Critic Guidelines” from the AFJ (2016). Moreover, real food critics also feel that concern for wanting to be fair. A survey of food critics found that over half of those responding called it their primary ethical concern (Schroeder, 1985).

Although certain scholars note the reason this kind of journalism has not received as much scholarly attention because it is not “watchdog” journalism, this is, in reality, a false statement. Many forms of lifestyle journalism perform the nature of watchdog journalism. Watchdog journalism is a simple definition, holding those in power accountable for their actions (Pinto, 2009). With that in mind, are restaurateurs and chefs that have the power of food over its customers not being held accountable by critics? Of course they are. One food critic even describes himself as a consumer advocate, ultimately to serve the readers of his column. He even calls it a public duty (Goodsir, 2014).

It is not just journalists and journalism scholars who note the importance of food critics. A hospitality and tourism management study concludes, “we underline the importance of the journalist/restaurant reviewer over and above the ‘almost anyone’ who can be a restaurant reviewer on the Internet” (Goodsir, 2014, p. 128) pointing out just how crucial critics can be. Critics inherently are not ‘almost anyone.’ There are facets to their job that makes them more critical than the scores of others on Yelp. Those facets include a deep experience and specialized knowledge in the field they are critiquing.

Some critics, like Jesse Hirsch, who writes for the *San Francisco Examiner*, for example, eat at hundreds of restaurants a year (McKay, 2012). That means that many eat at thousands of restaurants over the course of their careers and that is something most Americans would not have the time or finances to accomplish. Unlike most diners, critics have an insider and elevated status to be able to go back into the kitchen, ask questions, and have access to those who are making the food (Freeman, 2016). Again, the average American would not have the time or in some cases even the ability at all to do this. Unlike citizens, critics as journalists also have ethical knowledge and duty, to avoid being bought (Mahe, 2013). Who is to stop chefs or restaurant owners from paying for good reviews? That would of course be food critics' duty to call them out and hold them accountable (Strickland, 2016). Restaurant critics' words can be more than describing food: they can do public good. For example, when Pete Wells wrote a review on Daniel, a restaurant, journalist L.V. Anderson, noted that, "Wells performs a public service in acknowledging that the treatment he receives at New York restaurants is sometimes, if not often, much better than the treatment tourists get" (Anderson, 2013). Furthermore, critics have a motivation for quality writing and verification of truth ("Food Criticism Guidelines," 2016). When critics write, they have their credibility and job to lose and the same is not true for amateurs (Goldfield, 2014). However, that is not to say that citizen journalists or amateurs are not duplicating the job of food critics. Despite encroaching amateurs, this study will focus on identifying and analyzing food/restaurant critics.

Since journalism is not technically a profession in the strict sense of the word (Meyers, et al., 2012), one can claim to be a journalist and food critic without any formal training. Review tools like Yelp, Urbanspoon, TripAdvisor, and others have made

everyone able to function as a critic of sorts. To maintain clarity then, there needs to be an established difference in terms between “official” food critics and their less official counterparts. Therefore, “citizen journalist” food critics will be identified as food bloggers for the purpose of this study. The operational definition of a food/restaurant blogger will be: a person who is *not* employed at a journalistic outlet, but maintains a personal blog or utilizes apps to write reviews on restaurants. They are more autonomous without having to be tied to any institution; however, with that lack of institutional ties they could also be perceived as less respectable than a restaurant/food critic that works in conjunction with a professional journalistic outlet. Since there are a number of similarities and differences between food critics and food bloggers, it is worth spending time illustrating what a food blogger is in order to show what a food critic is not and why depictions of food bloggers are not a focus of this study.

If amateur food critics are very often not being paid to do essentially what others are in fact paid to do, why do they become food bloggers? Some research suggests that this behavior is a cultural shift (Yang, 2011). With people having more leisure time, and with these review apps so readily available, people are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about food. This process of performing systematic pursuit of an activity by amateurs, hobbyists, or otherwise is called “serious leisure” and has been shown to ultimately lead to specialization. Specialization through “addictive behavior” is the process, in this specific case, of searching for fine food, collecting information, and writing commentary that then becomes a habit or routine (Yang, 2011). Perhaps the most inherent differences between the bloggers and their more official counterparts are the ideas that to be a critic one must already have an expertise that is only solidified versus

having one born out of more recent experience and that critics earn income from their work. It needs to be noted, though, that bloggers, whether maintaining personal blogs separate from official journalistic outlets or simply maintaining profiles on existing apps, are fundamentally changing the journalistic landscape and even modern foodways. This means non-journalists are actively changing the way journalism works in the modern era (Robinson, 2006). This change is in journalism at large, but especially prominent in food criticism. Lines between journalists and bloggers are being blurred as these two types write, critique, and review similarly despite perhaps having different goals. After all, issues of critics and bloggers attacking each other's ethics to delegitimize the other party have caused audiences to question the authenticity of those who review food.

There is not much scholarship concerning food criticism, but what does exist spans countries, cultures, and disciplines of study. Articles span from France to Pakistan and across disciplines from journalism studies and hospitality and tourism management to sociology. This illustrates that this is a topic that has broad appeal despite the lack of much scholarship concerning the topic in terms of overall quantity. For instance, one study looked into the history of food critics in France starting in the 1970s through today, mentioning such critics as: Henni Gault, Christian Millau, Emmanuel Rubin, and Alexandre Cammas (Naulin, 2015). Lifestyle journalism that includes food criticism has received little attention from scholars, so it is not surprising that journalistic depiction studies in this kind of journalism are also lacking. However, this lacking should change because this kind of journalism also has important implications that should be discovered. Although this type of journalism does treat the audience more as consumers than citizens by giving advice and providing factual information concerning goods and services, which

is a slippery slope for good journalism to be sure, it is still a relevant form of journalism (Hanusch, 2012). Ultimately people do need information that helps them live and decide how to spend their hard-earned money.

It should be clear that this distinction between food critics and food bloggers will prove to be useful, because as technology has given everyone with a smartphone the ability to become a food blogger, depictions of citizens doing just that have risen exponentially. This idea of aggravating people rating food on social media is not a new phenomenon. Yelp reviewers have been referred to as “foochebags,” a combination of the words “foodie” and “douchebag” for their tendency to write mean-spirited reviews and have been referred to that way long before a *South Park* episode “You’re Not Yelping” took aim at them (Rousseau, 2012). This reestablishes the notion that the journalist/food critic has more power and credibility over food bloggers (Goodsir, 2014). At the same time though, there is an understanding that there can be greater or, at the very least, different knowledge that group experiences can provide versus a single person’s experience (Rousseau, 2012). That finding is also confirmed in relation to citizen journalism in general through another study that determined consumers of citizen journalism are more likely to view it favorably (Holton, 2013). Since the technology that allows citizens to publish their own reviews of restaurants is a relatively new phenomenon, though, and my thesis concerns journalists as food critics, I exclude depictions of citizens reviewing restaurants as food bloggers. So, which kind of food criticism is best, a single well experienced critic or an aggregate of anyone who decides to review a restaurant? Of course, this question is cyclical; basically, it is the same as asking which came first, the chicken or the egg? The answer to these kinds of questions is

that both food blogging and food criticism have their own value and that both chicken and eggs are delicious. However, for the purposes of this thesis I will only look into depictions of food critics, as previously defined.

### **Depictions of Journalists and Food Critics**

It is fascinating just how often and how varied the depictions of journalists can be across mediums. These instances are all around us, from our video games centering around photojournalists like in *Dead Rising* (2006) where the main character has to document the outbreak of a zombie apocalypse, to some of the newest films garnering critical acclaim like *Spotlight* (2015) where a team of journalists uncover a major scandal concerning the Catholic church. Whether fictional or not, these depictions have implications for the viewing community and offer insight as to people's perception of journalism and journalists.

How have scholars gone about identifying and closely reading these texts? Very often it is through a three-step process: mapping, linking, and contextualizing. Mapping is defined as the process where journalistic depictions are identified and documented. Linking namely being the process of connecting the study of depictions of journalists to other research areas/disciplines. Contextualizing is arguably the most important of these, being the idea that these texts need to be closely analyzed, understanding the context in which it was made and also moving beyond surface interpretations (Ehrlich, 2009). This theory gives a streamlined way to examine the various fictional texts and the journalistic depictions therein.

While mapping is simply naming journalist depictions in a medium then taking ideas from other areas of study and linking them to journalist depictions, contextualizing

is taking qualitative ideas of how journalists/journalism is perceived and constructed with themes, tropes, and archetypes identified. Contextualizing has led to some interesting findings as researchers have found that there are main archetypes to be identified and connected with depictions of various types of journalists. Previous scholarship has identified a number of categories for these images including: anonymous reporters, cub reporters, editors, flawed male journalists, investigative reporters, newsroom families, photojournalists, media owners/publishers, sob sisters, real-life journalists, war correspondents, sports journalists, and critics/columnists. Each of these categories of journalist has its own tropes/stereotypes associated with it. For example, war correspondents and investigative reporters are often depicted as heroes in stories that feature/focus on journalism or journalists (Saltzman, 2005). These various ideas/tropes connected to different types of journalists provide a starting point for research on various texts to either confirm these stereotypes or highlight when depictions diverge. Through this process, one scholar was able to note anxieties and racism in the James Bond novels by Ian Fleming (Eco, 1979). Using similar close reading techniques in stories that feature food critics, for example, Anton Ego, the food critic in *Ratatouille* (2007), will produce other findings.

While scholars have closely analyzed journalist characters, very often there is a tendency to focus on hard-news style journalism. While traditionally understood, “hard-news” journalists seem to be painted in a number of different lights that correspond to the various positions they can hold at a news outlet, critics/columnists are typically denoted as villain or antagonist characters (Saltzman, 2005). Food critics in particular, though, have not received specific attention looking into their depictions in popular culture.

However, many of the commonly associated tropes of critics are confirmed in food critic depictions. One common theme that's confirmed would be the idea that despite constantly being villainous characters, they often have a moment of clarity when they realize they should value the work of the people they review (Saltzman, 2005).

This is not to say critics are the only journalists that are painted in a nearly exclusive negative light. Media owners/publishers also tend to be the subjects of negative depictions as well, such as the character of J. Jonah Jameson, editor and publisher of the *Daily Bugle*, in the *Spiderman* films. They are shown to be part of the elite one percent type who audiences love to hate and frequently are shown as greedy, hypocritical, and often immoral (Saltzman, 2005). Despite critics not being the only villain journalists, it is important to note that they are part of a small group that is targeted. Moreover, they may also be targeted unnecessarily. One of the only studies that looks into the content actually produced found that food/restaurant critics are not truly so harsh. Critics, the 1987 study found, were, "reluctant to write negative reports...overall, [they] were far gentler in their opinions than their self-report led us to expect" (Burry, 1987, p. 403). The study even concludes with the idea that, if anything, often the food critics are too positive, leading to the question: why are they perceived so negatively? This remains unanswered. That same study, though, gives a bit of a profile of the demographic food critics, determining that most of them had been writing food criticism since their publication had begun to do so, equally distributed for men and women, and their training was less focused on formal culinary training, but instead on experience developed from years of eating well (Burry, 1987). However, this study has almost assuredly lost some relevance. In 2016, there are now many websites and apps where average people can leave their own reviews, which

definitely changes how the role of a food critic operates. Moreover, the original study only was able to get information from 20 critics, not enough to make any truly sweeping claims about these kinds of journalists.

### **History of Food Critics**

Although modern incarnations of food critics are included under the umbrella of journalists, food criticism at its origin certainly was not a journalistic institution. The first true food critic, Alexandre Balthasar Laurent Grimod de la Reynière from France, started a long new tradition with his foray into a brand-new world, an entirely new style and subject of writing. From 1802 to 1812 he edited and published the *Almanach des gourmands*, for all intents and purposes, it was the origin of the restaurant review. It was not created out of the void, however. Despite being a lawyer by trade, Grimod de la Reynière was, for a time, an editor for a theatre weekly, the *Censur dramatique* (Sprang, 2000). Using theatre criticism as a base, but expanding on it, Grimond de la Reynière created the offshoot of food criticism at that moment in history. Its origin was perhaps best illustrated in that he would faithfully report the experiences of himself and his jury of 17 and give honest opinions of the food offered (Sprang, 2000). France would also come to produce the following generation of food criticism that still exists to this day, the *Michelin Guide* system.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tire company owners and brothers, Edouard and André Michelin, decided to publish a guide illuminating places like hotels, restaurants, sights to see, and gas stations. It was a marketing gimmick that continued for 20 years (“History,” 2016). They thought that it could help boost the sales of their tires, but it ended up continuing a French tradition of food criticism. In 1920, the two decided

that they would no longer offer the guide for free because, despite its success, they felt respect could be better earned for something that was paid for. Apparently, this decision came after André Michelin saw several of the guides propping up a workbench (“History,” 2016). Following the price jump, the brothers also instituted some other notable changes: firstly, the removal of all paid advertisements in the guide. Secondly, the institution of a group of “mystery diners” that have since become known as restaurant inspectors. Finally, by 1926, they had instituted the Michelin star, as a kind of award for the best restaurants. However, even the top restaurants would only have received one star. Finally, in 1931, the most recent incarnation of the Michelin stars was established with a ranking system of one to three Michelin stars being awarded (“History,” 2016). This was really the first iteration of some objective ranking system of restaurant experiences, although eventually it would become commonplace in food criticism.

Despite these other early adopters, it would take some time for this kind of writing to make its way to the United States. But, when it did manage to cross the Atlantic Ocean, it was extremely reminiscent of the styles of the Michelin brothers and Grimond de la Reynière. America’s first food critic was Duncan Hines. He was a salesman who was a rather prolific traveler, and who would end up driving all over the U.S. at around 50,000 miles a year (Mariani, 1991). Over the course of his travels, he would make sure to take note of his experiences. After a simple Christmas card to his friends and family in 1935 that listed his absolute favorites was well received, he decided to publish them into a periodical guide called *Adventures in Good Eating*. After the *Saturday Evening Post* highlighted this book, it took to the national scale. Hines’ guide was selling 100,000 copies a year by 1939 (Mariani, 1991). After that, it became the go-

to guide on restaurants in the United States and was published through the mid-1950s (Sietsema, 2010). These were very basic and rudimentary guides, however, with only a few lines given per review.

After these originators started what would become modern restaurant and food criticism, journalists would pick up and bear the torch thereafter. We see this transition first through the food critic at *The New York Times*: Craig Claiborne. He was American born, and had gone to a Swiss hotel school. Using that experience, working for *Gourmet* magazine, and other culinary experiences he had had, he would eventually become the first male food editor at *The New York Times*. Starting in 1957, he would write restaurant reviews that would ultimately look to judge a restaurant based on the overall experience in what it was aiming to give. He created a four-star rating system (possibly inspired by Michelin) and awarded stars to both high-reaching white tablecloth restaurants just the same as he could to restaurants most everyone would be able to afford. Though Claiborne is credited by many to be the father of modern day food criticism, his style of writing would quickly be dropped for a different kind of writing. His style was short, with declarative statements, and was described like an all-knowing lecturer (Sietsema, 2010). Those who would come after him though would take a much more lengthy and conversational tone.

Gael Greene at *New York Magazine*, with her start at 1968, would bring, “hyperbolic language to a medium that had once been merely informational” (Sietsema, 2010, p. 44). While Greene may have stolen the objective rubric from The New York Times and Claiborne (or perhaps even Michelin), *The New York Times* would then look to steal from Greene’s success, zeal, and style of writing with Claiborne’s successor

Mimi Sheraton. These two, although working at different outlets, would share a similar style of description, adjectives and detail that was just not present in Claiborne's writing. This detail with a special attention on flavor, appearance, smell, and context would elevate food reviewing/criticism as a craft (Sietsema, 2010). A few years later, with one food critic in between her and Sheraton, a new critic would take the reins at *The New York Times* and go on to become one of the most famous food critics to date, Ruth Reichl.

Reichl would become arguably the most prominent and recognizable food critic, although recognizable mostly in name because part of her claim to fame was her strive for anonymity. In her memoir, *Garlic and Sapphires: The Secret Life of a Critic in Disguise* (2005) she described at length the hoops she would go through to stay in disguise. Wigs, hats, false names and more were all used at various restaurants to try and maintain a cover. In fact, it could be argued that her rather zany disguises and antics that took place in the 1990s could be why in popular culture depictions, anonymity remains as one of the more persistent ones. But she was never just a disguise; she backed up those whacky disguises with tremendously respectable writing over the course of her career, winning multiple James Beard awards for food criticism. In fact, her desperate attempts to remain anonymous in her criticism to her were very justified, and never more apparent as to why as after her review of Le Cirque. Her critique was a true dichotomy, as she tells about two separate visits where she visited the restaurant. The first was a not so great experience filled with rudeness and rather awkward service. The second, after being recognized as a food critic, was rather lovely special attention and care given to her. That

huge difference in experience is why she stayed true to the established food critic tenants of anonymity and multiple visits.

Since Claiborne, Greene, Sheraton and Reichl using whatever medium has been available to them, food critics have been discussing their dining experiences for the betterment of people who wish to eat as well as possible and for the betterment of the chefs and restaurateurs who are creating wonderful experiences for people to enjoy. It should be no surprise that, in the years following Claiborne, journalistic food critics would make their way into popular culture. This could be in part because the majority of local papers had food critics on staff by the middle of the 1970s (Mariani 1991). But they go beyond penning columns in local papers: they go on television, type up reviews and critiques online, and push the culinary bar. Some go their entire careers anonymously eating and reviewing while others make their identities known. There has been an evolution in critiquing and reviewing food from straightforward and short form, hard-news-like reporting to more detailed, long-form, feature reporting. Food criticism has developed from little more than advertising to Pulitzer-Prize winning writing thanks to people like Jonathan Gold, food critic for the *Los Angeles Times*.

However, with the advent of the Internet and social media, people with access to a smartphone or a computer can rate their meals through a number of means. They can simply describe their experience on general, non-specific kinds of social media: Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. They can give a star rating to any restaurant's specific Facebook or Google profile. They can also use a seemingly innumerable number of apps to review restaurants: Urbanspoon, Yelp, Foursquare, Eat24, Zagat, OpenTable, LocalEats, DiningGrades, Restaurant Finder, and Dysh all offer the ability for citizens to

critique restaurants based on their own dining experiences. Despite all being produced by different creators, each of these apps seems to be influenced by some of the earliest critics. Just like the Michelin brothers, many of those options use stars to rate the quality of dining experiences. After Craig Claiborne instituted his own variant of the star system at *The New York Times*, which would have four stars instead of three, journalistic food critics used stars more often, and that spread to the apps that would follow them as well. If stars are not used, though, more often than not some form of rating system is. Rarely is there a food criticism app that does not try to give some objective score to go along with what tends to be rather brief write-ups of various parties' experiences. Finally, if none of those options were preferred, people could even create their own personal food blog, which is as simple as opening a Wix or Wordpress webpage. But again, one must keep in mind that unlike journalists who have an obligation to the truth and a standard of ethics you are expected to follow, citizens do not have that expectation. But what exactly are the ethics of food criticism? How are the ethics of food criticism different from traditional journalistic ethics?

### **Ethics of Food Critics**

Food critics have clearly evolved into a type of journalist and, as such, hold certain ethical standards highly, although it may be the case that even modern journalistic food critics obtained many of their most traditional ethical values not from journalists, but from a rather eclectic group of men. Namely, an 18<sup>th</sup> century lawyer, a pair of French brothers that owned a tire company in the 1900s, and a traveling American salesman from the 1930s. These four men, Alexandre Balthasar, Laurent Grimod de la Reynière, André Michelin, Edouard Michelin, and Duncan Hines were the early founders behind

modern food criticism that journalists seem to have taken nearly wholesale. From there, journalist food critics such as Craig Claiborne, took the mantle or, perhaps more appropriately, the dinner plate, and continued to write. Each of these early critics added specific facets to food critic ethics that are still clearly visible in modern popular culture depictions.

Grimond de la Reynière as the originator of the trade of food criticism obviously had a lot to do with how the tradition was shaped. While he may not have established rules to be followed, and certainly was not a journalist, his influence is the first in a traceable lineage that leads to similar tendencies in food criticism and reviewing evident in how the Michelin brothers' and Hines' guides would work as well as journalistic food critics like Claiborne. Grimond de la Reynière made the point to describe his experiences truthfully, giving his honest opinion. He would go out to various eateries in a number of disguises and would try to remain as anonymous as possible and wanted the same for his tasting jury of fellow critics (Spang, 2000). Despite this, he became one of the most famous and identifiable of celebrities in Paris after several years of his guide being published. But anonymity was arguably his central concern for the ability for restaurant criticism to happen. In fact, although he dedicated the fourth *Almanach's* edition to them, he refused to name the 17 members of the Wednesday Society, saying to do so, "would violate the anonymity central to the Society's continued happiness" (Sprang, 2000, p. 163). It would not be until the early 1900s when ethics of food critics would see another iteration.

That update would come in the form of the Michelin brothers. They too had a substantial impact on how food criticism has evolved today. Based on how their

“restaurant inspectors” view a restaurant, they award it with one, two, three, or no stars, usually along with a short summary of the restaurant. What is perhaps different from many journalists is that these inspectors do not take account of décor, service, or the like when rating the restaurant with stars. Instead, those are rated with Michelin’s fork and knife symbols, from one fork and knife to five. There are also symbols denoted for restaurants having impressive wine, sake, or cocktails available, and being a tremendous quality for the price (“Stars and Covers,” 2016). Although there is not much available as to what the Michelin brothers thought about the ethics of their restaurant inspectors when they originated, there is material concerning the current restaurant inspectors and their ethical outlook. According to Michelin’s website, six core values govern how their inspectors work: anonymity, independence, expertise, reliability, passion, and quality.

Anonymity, like to most modern journalistic food critics, as well as the oldest food critic, Grimond de la Reynière, is of extreme importance. Michelin says that this is to confirm that no special treatment is given to the inspectors, as they aim to be treated as any customer. Independence refers not to their professional position, but to the idea that they are independent from the restaurants they review. Michelin says that all of its inspectors are employees who pay for their meals in the restaurants they test. Expertise again refers to the inspectors, with Michelin maintaining that they have professional experiences in the restaurant and hospitality industries to give them a fuller range of scope when judging. This is really an innovation off of Grimond de la Reynière, because despite being taken as an authority on restaurants and where to find the best food, he was not a chef or restaurateur, and he did not even regularly eat out at restaurants (Spang, 2000). Reliability is mentioned to denote that all Michelin reviews are the result of a

consensus between several people, never just one person's judgment. Again, it is clear to see the progression from Grimond de la Reynière and his tasting jurors. Passion is mentioned because all of the inspectors love and appreciate food. Finally, quality is on this list to denote that same principle Claiborne noted, that no matter what kind of restaurant, it can earn a high rating if its quality is high, whether lowly food stand or expensive white tablecloth establishment ("Inspection," 2016).

Part of the ethics of food criticism for Michelin as well is their publicly acknowledged criteria for whether or not a restaurant will receive any stars. After adding that they pay for their meal in full and dine out anonymously, they add the list of criteria as follows:

- 1.) Quality of products
- 2.) Mastery of flavor and cooking techniques
- 3.) The personality of the chef in his [sic] cuisine
- 4.) Value for money
- 5.) Consistency between visits ("Inspection," 2016)

What should be clear to see from Michelin's notes is the striking similarity they have to food criticism from journalistic food critics. They have an obligation to serve the public and to inform them on quality, consistency and value while making strides to remain independent and unbiased. So although not inherently journalism, without Michelin there may be no modern journalistic food critic or even some modern ideas about the ethics of journalistic food criticism.

Duncan Hines, the original American food critic, has also had a notable impact on food criticism today. Although not a journalist, his career travelling as an ink and printer paper salesman had given him a unique experience in that he ate out all over the U.S. Despite some critics calling his work "verg[ing] on puffery," he did have his own

standard of ethics that he made clear in the introduction of his guide (Sietsema, 2010, p. 42). Along with striving to remain anonymous, he added: “I have never accepted a free meal or any other consideration from any inn...No advertising accepted. No matter what anyone may think, no place in this book has paid one cent directly or indirectly for what is said about it” (Hines, 1938, p. ix). Obviously, the concerns about conflict of interests and special treatment that come up time and again were mirrored in Hines. Although, it should also be noted that he did not write every single review. Hines’ guide also used recommendations from others as well, and made no distinction between something that Hines personally experienced over what someone else had (Sietsema, 2010).

Perhaps more than nearly any single person, Craig Claiborne has had the most influence on the trade. Not only because he was the first journalist food critic, but also because he “established an ethical and procedural framework” (Sietsema 2010, p. 42). His rules include: anonymity, visiting a restaurant multiple times with other diners, not taking free meals from restaurants (instead, having the critic’s employer publication cover the bill), the four-star rating system, and writing reviews with one’s name actually attached to them. Certainly, that framework was not made up of all original ideas. Each of the other three aforementioned founders of food criticism came up with ideas of ethics and each agreed on the ubiquitously important idea of anonymity. But Claiborne made the framework, and he made the case for it so strongly that others would follow. And follow they did, not just at *The New York Times*, but also at competing journalistic outlets. Gael Greene by 1968 had established herself as a food critic for *New York Magazine*, but with a basis for how she would work from Claiborne. She said that when starting out, she told New York founder Clay Felkner, that it was imperative they

structured their food criticism the same way as Claiborne: anonymously, with others, multiple times, and of course paying for the meal themselves (Greene, 2006). The saying goes that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and it would seem that when food criticism made the jump into the journalism family, it was due to significant imitation of Craig Claiborne.

For modern journalistic food critics, these ideals about how food criticism should be practiced have translated into food criticism's basic official guidelines. The Association of Food Journalists has an extended list of things to keep in mind as critics practice their craft. All of these founders – Grimond de la Reynière, the Michelin brothers, Dan Hines, and Craig Claiborne – are present through their ideas. They offer guideline ideas established by the founding critics, for example: rating scales, anonymity, multiple visits, payment, and variety (i.e. different kinds of restaurants as well as the variety of trying the range of the menu). While also offering others guidelines that are more modern, like differentiating between a food critic and a food reporter (in part, a food critic is more ethically independent, while a food reporter has more obligation to answer to an editor), being fair to new restaurants (deals with the ethical journalistic notion of minimizing harm), and when/why to change reviews (“Food Criticism Guidelines,” 2016). In these additions, we see journalistic norms being established. What's important to keep in mind about these guidelines, though, is that they are just that, guidelines. These are merely suggestions, so although one would hope all journalistic food critics strive to follow these guidelines, some may not follow them while they say they do and others may disagree with them entirely.

Those disagreements in ethics may be the single most defining difference between true journalistic food critics and those food bloggers who critique on their own, without the backing of any journalistic outlet. Or, for that matter, any other outlets that also employ restaurant reviewers/critics/inspectors, such as Michelin or Zagat. Take, for example, Restaurant Girl (the pseudonym of Danyelle Freeman), a food critic who had started her own blog, then was hired by *Daily News*, then was let go, and then went back to blogging on her own. She still continues to be a food critic on her own while making an ethical case as to why anonymity, perhaps the most cherished of historic rules for food critics, is not useful. On her website, she goes into detail as to why she decided against anonymity for herself:

I have no reason to hide behind a false identity, hats, sunglasses and any other disguise. Besides, no one does that anymore. I aspire to be as personable as possible to my reader as well as to chefs & restaurateurs alike. I'm passionate about chefs and their art. I hope to understand their vision, even peek in their kitchens, all in the pursuit of getting a truer picture of the dynamic in both in the front of the house as well as behind kitchen doors (Freeman, 2016).

Freeman goes on to say that all of this is in an effort to greater serve her readers and differentiate herself from other food critics. But the notion critics need to drop anonymity is not just her opinion. Many food critics that still practice their craft have all stopped with what they deem to be a charade. One of the shining stars of modern food criticism would be Jonathan Gold, currently writing for the *Los Angeles Times*. Gold was the first person to win a Pulitzer Prize for food criticism, but has done much more than just that. Along with winning several James Beard awards for food writing and criticism, Gold also is at the forefront of writing about the growing racially, culturally, and ethnically diverse world of food today. He too was one of the first to note the now booming trend of food trucks. He also followed the now centuries old tradition of anonymity and disguise. Over

the course of his career he has made great efforts to remain anonymous. His Facebook profile picture had been an apple; he had worn masks, had his face pixelated, or was photographed strategically behind anything from a potted plant to a tortilla (Gold, 2015). But as he notes in an article where he shows his face and drops the anonymity with the *Los Angeles Times*, he had not actually been anonymous for some time.

Gold did not just stop the anonymity attempt because it was futile for him personally. Like any ethical journalist looking to minimize harm, he identifies several reasons that anonymity would be harmful to both critics and restaurants alike. Firstly, he notes that food critics that truly do succeed at anonymity (perhaps in smaller markets) could be more inclined to write more callously about the restaurants they review. Secondly, “If chefs truly can cook better when they know a critic is in the house, then restaurants without an early warning system are at a permanent disadvantage” (Gold, 2016). Finally, Gold adds that anonymity is more often than not, irrelevant – not just for him, but for all critics. He rejects the idea that more than a select few extremely talented chefs could be able to improve their food for a specific customer, such as a critic. After all, menus are set, food is already in the kitchen usually prepped by service time, and by the time food critics traditionally arrive to review a restaurant it has had enough time to establish itself and how it works. He also likens the dining experience to a play: “A performance of “King Lear” is not likely to be any better the night *The Times*’ theater critic Charles McNulty has two seats on the aisle” (Gold, 2016). In the same fashion, the argument certainly can persuasively be made that food critic anonymity would not affect the outcome of a meal much if at all. So, between anonymity being described as irrelevant and inconsequential on one end of the spectrum, yet having the power to

privilege high-end restaurants at the same time, it may seem that there are clear reasons to drop anonymity as a norm for food critics.

Gold is not the only one to step out of the darkness of anonymity. Other established food critics working at larger journalistic institutions are now shedding whatever anonymity they believed they had left, two prominent examples being Adam Platt of *New York Magazine* and Leslie Brenner of *Dallas Morning News*. With this seemingly core and established norm of anonymity being questioned in modern food criticism, it should be quite interesting to see what modern popular media chooses to include and showcase.

What is clear from the various people and organizations that have had a hand in helping food criticism's ethical standards evolve, is that there are norms that have been established. With the exception of anonymity, which is still an active and hotly contested issue among critics, all of these norms have now been commonplace for long enough to be explicitly written in the Food Critic's Guidelines by the Association of Food Journalists. These norms all can be condensed down into three central categories, or reasons, why they exist. Food critics should be fair, honest, and autonomous. Those first two, being fair and being honest, are actually part of the explicit goals of the food critic guidelines. The guidelines state: "Restaurant criticism is not an objective pursuit, yet readers expect a measure of objectivity from critics" (2016). So, one way for food critics to get close to objective truth would be to use norms that help bring about a sense of an even playing field between restaurants. Norms like visiting a restaurant multiple times, using stars and other rating scales, ordering a range of items off the menu, visiting a wide range of styles of restaurant from high to low cost and across ethnicities, they all relate

back to the idea of being fair to everyone involved. The notion that the Association of Food Journalists would urge critics to wait one month before visiting a new restaurant also conveys an attempt at fair coverage. This exemplifies fairness because it can take some time to work out the “ins and outs” of a restaurant. It can take time to establish norms of service, to establish a menu, and more. Even anonymity as a guideline, although debated, exists because of this notion that food critics should be treated just the same as any other typical patron, which is an issue of fairness.

Being honest also helps establish the sense of an even field among restaurants, a fair competition, as though critics were judges in an Olympic trial. Honesty for food critics, such as fairness for food critics, comes in a variety of agreed upon guidelines. They include: presenting correct facts, presenting honest opinions, and attaching one’s own name to one’s own writing. Also, honesty includes the stars and rating scales also classified under fairness. Honesty is important in all of these for without that, what use would the critic be to the public?

The last of the three central categories is the ethic of autonomy. Obviously, incredibly important to journalism in general, autonomy is clearly observed through several guidelines the Association of Food Journalists suggests. One of the suggestions is the clear distinction made between food critic and food reporter: a responsibility for food critics not to become too close to the subjects they critique. They suggest that critics isolate themselves from the food community and not participate in functions where they would be likely to meet and converse with restaurateurs and chefs. There is also the suggestion to deny free meals and pay in full for any meal, drink, or anything else that would normally be paid for by a normal patron. This suggestion, used all the way back by

Duncan Hines, was to maintain his independence/autonomy and reinforce the other two categories of ethics. This was to keep people aware he was being honest and fair with the places he reviewed. These three core ethics of honesty, fairness, and autonomy create the backbone of modern food criticism more than any other trait.

### **Research Questions**

Since food criticism is a variety of journalism that is not the standard journalism many people think of and because new technology allows people to be food bloggers easier than ever, it will be important to consider depictions of both food bloggers and food critics.

**RQ1:** How are food/restaurant critics depicted in popular visual media?

This is a direct answer to the call to add to scholarship concerning depictions of journalists in popular culture in mediums besides film (Ehrlich, 2015). Moreover, looking into film, television, graphic novels, commercials, and more will be beneficial because all of these mediums offer varying instances of food critic depictions and will likely add another layer of complexity to the current understanding of journalists and journalism in popular culture.

**RQ2:** To what extent does Saltzman's conclusion, that most journalistic critics tend to be villainous characters, apply specifically to food critics?

**RQ2a:** If so, do food critic character's ethics, or lack thereof, help to establish them as villainous characters?

Past scholarship has identified patterns of depictions of journalists. Specifically, critic depictions include such traits as: being villainous, being cold-blooded, and being self-serving. Directors and writers are known to, "get revenge against critics by holding them

up to scorn and ridicule” (Saltzman, 2005, p. 35). Food critics certainly have been shown to share some of these traits. However, there are many traits that may indeed be unique to the food critic, or may not have been included in previous scholarship akin to being part of the job of a food critic to be anonymous.

## **Chapter Three: Method**

As noted, the goal of this research is to explore how food critics are depicted in popular culture, and determine why they are depicted often as villainous, and if that has anything to do with the ethical decisions they make in the fictional worlds they inhabit. This chapter will examine the approach used in this study to show how food critics were depicted across popular visual media.

### **Rationale for Method Selection**

This research is qualitative in nature, achieved through a textual analysis using as many instances in popular media as possible, including: films, television episodes, and other visual popular media or until saturation, using criterion sampling. This means this research will only be looking into texts that satisfy specific criteria. In this case, any text that would be included for study must feature a food or restaurant critic of some kind. Although there are also many non-fiction depictions of food critics in documentaries, television shows, and other popular culture media, this research will exclusively focus on fictional depictions. There are, of course, potential depictions that are non-visual as well: radio, novels, and songs, but again, this research will focus, on visual media.

## **Researcher's Role**

When looking into the results of qualitative studies, it is obvious that the researcher is interpreting data. Unlike a quantitative study, which has clear numbers that do not need as much help being interpreted, a qualitative study is understood through the knowledge of the researcher. That knowledge coming from those researchers' lives and their collective experiences: socioeconomic class, religion, culture, race/ethnicity, and more. It is their unique perspective that allows them to help others process and understand the knowledge of the study in its appropriate context. So, to help readers digest all of my findings on food criticism and how it is depicted in popular culture, I will share the relevance of myself to be entering into the discussion about this topic. To start, I am a white male who comes from an upper-middle class family from the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois.

Food has always been tremendously important throughout my upbringing. Originally, I was an extremely picky eater, but as one gets older, as my mother would always say, "your tastes can change." And so they did. As I progressed through high school and then college, I explored identity, culture, and myself through my exploration of food. Being raised a Roman Catholic; I was always fascinated by the importance of the Eucharist at Mass and how each service revolved around something so typical and ordinary as a meal. I went to public school until high school when I switched to a private all-boy, Catholic private school.

Professionally speaking, food criticism has become a goal of mine and, to a degree, has already been realized. For a class assignment during my undergraduate studies at the University of Missouri, I created a food criticism website called Columbia

Cravings. On that website, I would write up my experiences with local restaurants in Columbia, Missouri. Although I no longer regularly update that website, I continue to be very interested in the world of food, food criticism, and food photography. My personal Instagram account @drewjkoch only contains pictures of food, and primarily photos of food from around mid-Missouri.

My interest in popular culture: film, television, graphic novels, and more came from a deep appreciation for that kind of media throughout my life. I have watched thousands of films and television shows over the course of my life and, in large part, is how I connect with my family. That became an academic interest through several courses I took during my undergraduate studies that looked to discuss issues of identity, culture, and more through various films. Moreover, my first job was reporting on entertainment television: reality television, scripted shows, as well as award shows. After finishing my education, I received dual degrees from the University of Missouri with a Bachelor of Journalism and a Bachelor of the Arts in English with an emphasis in fiction writing. With the completion of this thesis, I will soon graduate with a Masters of the Arts in Journalism, with a focus on arts and entertainment reporting and reviewing also from the University of Missouri. Following graduation, I will look for employment as a food/entertainment/arts reporter or critic.

## **Research Design**

### **Data Sampling**

The subjects of this study of course will be texts that include instances of food critics as major or minor characters in the narrative. While some may be protagonists, the study aims to look at the different ways that they are depicted, so antagonists and minor characters have also been included. As such, the criterion sampling method will be perfect for this study to identify and further examine only texts that do include a food/restaurant critic. The research aims to use not only film, but also other visual media texts. This move to use other mediums in addition to film is a direct response to a call to action for more scholarship that addresses depictions of journalists in everything including television, videogames, plays, commercials, cartoons, and so on (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Responding to the most current scholarship regarding the depiction of journalists in popular culture helps foster a community of researchers that are willing to work with one another. Ultimately, this study utilized 46 texts comprised of television episodes, films, an Internet video, a television commercial, and a graphic novel. All the texts analyzed are included in an appendix at the conclusion of the thesis.

The study will highlight the commonalities, the various themes or archetypes in depictions of food critics and food bloggers that appear across mediums. This will contribute to what is known about depictions of journalists in popular culture. This is the most appropriate method for the study because unraveling the fictional depiction of journalists is complex, but to truly be contributing to knowledge, there needs to be enough of a supply of depictions to be able to compare. Using a minimum of ten texts should prove to be a sufficient sampling, given that previous research, for example,

scholar Umberto Eco, looked across ten texts when studying narrative in James Bond novels (1979). However, as the data collection and management section below will discuss, ten texts simply will not be the end.

Following the lead of other scholars looking into the depictions of journalists in popular culture, the progression of mapping, linking, and contextualizing will be of great importance (Ehrlich, 2009). Mapping refers to the idea of identifying those texts that will be analyzed, that do have a journalist depiction in them, and, for this study and its purposes, that will be altered to the specific type of journalist: food critics. In total, 46 texts were mapped and included. To view these texts, I employed a variety of methods to obtain the films and episodes including video streaming websites, specifically Netflix Hulu, Xfinity, GooglePlay, as well as services that can provide physical copies, including Amazon, if necessary. These vast and varied texts span over 40 years: from the mid 1970s through today in 2017.

### **Data Collection and Management**

Despite the base-limit of ten based on Eco's narrative analysis of a grouping of texts, this research aims to continue to analyze the depictions of food critics until data saturation is reached. The reason behind the choice to aim for data saturation over a simple number of texts to include is that it is hard to numerate just how many instances of food critics there have been over the years in television series, films, and other popular culture. The start will of course be the tens of thousands of journalist depictions already at least noted on in *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture's* online database. However, that database does not have every instance of a food critic in popular culture

and I will be adding my own knowledge of texts that include food critics to be included in the study.

Using an assortment of media that range from drama to comedy helps establish a spectrum of food critic depictions. Whether animated, award winning, made for TV, a graphic novel, commercial, or something as a part of a larger series, there are established themes and tropes that correlate with how food critics are identified. Using textual analysis as a way to analyze these works in depth allows for understanding the similarities and differences of how food critics are portrayed in context. It also looks to see if food critic identity or stereotypes are maintained and kept across the mediums of television, film, and beyond. Not only does it answer the call for research concerning the portrayal of journalists outside of simply film, it also allows for study of how their identity as a food critic is conceptualized by those who feel these characters are depicted in a way that is true to life. It took a number of months to obtain, view, and analyze the numerous amounts of texts to be included in this study. It lasted longer than anticipated, in part because many of these texts were not available on the various streaming outlets until a later date, often times, without warning.

## **Coding Procedures**

The research will be conducted using detailed descriptions of how the food critics influence the plot of the text, with special attention being given to the common tropes that were aforementioned as well as any interesting or unique details that stand out after experiencing these texts. Once obtained, the texts were viewed at least twice. The first viewing will be used as an opportunity for general note taking. It focused on identifying scenes where food critics are prominent characters, or their role as a food critic will be important to the scene/story. I will take note of identifying features about the character, for example: whether they are portrayed as a main or side character, their gender, their status as a protagonist or antagonist, their status within the world of the text, their appearance/clothing, and any other details that may stand out from text to text. The second viewing will be to transcribe those highlighted and important scenes I made note of in the first viewing. Any further viewings would be to confirm the notes taken or to look for additional details.

This study aims to look similar to Eco's as well as Saltzman and Ehrlich's research, who both used textual analysis to understand each narrative, but certainly had their analyses go beyond that. In a similar way, through contextualizing, as outlined by Ehrlich (2009), this research will look at the various depictions of food critics and food bloggers in a number of texts to determine a common archetype of what a food critic is, then discuss the complexities of the individual characters. This will include character attributes like how they are viewed in the universe of the text as well as how they look, and how they act, among other features.

For transparency, I have kept track of a number of details about each text: The date it was released/created, title (series and episode, if necessary), the medium, the director or writer, the date I accessed the text, as well as where/how the text was accessed.

### **Trustworthiness**

The findings that come out of this specific study will be able to be trusted through the knowledge that my interpretations will have been questioned multiple times throughout the writing process through several sessions of peer debriefing. Peer debriefing was received throughout, through those who are complete outsiders to the topic, as well as trusted advisors who are also members of this committee.

### **Limitations**

As this study is not quantitative in nature, it shall make no broad and definitive statements. You will not read: “Every instance of a food critic is like this...” Its goal will not be to show exactly what percent of food critic depictions were of white men or women or people of color. What this study will aim to do instead is to offer insight on themes, trends, similarities, and shared storylines of these food critics across mediums. Another limitation will of course be time. With a finite amount of time to complete this thesis in mind, this study will almost certainly miss depictions of food critics in film, television, commercials, or graphic novels that either add to the understanding of the depictions or even be completely different. However, to try to mitigate that, my intention is not to try and view every visual text that showcases a food critic, but instead to view until I have reached saturation.

## **Summary**

Depictions of journalists in popular media matter and food critics are a severely under studied population in general academic studies and specifically in journalism studies. While studies have increased showing people concerned with food and actively forming online communities to share, review, and negotiate what good food is, what is left out of that conversation is the historic role that journalists have played in traditionally being the go to source concerning perceived value and information regarding food and restaurants. This qualitative textual analysis looking into depictions of food critics in popular culture will surely bring some attention to this interesting subsection of journalism. It should also gain information and hopefully find answers to the questions: How are food critics depicted? And, why are they so often seen as villains?

As the world becomes more interconnected through the Internet, food and foodways change and new Internet-specific food and foodways are created around these virtual, non-physical communities. Following this logic, as foodways change, so too do the food critics change. What we as viewers and scholars are left with is the understanding that this is a complex, fascinating, and multifaceted area of research that remains to be studied to its full potential.

## Chapter Four: Findings

This study had two main questions. Firstly, **RQ1**: How are food/restaurant critics depicted in popular visual media? Secondly, **RQ2**: To what extent does Saltzman's conclusion, that most journalistic critics tend to be villainous characters, apply specifically to food critics? And depending on how that first part of **RQ2** was answered, a second part **RQ2a** was added to ask: If so, do food critic characters' ethics, or lack thereof, help to establish them as villainous characters? With the understanding that the first research question is a bit nebulous to answer, in an effort to clarify, I determined a number of major findings that each adds a facet to the understanding of how food critics are depicted in general.

### **RQ1: Depictions of Food Critics**

Throughout the course of this study and viewing all of the texts across the different forms of media, a number of themes emerged. Themes included: the negative attitude of critics, the tendency for them to be antagonists, their questionable ethics, violence used against them, lack of depictions of women and people of color as critics, the perception differences between journalist food critic and Michelin critics, and finally the tendency for food critics to have a change of heart. Each of these themes was present in three or more texts to be included as a subsection in this major findings section.

## **Attitude**

Through how they looked, spoke, and acted, food critics leave a lot to be desired in popular fiction. It presented them as an elite who had an air of cultural superiority about them. They are more often than not shown as snobby, mean, uncaring, cold, and generally unlikeable. Take for example one of the more recent examples of food critics appearing in popular media, an episode of *BoJack Horseman*, a Netflix original animated series that focuses on a horse who was popular in a 1990s television sitcom. In this series, characters can be human, or animals that stand on two legs and speak as though they are human.

Series creator Raphael Bob-Waksberg has spoke to *Uproxx* about this process of choosing what kind of animal, or human, the character will be depicted. In that interview, he said that when deciding what kind of creature to make the character, they ask themselves, “Who is this character, and what is the funniest version of this character?” (Bob-Waksberg, 2016). Was the food critic character human? No. Despite saying in that same interview that the amount of animals versus the amount of humans can feel overwhelming in the side of the animals (Bob-Waksberg, 2016), they decided to make the critic an animal. Specifically, he decided the food critic character to be an earthworm. Earthworms are not very flattering creatures. No arms or legs to speak of, spineless, a bug that for many can conjure up feelings of disgust, all of which are characteristics then brought to the character of the critic Samantha. While even the character’s species can help contextualize her for an audience in that scenario, far more often the food critics in popular culture are shown to be unpleasant through the words they speak.

There are numerous explicit quotations in the texts that illustrate the aggravating, rude, and implied superiority of critics. From the first critic looked at chronologically in this text to some of the most recent, the stereotype of this entitled personality has been present. An episode of *Alice*, a 1970s era television sitcom about a widowed mother working as a waitress in a diner, is the first instance of a food critic featured in popular visual media, establishes this identity of a snobbish, arrogant food critic. Walking into the restaurant as the physical manifestation of gluttony, showcased by his suit in a restaurant that doesn't call for it, as well as his heavy-set build, being the most overweight critic featured by far, he maligns at the fact that he cannot order his favorite food: Peking duck, which he later says he has at least once per week. Once he settles in, he immediately takes on a hypercritical role before he even has his first bite. After sending back his glass of water for being dirty, his waiter asks if there is anything else they can do for him. The critic replies, "Yes, perhaps some toast to go with the egg on my spoon." Obviously he is not saying he actually wants toast; he's making a snarky remark at the cleanliness of the restaurant and how it is maintained. As the visit progresses, the critic overhears the owner and head waitress discussing the soup and, when the waitress returns to his table, he comments, "Really, it was very nice for you to take time out from hiding your old tomato butts in the soup." In response the waitress says, "I can't think of words to describe Mel's chili," to which the critic snidely remarks, "I'll settle for edible." In this interchange, he is clearly used to more high-end establishments than the diner he is currently in. These quotes show how the critic thinks of himself as too good to even be at this restaurant and, in fact, the only reason that he is there is that the waitress asked him in to try the chili. His mentality is, therefore, that he is doing the restaurant a favor.

Moving forward to the mid-2000s, the stereotype has not changed. Even in a children's cartoon, food critics are shown to be full of themselves and even more snarky. For example, Gene Scallop, a television food critic in the universe of *SpongeBob SquarePants* (an animated series about a sponge who is a fry cook at an underwater burger restaurant) based on and voiced by real life critic Gene Shalit, visits the Krusty Krab and, while he gives the food a great review, he takes issue with a lot going on at the establishment. He reports on television, "This week I reviewed the Krusty Krab restaurant a local burger joint that's second to none – or should I say second to run? Since this critic wanted to make like a banana and peel out the minute he saw how drab this crab really was." Here he comments on the décor. Rather than being constructive in his criticism, he instead chooses to use viscous remarks that do not contextualize the restaurant any further than less harsh ones would have. Scallop continues, "Once I stuck my beak through that door, my appetite flew south for the winter. I mean I'm not kidding when I say this restaurant smells like the rear end of a goat." By likening the restaurant to the foul odors of livestock, he is being unnecessarily demeaning. This also makes one question how truthful this critique actually is. The restaurant is shown with plenty of diners eating in, an act that seems questionable if the Krusty Krab truly smelt like a barnyard. This overly intense criticism seems to be for the sake of shock value and paints the food critic as not entirely trustworthy.

The stuffy, snobby, rude food critic stereotype persists even today with the most recent instance being in the 2016 Netflix original series *BoJack Horseman*. As time has progressed and the internet has become something more people use daily, Samantha, the critic in *BoJack* is shown using this by being a critic that utilizes the website Tumblr for

her critiques. Even though her experience at BoJack's restaurant was terrible, including staffing issues, a two-hour wait, and multiple fires, she ends up saying the meal is superb. However, when the staff assumes she will write a positive review, she replies, "Unfortunately you will be receiving my lowest rating: 412 stars out of a possible billion ... I assure you, the animated GIFs with which I describe this encounter shall be scathing." Similarly to the critics of the past, Samantha uses pointed and threatening language to talk about the review that is to come. Using her rating scales, this amount turns out to be far less than even one half of one percent. According to her own language, the food itself was "wonderfull," so despite the rest of her experience, this rating is unfair. The fact that she says she will be using GIFs shows that as times and technology changes, as do food critics. Despite changing with the times, therefore, the stereotype of critics remains the same as it was in the 1970s.

However, it was not just explicit things critics said, or other characters said about them, that characterize them. In fact, the implicit and nonverbal traits about them may do more characterization than words. When looking at visual mediums, everything that is presented to the audience can have significance. Everything that is included in the shot or animation was put there for a reason as a creative choice from the director, or writer, or artist. These visualizations have communicative significance for the audience whether they know it or not. Some things may be pretty obvious, like the fact that in *The Golden Palace* (a spinoff and continuation of the *Golden Girls* where the elderly women invest in and staff a Miami hotel) other characters reference the food critic's Rolex a number of times. Rolex brand wristwatches are obviously expensive and imply the critic is paid a much higher-than average job salary and insinuate an upper-class lifestyle. That image is

further solidified when nearly every male critic is depicted in a suit. In fact, there really are not any depictions of the critics in anything but semi-formal or outright formal wear. Whether that be a blazer or a dress, they always take special care to look upper class. There are not any critics in any of the texts viewed wearing athleisure, yard work attire, or a uniform. But, at least for male food critics, two traits seem to appear more often than anything else: mustaches and bowties and surprisingly, they both seem to imply the same kind of attitude for the food critics who wear them.

Mustaches have gone in and out of fashion since they were first perceived to be part of a counter-culture movement in the Victorian era. Mustaches at that time were not very well liked, and often associated with those on the social fringe, namely artists and revolutionaries (Walton, 2008). Moving forward to modern day depictions, those associations continue to be relevant. Critics too are often associated with the social fringe, similar to the artists (i.e. chefs/restaurateurs) they critique. Modern studies have shown that facial hair, like mustaches, are linked with traits like: intelligence, enthusiasm, self-confidence, nonconformity, courage, industriousness, and general competency (Reed, 1990) which all relate to the ideal stereotypical traits of food critics, especially when thinking back to Deuze's ideal traits of journalists, specifically their need to be autonomous.

Food critics in fiction seem to be gaining their stereotypical facial hair in part because of real-world critics that maintain that kind of facial-hairstyle as well, like Jonathan Gold (Pulitzer-prize winning food critic) and world-renowned film and book critic Gene Shalit. In fact, in *SpongeBob SquarePants*, Gene Scallop is very obviously based on Gene Shalit as Shalit not only voiced him, but Scallop also shares his real world

counterpart's spectacles, bowtie, and, in both live action and animated popular visual media across time of course, that famous mustache. Other fictional food critics that sported bowties appeared in: *Mystic Pizza* (a coming of age film about two sisters and their friend waitressing at a pizza restaurant in the town of Mystic), *The Twilight Zone* (a television series comprised of uncanny shorter storylines), and even a Tostitos tortilla chip and salsa commercial (in which a food critic shows up to a party and mistakes it for a restaurant). All these food critics share self-entitled attitudes, speaking in an elevated manner, and act with an air of feigned politeness. When they put on their bowties, it would seem they also put on the attitude associated with those who wear it.

Bowties and mustaches often go hand in hand. As the food critics in that Tostitos commercial, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Mystic Pizza*, and *The Twilight Zone* all also are wearing bowties. However, there are even more food critics shown to be wearing bowties than growing out their facial hair, as food critics wearing bowties also appear in *Frasier* (a spinoff of *Cheers* following the life of a psychiatrist when he returns to his hometown of Seattle) and *The Parkers*. Why is this so common? In part, they are probably depicted this way because for many the first critic to come to mind is the very iconic looking Gene Shalit. However, for many food critics, their inclusion is more than just referencing a famous critic.

Their inclusion is meant to associate ideas of the kinds of people who wear bowties to how people have traditionally/stereotypically thought about food critics. A writer with *The New York Times* may have said it best: the bowtie “suggests iconoclasm of an Old World sort, a fusty adherence to a contrarian point of view. The bow tie hints at intellectualism, real or feigned...But perhaps most of all, wearing a bow tie is a way of

broadcasting an aggressive lack of concern for what other people think” (St. John, 2005). St. John illustrates three points that are not only relevant to the stereotype of a bowtie wearer, but to the stereotype of a food critic as well: oppositional, intellectual, and self-interested.

This is clear even in a brief commercial featuring a fictional food critic. During a Tostitos commercial the audience is introduced to Miles Von Gaston, a “famous food critic.” He is oppositional because he shows up to a party he obviously was not invited to because he does not realize that it is a party, instead of a restaurant. He is also oppositional for wearing a suit and bowtie to a party where everyone else wears jeans and t-shirts. He is a perceived intellectual because of his attire in large part, including the bowtie, glasses, and moustache and because of his elevated manner of speaking. Finally, he is proven to be extremely self-interested because he does not speak to a single person and only announces his review to the room at large before leaving. This commercial shows many of the main stereotypes and tropes of a food critic and does so in a concentrated manner given the commercial only lasts 30 seconds. One of the only major stereotypes not addressed in this commercial is a food critic’s proclivity for anonymity.

### **Anonymity**

Although presently one of the most hotly debated guidelines in food criticism, as was explained in the history and ethics sections, the concept of anonymity certainly was not always perceived that way. For the vast majority of the life of the genre of food criticism, anonymity has been at its center, and that was certainly very clear through how often it was touched on in popular media throughout the years. In these texts, it manifests its presence through anonymity and even outright disguises.

Disguises have a clear prominence throughout the history of food criticism. From the earliest with Grimond de la Reynière, to the more modern Ruth Reichl, critics have worn disguises. However, it would seem that Reichl directly inspired disguises for critics following her prominence as the *New York Times* critic from 1993 until just before 2000. The reason is that before 1993, despite there being a number of depictions of food critics in popular media, disguised food critics were not depicted until the early 2000s with *Law and Order* (a police drama series following the Major Case Squad in New York City), *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (a children's comedy series about twins living in a hotel) as well as *Bob's Burgers* (an animated comedy about a family who run a burger joint). Both of those first texts, oddly enough, not only showcase disguised food critics, but the exact same disguise. In nearly identical fashion, each female critic disguises as a male and does so successfully. They are only revealed when the critic in the *Law and Order* episode is discovered dead with a false beard and glue residue on her chin. And in *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* the critic only reveals herself to be a critic when her voice changes from a man's to a woman's in the final line of the episode. The disguise depicted in the *Bob's Burgers* episode is a bit different. In that episode, multiple restaurateurs note that the critic has disguised himself as a number of different people: a construction worker, an ER doctor, and a park ranger. He uses a fourth disguise, a religiously devout Hassidic Jew, to review the protagonists' restaurant. Although disguise goes back to the earliest critics, that is not exactly common knowledge among most Americans. What is common knowledge, though, is Reichl's contribution to modern journalistic food criticism, and her affinity to disguise herself. I argue that this is the reason for the disguise to become a trope that is associated in modern times with food critics.

Simple anonymity however, was present before the 1990s. It has been a major and established part of all restaurant criticism for both Michelin and journalist-style food critics. So, it makes sense that many food critics would not go to ridiculous lengths to remain hidden, like wearing a disguise, but might not call attention to themselves as critics. Michelin critics, like in *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (a film about the feud between two restaurants across the street from each other and the talented young man who unites them) and *Burnt* (a film about a chef who left the restaurant scene to deal with substance abuse, but returns in an attempt to gain a third Michelin star), unlike journalist food critics are held to very specific standards of anonymity. That sense of the unknown is replicated in *The Hundred-Foot Journey* and *Burnt* in the sense that we as audience members, like the chefs who would be serving the critics, would not know or be able to identify the critics when they come.

For texts depicting journalist food critics, simple anonymity could be achieved in a similar way, simply leaving the food critics unidentified to the viewers like in episodes of *Charles in Charge* (a show about a college student who lives with a family and their children) and *Gilmore Girls* (a comedy drama that makes social comedy while following the lives of a single mother and her teenage daughter in small-town Connecticut). Anonymity could also be aided by posting reviews online without the critic's face associated in any way like in *Fresh Off the Boat* (a sitcom about an Asian-American family based on real life chef Eddie Huang) or *Good Guys*. Fake names were also sometimes used to conceal a critic's identity like in episodes of *Twin Peaks* (an eerie crime drama) and *Nash Bridges* (a police drama following two San Francisco investigators). While the Association of Food Journalists asserts that those who report on

food should write using their real names (“Ethics,” 2016) they also say food critics should aim to critique anonymously and use names other than the critic’s name for paying for food and for making reservations (“Food Critic Guidelines,” 2016). So while in practice food critics do use fake names, or the names of others, it is frowned upon to actually review or critique using names that are not their own.

However, that is not to say that all, or even the majority of the texts, depicted food critics as using anonymity during their food criticism. Texts that did not include this trope had a number of ways to avoid it. Many just did not address anonymity, perhaps for sake of clarity in labeling food critics. In other cases, characters would announce themselves as critics. That was the case in both *The Golden Palace* and in *My Best Friend’s Wedding* (a romantic comedy following lifelong friends with a pact to marry each other if they remain unwed by age 28). In the former, the critic boasts about himself, assuming every restaurant owner should know his name and face. The latter, the food critic and protagonist of the film, Julianne Potter gives the chef a heads up on what her column will have in store saying to the waiter, “I’m writing this up as inventive and confident.” It seems that critics calling attention to themselves and their job may be primarily a trick for fiction writers to clearly identify them to audiences and help establish the critics as arrogant characters, especially in television series. Another television example to help illustrate this point is *The Haunted Hathaways* (a sitcom about the interactions between a family who moves into a new home and the ghost family that haunt it) when the critic opens the door to the bakery and immediately proclaims: “Good afternoon, I’m Clay Bannister, food critic for the Taste of New Orleans. Yes, that Clay Bannister.” The assumption Bannister has is that like the critic in *The Golden Palace*, if you were a

restaurateur, then of course you would be familiar with him. This air of superiority immediately makes him, and any critic characterized in this way, unlikeable.

Others critics were prevented from being anonymous in their depictions because they had television shows. That was the case in *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Twilight Zone*, *Murder She Wrote* (an award-winning drama about a woman who is a crime writer and amateur detective), and *Mystic Pizza*. Each of these texts had food critics that each had their own fictional shows: *The Bottom Feeder*, *Glamorous Gourmet*, *Dining with Diane*, and *The Fireside Gourmet* were the titles for each respective texts' show. In these cases, it is obvious why they could not be anonymous critics. Being on television makes that nearly impossible; with their faces on screen and voices heard they would be able to be identified by any restaurant, so the premise of anonymity is forgone. But while anonymity is meant to protect the consumers, the readers of the critic's reviews, in some cases, it could have helped save the food critics themselves, as a common theme for food critics in fiction was that they are often in danger.

### **Violence Against Food Critics**

Everyone gets angry in life. Some scream, throw tantrums, and give the cold shoulder to those who have done the offending. Some may even get into the occasional physical fight. Even that is not atypical. However, when looking at instances of food critics depicted in popular culture, the proclivity for them to be the victims of terrible violence is oddly frequent. From kidnapping and food poisoning to paranormal possession and murder, in film, television, and other forms of media, food critics are shown to be in grave danger while working.

Food poisoning seems to be one of the more benign things that can happen to a critic on the job. This scenario was most common for television comedies. Used in comedies because in non-fatal incidents, as in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* episode, where poisoned burger patties caused the critic and other patrons to turn yellow and get splotches on their skin. And in fatal incidents, laugh tracks in the episodes suggest it is amusing to move around a dead body hoping no one will notice. In fact, that was the case for the earliest instance of a food critic in popular media.

*Alice* in 1976 had a food critic who came in to sample a diner's famous chili only to die mid-meal. The "food poisoning" was later determined to be because of a prior meal the critic had eaten. This was also the case in an episode of *The Golden Palace* (a spin-off series based on *The Golden Girls*) where the protagonists were moving the critic's corpse around for nearly the entire episode, dodging a health inspector, television journalists, and other customers. Variants of death by food poisoning were also present in *The Simpsons* (attempted murder by food poisoning), *Psyche* (a detective comedy where the lead solves crimes with the power of observation, but tricks others into thinking he is psychic and in one episode features a successful food poisoning murder of a critic by death-cap mushrooms), as well as *Kate and Allie* (a sitcom in which two divorcees with children share a home and in one episode a food critic death mistaken for food poisoning, but was an allergic reaction to a previous meal).

Despite often being portrayed as the bad guys, it is puzzling just how often food critics are taken hostage, bound and gagged with rope, tape, or whatever seems to be lying around. Instances of this trope can be found in: *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (a black comedy about a group of friends who run a pub), *Bob's Burgers*, *Chew* (a graphic

novel featuring an agent of the Food and Drug Administration who has the power to receive information psychically from food), and *Bitter Feast* (a film about a chef who loses his job after a bad review and goes on a murderous rampage to seek revenge against the food critic). Besides being poisoned or being taken hostage, food critics also suffered other rather miscellaneous but notable forms of assault whether verbal or physical that leads to negative consequences. Death threats happen, like a single instance in *Nash Bridges* or even enough threats to fill a binder for the food critic in *Psyche*. Sometimes of course, the violence imposed on critics reaches its ultimate end and they are killed. In several cases, their deaths are accidents or result from otherwise natural causes: unintentional food poisoning in *Alice*, a heart attack in *The Golden Palace*, and a food allergy in *Kate and Allie* all ended up being fatal incidents. Other times however, they are more sinister, and not accidental. An episode of *Law and Order* features a food critic being beaten and kicked to death. Meanwhile the film *Bitter Feast*'s food critic, after being tortured, poisoned, and deprived of food and water, was shot to death while trying to escape being kept hostage. Ultimately, these recurring violent circumstances happening to food critics seem to be happening increasingly often. What is not happening increasingly is the inclusion of female food critics to the degree men critics are depicted.

## Gender

Throughout the history of food criticism, it has been a male-dominated activity. It was male dominated when the practice was in its earliest iterations going back through time with Duncan Hines, the Michelin brothers, and Grimond de la Reynière. Its modern journalistic origins were with another man, Craig Claiborne of *The New York Times* in the late 1950s. Despite the over half century that has passed since then, however, it seems to continue to be perceived as a gentleman's club by both the journalists that practice the craft and those who are aware of food criticism in general. Former food critic Cara Strickland said, "One of my best assets as a critic was that I don't look like one. I'm small, youthful, and female" (2016). Judging by popular culture depictions going back to the earliest ones in the 1970s until now, she would be right.

When looking at the various depictions men are showcased much more than women. They are showcased in the overwhelming majority of texts observed: *Alice, All That* (a sketch comedy geared toward children and teenagers), *Bitter Feast*, *Bob's Burgers*, *Brothers and Sisters* (a television drama about a family living in Los Angeles), *Cheers* (a sitcom focused on the patrons of a bar called Cheers), *Chef* (a film about a defamed chef who goes on a cross-country journey with his son in a food truck), *Le Chef* (a French comedy who loses his passion for cooking, but finds it again with a young fan who comes to work with him), *Columbo* (a detective show where the audience knows who committed crime and the entertainment is in seeing how the mystery is solved), *Frasier*, *Fresh Off the Boat*, *Friends* (a award-winning sitcom following the lives of six Manhattan friends), *Full House* (a sitcom in which a widower raises his daughters with the aid of his brother-in-law and his friend), *Gilmore Girls*, *The Golden Palace*, *The*

*Good Guys* (a buddy cop series set in Dallas), *Haunted Hathaways*, *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, *Kate and Allie*, *Larry the Cable Guy: Health Inspector* (a comedy film where a health inspector duo unravel a string of food poisonings), *Mystic Pizza*, *Nash Bridges*, *The Parkers* (a spinoff of *Moesha* starring a mother and daughter attending college together), *The People That Touch Your Food* (a comedic internet series about the staff at a mid-tier restaurant), *Psyche*, *Ratatouille*, *A Recipe for a Perfect Christmas* (a made for television movie about a food critic who tries to set her mother up with a chef), *The Simpsons*, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Three's Company* (a comedy featuring two female and one male roommate and the way their lives intertwine), *The Twilight Zone*, and finally, even a Tostitos commercial. Running through all of these depictions was the idea that the men (with the exception of an outlier for comedic effect) at the very least are always, at minimum, middle-aged, and more often than not depicted as older men. Men appear as critics over 71 percent of the time (33 texts out of 46) compared to women who were shown to be food critics in around 30 percent of the texts (14 out of 46).

When the women food critics are showcased, often there is a different issue: they are only there to be the romantic interest of another character. This is the case in a number of films: *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Murder She Wrote*, *Master of None* (a comedy drama series about an actor in New York City), and even in *The Simpsons*. Being simply the romantic interest is not a new finding, as Saltzman notes that often the nicer critics are, “mired and mired in domestic comedy” (2005, p. 34). However, it is problematic, because there are not examples in the texts surveyed that have male critics relegated to a simple love interest.

Also, it is important to note that when women are showcased as food critics often they are still supplementary. In numerous cases, female food critics are shown working either in conjunction with male critics, or as competition. In *Le Chef, Recipe for a Perfect Christmas*, and *The Simpsons* each female critic is relegated to a couple of lines at most, while the male counterparts have noticeably more lines. For example, in *The Simpsons*, protagonist Homer Simpson takes over the local newspaper's food criticism section following the former female critic's retirement party. She only has two lines at her own party, the primary one revealing that annoying and persistent stereotype of the snobby arrogant food critic when she says, "What can I say except thanks for the predictable champagne, pizza that's hardly numero uno, and ice cream cake that reminds us why make 31 flavors when you can't get vanilla right?" However, following that scene, the former head critic is never seen again as the rest of the episode is about Homer, the new critic. In *Recipe for a Perfect Christmas* the original female food critic quits because she is about to have a baby, then is replaced by a male critic, only to be replaced by the original female critic's female assistant when he is fired for sexual harassment at the office Christmas party.

When they are competition, they are deemed lower, like being less skilled, or just generally less important than the male critics. This differentiation is seen in both *Ratatouille* and the *Twilight Zone*. In *Ratatouille*, this differentiation is subtle. The male, Anton Ego, is understood to be an antagonist for nearly the entire film. He's introduced before the protagonists. He looks villainous. He speaks down to other characters. But he is explicitly called "France's top food critic." Throughout the film, he appears in numerous scenes and is talked about even in scenes he is not present in. Ultimately, a full

review is read in full at the end of the film. All of that is the opposite for the female critic that actually reviews the restaurant before Ego does. Her name is Solene LeClaire and she only has one scene where she appears in the film and only one line of her review is read aloud. While we see her speak to a waiter, the audience does not hear her utter a word. Clearly the prominence and esteem is given to the male over the female, at least in *Ratatouille*.

That drastic difference in screen time and importance given in *Ratatouille* happens again in an episode of the *Twilight Zone* titled “The Misfortune Cookie.” But where *Ratatouille* may be subtly giving more importance to a man, *Twilight Zone* does it blatantly. The introduction shot introduces the audience to a male newspaper food critic who is watching the report of a broadcast journalism food critic. Again, as in *Ratatouille*, the majority of the screen time is with the male critic. She appears in only one scene, while he appears throughout the episode. Although he is shown as a mean, unethical man, she has less influence than he does, with his reviews allegedly closing a number of restaurants and her reviews containing much less critique. The male critic even says to her, despite the fact that she cannot hear him, “No one in the greater metropolitan area cares what you recommend.” Despite the fact that we as the audience are supposed to dislike his character, in part for comments like that, there does seem to be an underlying understanding that she is a less crucial critic than he is.

Even when women are shown to be competent critics, even when they are the exclusive food critic character in a text, often they are unethical or immoral in their relationships with others outside of work. Examples of this include: *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Master of None*, and *Murder She Wrote*. In the first, a female food critic is

actively trying to break up an engagement so that she can get engaged to the man instead, and in both of the latter texts the women critics are shown either attempting, or succeeding in having an extra-marital affair.

### **Race/Ethnicity**

Although there was no intention to go into depictions of race or ethnicity when this research began, after viewing all of the texts, the lack of diversity is one of the most glaring and obvious of the findings discovered. And the most alarming finding is at the intersection between pop culture depictions, gender, and race/ethnicity. In none of the 46 texts examined across various mediums is there even one instance of a female food critic of color depicted. Despite 14 texts that include at least one female food critic, every single one of the depicted women is white.

With that poor of a variety of depictions it should not be a surprise that only three texts viewed include a male food critic of color. Two texts, each television series, *The Good Guys* and *All That* showcase African-American critics in an episode each. The final text, another television series titled *Fresh Off the Boat*, features an episode that showcases an Asian-American food critic. Besides these three instances however, in all other cases of food critics depicted across film, television, commercials, and graphic novels, only white/Caucasian ones were shown to exist in the world. Even *The Parkers*, a show primarily about an African-American mother and daughter who attend college at the same time, features a predominantly African-American cast, yet the food critic character is a white male. The lack of representation is not the only issue with the depictions or lack thereof however. In the few select instances where someone of color is a food critic, the representation includes some problematic aspects.

The first problematic aspect would be the fact that two of the three of these texts are comedies. The fact that they are comedies does not make the texts inherently problematic, however, what does is that the race/ethnicity of the critics may be a punch line. How exactly do food critics become a joke because of the color of their skin? What makes something funny? According to the violation theory, something is funny when: A.) Something violates the way we think it should work. B.) It does so in a way that is non-threatening (McGraw, 2010). In each of the two cases of comedies, *All That* and *Fresh Off the Boat* this benign violation is achieved because the stereotype of a food critic is an old white male but that is not the type of food critic the audience is exposed to in either situation.

In *All That*, and specifically in a recurring “Good Burger” sketch, Sherman Hemsley, a black actor known for roles in *All in the Family* among others, played the food critic. A black man as a food critic does violate the stereotypical way things work, as in almost every other text examined the critic has been white. Not to mention, as other food critics have noted, the expectation of a critic is a white, older man (Strickland, 2016). *Fresh Off the Boat* subverts expectations even more dramatically. When the Huang family restaurant receives a poor review from an anonymous critic on the website Phil’s Phaves and invites him back for a second-chance review, they expected perhaps an older white male, maybe even one in a bowtie. However, when Phil introduces himself as the critic, they realize he is a small, adopted Asian child. That subversion of expectations is used for comedic effect.

As for that second part of benign violation theory, it is clear to see that television, film, graphic novels, all of popular culture, are a safe space in which to subvert

expectations. It means that the norms can be kept and that social commentary can be made. All of fiction is make believe, even if the fiction trying to be realistic, or even if it is based off of a real life event. Liberties are taken in the creative writing process. As the average expectation of a food critic is to be an older white male, this violation of expectation shown in a non-threatening way was intended to get laughs.

Clearly there was some amount of representation of food critics of color in popular culture. However, this is no different from recent studies of modern film and television; there is an enormous lack of equal representation of different races and ethnicities (Smith et al, 2016). But perhaps what is most egregious for food critics is the absence of any women critics of color at all. Although further research could be done to see exactly why this is the case, or perhaps if there is some text that was missed, it is most likely due to the stereotyped image of a food critic being an older white person in general. Those who are in African-American studies, similarly to the section concerning women's studies, must be interested in these findings, both the underrepresentation and also the problematic representations as well.

### **Journalistic Food Critic vs. Michelin Critic**

Both the work of a journalist food critic and a Michelin critic are at their core, the same thing, food criticism. They each can have an effect on the bottom line of a restaurant with a journalistic food critic having shown to have on average an 11% change at least for the first month following publication (Heiman, 1997). Michelin reviews have been documented to have a similar effect, if not more pronounced. Restaurants that are receiving their first Michelin star according to *The Chicago Tribune* can expect a 10-25% increase in business (Yue, 2010). Meanwhile, losing a star can cause sales to be cut in

half (Johnson, 2005). But despite being nearly identical in responsibility, Michelin critics and journalistic food critics are viewed starkly different in popular culture depictions. The difference is as stark as the differences between hot and cold, black and white, or water and fire. While it has been clear through this discussion that journalistic food critics have been overwhelmingly portrayed poorly, Michelin critics by contrast are viewed in incredibly high regard. As though they were sitting atop a pedestal, Michelin critics are discussed using fantastical and holy language.

Invoking what could be described as a modern legend, *Burnt* discuss Michelin food critics' ratings like the power of *Star Wars* heroes. To be a chef who received one star was likened to Luke Skywalker, two stars likened to Obi-Wan Kenobi, and three stars to Yoda. Keeping in mind that these three figures were all mystical swordsmen who had the power to move objects with their minds gives a sense of mystical and otherworldly power to those who determine the chefs that get these accolades. That sense of the mystical becomes religious when one of the restaurant workers tells the wait staff that the Michelin Guide is "the Bible."

*The Hundred-Foot Journey* too has several characters introduced to the idea of the Michelin guide and the three-star system it implements to rate restaurants. Like in *Burnt*, a character in *The Hundred-Foot Journey* called the yearly Michelin book the Bible, as well. The mystical quality of these metaphors is taken a step further when the main character calls the critics, "restaurant gods." These gods deem the value of the restaurants they review, and another character says that the stars they award are "holy" to the chefs that earn them. Like other gods though, the critics are not exclusively to be praised. The owner of a restaurant in the film calls them cruel. That cruelty, of course, comes from the

high expectations and large amount of power and influence they hold, which is not exclusive to the world of film and television.

In what was the only other mention of Michelin critics in the various texts, they are simply deemed to be more important than journalistic food critics. In *Bob's Burgers* after the main character, Bob Belcher, suffers a bad review from a food critic working for a local newspaper, his son Gene tries to console him saying, "As long as we get Michelin recommended we'll be fine!" Although Michelin critics are not held to quite the level of gods, the Bible, or even Jedi master, they are obviously here viewed simply as more important than journalistic food critics. Part of the reason that line is even used is for comedic effect. It is funny because Michelin rarely would bother to recommend, let alone review, a simple American burger joint.

The cause for this discrepancy between positive opinions of Michelin critics and journalistic food critics is unclear. One could argue that it comes from the respect of tradition. Michelin has simply been around longer than any other food criticism (i.e. journalistic food criticism) and has had more time to gain respect. Perhaps too, that because Michelin is not associated with journalism like other food critics are, it is not associated with the public and their sometimes negative views of journalism in general. This reverence and respect given to Michelin over journalistic food critics is something that could use more scholarly attention.

## **Change of Heart**

One final finding that is significant through the course of this study would be the tendency for food critics to change their ways over the course of a text. Saltzman reported this same thing for his categorization of critics and columnists saying, “by the end of the film, they usually redeem themselves a bit by acting human and doing the right thing” (Saltzman, 2005, p. 33-34). This change, while in theory, seems like a good thing, for food criticism itself however, it is not good at all. While this tends to make the critics much more likable in their respective films or episodes, it more often than not strips them of their roles as critics. Either these moments cause them to disassociate themselves from their honest (albeit often harsh reviews) or give up food criticism altogether. Both ultimately compromise what it means to be a food critic.

Often critics and their opinion are portrayed as very hard to change. Once they have made up their mind on something, only under rare circumstances does that change. Like for instance, when a critic is held hostage. It seems as though food critics although they may have staunch opinions on the places they may eat, are not willing to be martyrs for the things they may have wrote or said. When there is a risk of bodily harm, or their lives are seriously threatened like in *Bitter Feast* and *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* critics recant. This is a common enough trope that in another text, a critic jokes and says, “You know, you may have taped down my arms, but you’ve opened my eyes. I’ll never give a bad review again... In fact, I’m going to back and change all my bad reviews to glowing ones, and add smiley faces.” That was the words from a critic being held hostage in an episode of *Bob’s Burgers*. The only difference being that his change of heart is poking fun at the trope, and obviously disingenuous.

Outside of the occasional hostage critic scenario though, there are occasions when critics change their opinions. In *Ratatouille* and *Chef* their change of heart is tricky. Tricky in the sense that while it ultimately makes both Anton Ego and Ramsey Michel more likeable characters, but it costs them their jobs as food critics. In each film, both Ego and Michel originally offer harsh criticism. Ego's criticism dates back a few years, to when a Chef Gusteau was heading up the restaurant called Gusteau's. His original review was so dark the narrator mentioned it in connection with Gusteau the chef's death, saying the poor review basically led to it. But after hearing that Gusteau's is getting some newfound buzz with a new chef (unknown to the people, that new chef is a rat named Remy) Ego decides to review it again. After having a life-changing meal, he writes a glowing review and promptly loses his job and credibility as a critic when the health department shuts down Gusteau's after rats are discovered in the kitchen. After that though, he uses his own money to fund a new restaurant that Remy runs.

Ramsey Michel, the food critic in *Chef* has a very similar story. While he does not say that he was wrong for judging the chef Carl Casper harshly, he does completely change his mind after time has passed, and he eats some new food from him and his food truck. He declares it is amazing now that Casper is cooking the food he wants to, and not what the former restaurant owner was telling him to. Following that, Michel offers to financially back Casper's new restaurant (like Remy with Ego) and also sell off his criticism website. That effectively makes him a restaurant co-owner and effectively destroys his ability to objectively critique and review restaurants.

What these texts are arguably suggesting is that there is a perception that critics often do not fully take into account the consequences of their actions and reviews. In the

scenarios critics contemplate the impact their words will have, they realize that they were too harsh in their critiques or did not consider the chef and the circumstances surrounding them. However, perception and reality do not always align. The pair of surveys concerning food critics show that, in general, food critics “are reluctant to write negative reviews” (Burry, 1985, p. 403). Moreover, their top two ethical concerns are directly related to those restaurateurs and chefs they review. Those two concerns being: fairness and the concern that their reviews may damage other people’s lives and livelihoods (Schroeder, 1985). So, it would seem the perception that critics are too harsh, mean, unethical, or uncaring is not based in the reactions to real life food critics, but instead fictional depictions.

### **RQ2: Food Critics as Villains?**

Clearly, food critics have been portrayed a number of ways, but the most common is as white males who often view themselves as intellectually and culturally superior. They have a uniform of sorts with finer clothing like suits and bowties with even a preferred facial hairstyle. But are most food critics actually villains as Saltzman (2005) has suggested of critics in general? To determine that, it may be best to define villain first. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word villain as: “a deliberate scoundrel or criminal” or, “a character in a story who opposes a hero.” In terms of an occupational description, a food critic is in a way an opposite of a chef. Without something to discuss or critique, there is no critic so inherently they are a kind of yin to the creator’s yang. Since many of the texts focus on a chef as the protagonist, it would logically mean a food critic would be needed to have conflict and create a plot.

## **Antagonists**

In *Columbo* episode “Murder Under Glass” a food critic uses his expert food knowledge of the lethal poison liver of a Japanese blowfish to murder someone, an undeniably antagonistic action. While not all antagonists are this sinister, Saltzman’s conclusions pertaining to critic characters in general proves true when applied to food critic characters in particular whether depicted in television shows, movies, or other visual mediums. This section will cover food critics as antagonists, flawed protagonists, and bit parts. Even when not portrayed as an overtly antagonistic character, the food critics portrayed are difficult to classify as objectively good people.

Antagonists are similar to villains, but the two are not quite interchangeable words. Looking again to Merriam-Webster, an antagonist is defined as “one who contends with or opposes another.” With villain, there is an inherent negative connotation. However, with an antagonist, they may be a bad person, but the definition is not as specific or nuanced. In the context of this study, food critics were most commonly depicted as antagonists far more than protagonists or as smaller bit parts, and the examples are numerous.

*Ratatouille* is the story of a rat who dreams to be a chef. He finds a place working with a human in a restaurant kitchen, but constantly must hide what he does from both the head chef and his family. His life is further complicated by Anton Ego, a food critic, whose previous review was said to have led to the death of the previous chef perhaps giving Ego his nickname: the Grim Eater. He still has redeeming qualities and tries to be honorable with his craft. Meanwhile, there is another character that has no redeeming qualities and holds only mal intent for the protagonists. Saltzman wrote that critics are

one of the most popular villains in movies that feature journalists. Despite potentially having killed someone and despite his nickname, Ego is not a villain: merely an antagonist. This is why it is important to use specific, accurate language when categorizing characters. If food critics are referred to as villains, people may be more likely to view them as such whether they are or not.

Unlike other antagonist food critics, who may be depicted as any other character, a separation is made with the food critic Anton Ego in *Ratatouille*. From his name to his dress to his office, audience members are encouraged to dislike and be fearful of him. The name Ego obviously plays with the now familiar trope of food critics who have very high opinions of themselves. As an animation, his attire and entire character design should also be paid attention to. Every aspect of his appearance had to be crafted thoughtfully and purposefully. Specifically, it invokes one of the most infamous film villains: the vampire Nosferatu. The two share long, slender, pointed fingers; bulging eyes deep set in dark circles; large ears; sunken cheeks; and dark, tightly buttoned jackets with prominent structured shoulders. Nosferatu is also invoked through a number of other visual cues associated with Ego, namely his office in the shape of a coffin, which Nosferatu sleeps in. Ego's typewriter is made to look like a skull, an image of death, which represents his ability to end restaurants with his biting words much like Nosferatu is able to end people with his literal bite. Finally, Ego is only shown drinking red wine, much like the blood that sustains Nosferatu. All of these connections are drawn between Ego and Nosferatu not just to solidify Ego as an obvious villain, but also as a conscious choice by the storytellers to link food criticism with vampirism: being sustained by the

lifeblood of others to bring power to oneself. Ego is not the only critic with an ego, however.

*Chef* is a film that centers on Carl Casper, a head chef at a successful restaurant. His life starts to unravel when the restaurant owner bans him from having full creative control over the menu, which was something he had originally been promised in his contract. When Ramsey Michel, a food critic, comes in and gives him a poor review of his outdated food, Casper starts a Twitter war with him. This leads to Michel coming in for a second review, but the restaurant owner still refuses to allow Casper control over the menu, so he walks out and a different chef prepares the original meal Michel had had before. Casper returns to cook Michel a new dish, but he ends up shouting at him instead. When a video of the incident goes viral, Casper loses his job and goes on a cross-country journey in a food truck with his son.

In contrast to Anton Ego, Ramsey Michel is not painted as an obviously bad character. Where Ego is spooky, mysterious, and larger than life, Michel is really just an ordinary guy doing his job. He is certainly snarky as evidenced by his response tweet to Casper, which reads, “@ChefCarlCasper I would rather have you sit on my face after a brisk walk on a warm day, then suffer through that fucking lava cake again.” However, as he reveals later in the film, this was a calculated move to draw interest to both his reviews and Casper’s restaurant. Although Michel is an antagonist, his review allows Casper to go on his journey. Moreover, Michel was trying to hold those in power accountable as he thought Casper did have the creative control over the food even though that did not end up being the case.

There are a number of critics that act in the way that Michel and Ego work: by driving the plot without being evil. They act an opposing force to the protagonists to create certain circumstances for growth and for a story to be told because what is a story if not conflict followed by some kind of resolution? Through my research, I found that nearly every time there was an antagonist food critic that they were snobby, unpleasant, arrogant, chauvinistic, but not actually evil; except in one major instance. That instance is the one first introduced in this section: an episode of *Columbo* featuring a murderous food critic dating back to the 1970s. While most food critics portrayed are not evil, they are still not sinless angels with most falling into an ethically ambiguous area.

Even when food critics are the protagonists in stories that center on them, they are shown to be flawed people. These protagonists are central characters who audiences are intended to relate to. Were it not for some antagonizing force, their lives would go on as usual. However, just because these food critics are protagonists does not mean they are truly good people. In an episode of *The Twilight Zone* aptly titled, “The Misfortune Cookie,” the audience follows a food critic who revels in the matchbox graveyard commemorating restaurants he has forced to close with his reviews. He writes a review of a Chinese restaurant without ever eating there with the intention to close it. At this point, he is shown to be incredibly unethical, but still is just living his life as a terrible person. Upon actually visiting the restaurant, it becomes clear the place itself is the antagonist, not the critic. He receives cryptic fortune cookies that end in accurately prophesizing his untimely death. Were it not for these fortunes, he would have led a somewhat fulfilled life as a flawed protagonist. Even still, he easily showcases negative, unethical behavior

in his reviews as well as his motivation for them. This leads to another unethical food critic with a sweet tooth.

Homer Simpson of *The Simpsons* is ordinarily known as factory worker in a nuclear plant. But, in one episode, he temporarily becomes a food critic for the local newspaper. Initially he speaks well of all the dishes, but the other critics inform him he needs to be more critical. He responds by writing negative reviews of everything with no regard of good or bad qualities. This points to the stereotype of the critic as hypercritical and out to get restaurateurs no matter what. He is not considered a real critic when he writes how he actually feels and is only accepted by his contemporaries when he is indiscriminately negative in his reviews. Throughout the show, Homer proves to be a flawed protagonist time and again, but in this instance specifically he shows this by trying to please others and do the perceived right thing instead of the ethically right thing despite how accepted it is by his peers. Exposure in this classic staple series suggests real viewership was widespread and these stereotypes were seen and not questioned by many. When a good guy does a bad thing it sparks conversion and leads viewers to question their own ethics and ideals. Unlike *Simpson's* star, Homer, not all critics have leading roles.

Bit parts were actually the second most common kind of depiction of a food critic behind them being shown as antagonists. In this role, food critics served other main characters to basically just be a plot device to move the story along. In murder mysteries like *Psyche* and *Law and Order* food critics died and those specific episodes focused on main characters trying to find out who did it and why. Another murder mystery show,

*Mysteries of Laura* (a comedy drama series about a New York homicide detective), featured a food critic as a lead that led to the capture of the actual killer.

The most prominent kind of bit part however, was the food critic as a love interest. That trope appeared in *Master of None*, *Love's Kitchen* (a romantic comedy about a widower chef who opens a pub and falls in love with a food critic), and *Chew*. In the television episode, film, and graphic novel respectively, each story featured a male protagonist who saw the female food critic as primarily a romantic interest. Just because these critics did not have significant screen time does not mean their depiction did not make a large impact. In *Recipe for a Perfect Christmas* food critic Malcolm Bristol made the most of his short time on screen. He has a reputation for being an alcoholic hit on the editor's wife during a party announcing his very position as food critic for the magazine. He was promptly and understandably fired after this incident, but made a stark impression nevertheless. In *Murder She Wrote* a female food critic is shown on her show, *Dining with Diane* completing a segment about a new restaurant, but primarily stands out for cheating on her husband and supporting the grander plot at large. In these instances, the food critics are critics really only in name and not in action. Their work as a critic matters less in these fictional worlds than the how they can move the plot along. Because bit characters have so little screen time devoted to them, creators are forced to cling to stereotypes and clichés of the food critic to get the audience to understand the character in a minimal amount of time. This solidifies these expectations and minimizes the real world impact a food critic truly has. In these instances, the stereotypes conjure negative viewpoints on this neutral position, yet this is what writers rely on to show food critics in the most succinct way possible regardless of the truth of the matter.

Through this section, it should be abundantly clear that Saltzman's (2005) conclusion about critics being portrayed as villains also very often applies to food critics. I would argue that is more helpful to note that food critics are antagonists first and villains second. With the prevalence of television shows, films, and other texts that feature chefs as protagonists it is only natural that when food critics appear they are in opposition to them. Although many are mean, snobby, or rude there are very few who truly would fit the description of evil.

### **RQ2a: Ethics and Unethical Behaviors**

A critic offers a good review for sexual gratification another threatens to close a restaurant down for more food, another still uses his position as a critic to curry favor with women. These are just some scenarios showing the inherently problematic ethics with a number of food critic depictions across different mediums. This spans across violations of journalistic ethical norms, relationship norms, and norms of good will. These unethical practices could potentially have real world problems concerning perceptions of real world food critics. So, looking closer at what is ethically wrong in these scenarios and showing trends in them helps to separate character stereotypes from legitimate character flaws. Stereotypes and trends are more likely to sway popular opinion than one-off instances, which would be associated primarily with a singular character.

Food critics are journalists, and journalists generally aim for a high ethical standard that help to secure trust from an audience. That is why it may be surprising that not only do individual food critic characters act irresponsible and unethically journalistically but it is a noticeable trend. That trend takes several forms however.

One of the core tenants of the food critic guidelines from the Association of Food Journalists is to give a truthful experience of a restaurant. In one of the only instances of a protagonist food critic character, that truthfulness is lost when in *Twilight Zone* Harry Folger pens a bad review for a restaurant with the intention of closing it before he ever even eats there. It is not that this established ethical guideline is lost on him, though. His coworker immediately tells him what he is doing is wrong, but Folger doesn't care. In response he says, "Dear boy, in the arena of restaurant criticism there's only excellent and poor. There's no such thing as fair." Folger is using a double meaning here. While his coworker is calling him unjust, Folger twists that with his own response that references the ranking system from poor to excellent and that a food critic is not obligated to write middling reviews as the readership is only interested to know if an establishment is fantastic or horrendous.

Of course, not all ethical infractions are so drastic, but it is alarming that they are so common. There are multiple instances of food critics not actually paying for meals they were offered like in *The Simpsons* and an online series called *The People That Touch Your Food* or in *Recipe For a Perfect Christmas*. The food critic in the latter is sent a number of gift baskets and trinkets, chocolates, wines and snacks and she obviously accepts them because they are littered around her office space. Another instance of a critic readily accepting gifts appears in graphic novel *Chew* "International Flavor." The norm of what a critic should do when offered a gift of any of the natures is not to accept it in the first place or to try to return it. If these actions fail then the critic should not partake in the gifts and should instead share with someone with no stake in the review such as a coworker, neighbor, or donation to a charitable cause. While more major

ethical dilemmas highlight the audience's fears concerning truthfulness and honesty, more minor ones like this reveal anxieties about a food critics' ability to remain autonomous and respectful.

Sometimes, though, journalistic ethics violations cross into relationship ethics violations as well. Some may seem more minor. In *Burnt*, for example, we realize that a food critic seemed to have a romantic relationship with a chef that she may or may not have reviewed. If she did not review him at any point then it would not be as bad, although it would still be a conflict of interest since other restaurants she reviewed would be his competition and it calls into question her autonomy. However, when that same chef asks her to review a restaurant he is currently working at and she agrees to do so this reveals audience fears are warranted. This is incredibly unethical because she would be inclined to write in favor of him regardless as to how he cooked since they are at least friends and potentially even lovers. This creates an environment where other chefs she would review would unknowingly be at a disadvantage for their reviews.

A very similar situation happens in *Recipe For a Perfect Christmas* where a *quid pro quo* scenario emerges. The newly hired food critic has a list of restaurants that her editor wants her to review, many of which were determined by the food critic's predecessor before she left for maternity leave. However, when the chef of a financially failing restaurant approaches her and asks for help in the form of a good review and some attention, she uses that opportunity to help herself instead. She knows that her mother has been single for quite a while and the chef is handsome. So, she decides to make a deal with chef where if he takes her mom out on a date she will find time to review his restaurant. Although it doesn't work out with the chef and the critic's mom, she still

reviews his restaurant and the two end up together by the conclusion. So clearly these are journalistic ethics issues. However, food critic ethical dilemmas delve beyond the professional.

Even when journalistic ethical lines remained intact, food critics in fiction often proved to be ethically flawed in romantic relationships. Although that does not speak to the quality of their journalism, it does speak to their character. With how often this theme of the food critic as an unreliable person in their personal lives recurred, it could have negative affects for real-world food critics and their reputations as ethical people in their professional lives. This is not the only issue that impacts female food critics.

Female food critics tend to be hyper sexualized. In many cases their love lives are emphasized more than their careers. For example, in an episode of *Master of None* and the film *My Best Friend's Wedding*, in the narrative arcs, all that is important to the women are their love lives and their experiences as food critics are said by each respective woman in a few sentences at most. In an episode of *Drop Dead Diva* (a comedy drama where a model dies and comes back in the body of an overweight attorney), a food critic visits a restaurant to review it while going on a date at the same time. Her focus is primarily on her date, which does not go well, and because of this, she gives the restaurant a poor review. In an episode of *Brothers and Sisters* another food critic decides to multitask by going to a restaurant on a date with the intention to review it simultaneously. This is the only example of a male food critic who cares more about his love life than his work life, but it is both interesting and problematic because this critic is gay. The creators were using a stereotype of the feminine to characterize a homosexual male who are frequently stereotyped as effeminate.

This is not just a problem with depictions of the feminine; however, masculine male food critics also have a tendency to want to mix business with pleasure. In *Recipe For a Perfect Christmas*, food critic Malcolm Bristol has a reputation for being a womanizer. During the Christmas party that is supposed to be his introduction to the company, he heavily flirts with, makes sexual advances toward, and is sexually forward enough off camera to warrant a slap. Over the course of one evening, using double entendres with food, he tries his luck with at least four women before the magazine's owner fires him after attempting to make a pass at the owner's wife. It certainly doesn't help the depiction of food critics in general when he is also revealed to be an alcoholic. Male food critics also are too sexually forward to the point of making women uncomfortable in episodes of *Three's Company* and *Cheers* as well.

In *Three's Company*, the protagonist sees a review from a food critic and believes he can prepare a better experience than what he has been writing about, so he goes to the critic's office and convinces him to come to dinner. The protagonist lives with two female roommates and intends for them not to be present for the dinner. However when the food critic sees the women, he implies he would be disappointed if they did not stay for the meal. So, for the rest of the evening, the critic pays little attention to the food, instead focusing on drinking and making obvious and unwanted sexual passes at both women. Obviously, this makes the women very uncomfortable. In the end, the critic writes a good review, but misspells the chef's name, confirming the stereotypes of the food critic who feels he is more important than others, yet allows personal interests to impede his work.

*Cheers*' episode highlighting a food critic functions in a very similar way. In the episode, "Airport V," the critic has returned to a bar that he had previously reviewed negatively. But, when he arrives, he sees a new female bartender. Obviously smitten with her, he offers up a deal: if she will go out with him, he will give the bar a good review. This makes her very uncomfortable, much like the women in *Three's Company*, and highlights an unbalanced and sexually heightened power dynamic in an undeniably negative fashion. She ends up going on an unpleasant date with him and he writes a good review as promised, however, the entire situation is tainted by his unethical behavior.

Journalistic ethics and relationship ethics are not the only kind of ethics one has to keep in mind when looking at the depictions of food critics in popular visual media. It seems that even the fundamental rule, the golden rule, do unto others as you would do unto yourself is not sacred with many food critics. As shown previously, the food critic in *Columbo* was willing to kill to advance his career and finances; however, that is particularly atypical for a food critic to be so extreme. The only other instances of food critics putting others in harm's way in *Chew* and in an episode of *Nash Bridges* were much more subdued. In *Nash Bridges* the food critic character received a death threat and after hiring an investigator to discover who was threatening his life, he told a competing paper that the investigator was actually the food critic instead of himself without telling the investigator. The article falsely unveiling the food critic also included a photo of the investigator, so the food critic intentionally put the investigator in danger without even giving him the courtesy of informing him of this action.

The final instance focuses on a food critic who is bored and has lost interest in her job. The graphic novel series *Chew*, takes place in an alternate history where bird flu

spread across the nation. As a result, all chicken was banned, severely limiting people's diets and creating a black market serving consumers' desire for chicken and other poultry. As graphic novels often do, this fictional universe also features people with super powers; the twist here being that they are all food related. The food critic named Amelia Mintz is a saboscrivner, which according to the graphic novel itself means she: "can write about food so accurately that people get the sensation of taste when they read about the food she writes about." Her ethical failing is that her boredom causes her to go to extremely questionable restaurants and eat tainted, disgusting food for a rush. When she writes out her stories, however, this causes anyone who reads them to become violently ill. Obviously, at that point of her life, she is not a very respectable or considerate food critic.

Overall it is fair to say that when it comes to depictions in popular visual media, it really does not matter which medium, food critics tend to be prone to unethical behavior. Whether that behavior is the violation of journalistic norms, relationship norms, or otherwise, there are few times where they are shining examples of how journalism or food criticism, specifically, should be executed. While certainly being depicted in a negative light, it did not really seem to matter if they were antagonists, protagonists, or bit parts, they all were prone to ethical failures. While not villainous or evil, these depictions as a collective could prove to tarnish the perception of real world food critics.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The role of critics is to be an expert in their chosen field of interest. They are contextualizers, bridging the gap between the new or popular and the historical. Their knowledge of their respective fields helps them push those they critique, helping those creators to grow and become better at their craft. The critics also serve to better inform audiences on what truly is the best and worthy of their attention, time, or money, whether that be films, books, television, theatre, music, fashion, or, of course, food. Food criticism – and criticism in general – has long been an under-researched area of journalism studies. The goal of this study was to address this absence. Examining how food critics are represented in popular culture media helps shed light onto the perceptions of attitudes, ethics, and make-up of who exactly can be a food critic in the first place. By looking into over forty depictions of food critics across several distinct mediums, film, television, graphic novels, Internet videos, as well as commercials, this purpose certainly was met. Moreover, it was met in a varied way, with texts that had significant differences in narrative storytelling from drama to comedy and everything in between.

### **Major Findings**

Throughout this study, various patterns emerged that were present across the types of mediums. Food critics who are minorities were scarce. Although women were not drastically underrepresented, their portrayals were problematic. A trope emerged where food critics were given a way to become what the chefs considered to be reasonable people. In order to not be overly harsh, the critics had to give up their job and, instead, fund good cooking themselves. Another unique trope was violence against

critics; whether they were taken hostage, poisoned, or killed outright, it appeared again and again. Food critics were shown to have questionable ethics across the board.

Compared to other types of critics such as theatre, art, film, or music, only food critics have the tradition of anonymity being so integral to how they create their identities and practice their craft. In fact, anonymity was the reason why this study was warranted in the first place. Originally, Saltzman was too general with the way he categorized critics. These findings prove that food critics have their own traits that are worthy of further study and their own classifications.

While this study has produced a number of intricate and varied findings about the various depictions of food critics across popular visual media, there are a few standout takeaways that warrant further scholarship over others. Those takeaways being: food critic depictions being overtly and consistently negative, lack of ethics, which is problematic for journalism in general, and the unique findings specific to food critics: the increased violence against them and their penchant for disguises. With these unique findings concerning food critics the question remains, why are they portrayed so negatively? It could be because there is a rising tendency against intellectualism. It could be that food critics are disliked because of their association with the upper class or perhaps audiences do not like feeling talked down to or as though they do not know everything. However, there is no singular answer and any of these could be the reason why negative depictions and stereotypes of food critics persist.

## **Theoretical Implications**

This adds to the greater body of knowledge by filling a number of holes that were left by previous scholarship. Prior scholars that have looked into depictions of journalists painted their research with broad brushstrokes that characterized not only all critics as basically the same in their depictions in popular culture, but also grouped in critics with columnists. Part of the whole inspiration for this specific study was to not be so general, but instead to learn specifically about the depiction of food critics and criticism as its own separate subsection of journalism studies to research. This also adds to the collective knowledge because it is filling in gaps that relate to the depictions of journalists outside of only film. This study at its core certainly wanted to include film, but went out of its way to broaden that horizon by looking at as many visual mediums as possible including graphic novels, internet videos, television series, and television commercials.

Although the intent of this was not to look at the lack of depictions of women or racial/ethnic minorities, because of the texts' visual nature it became something too apparent to ignore. Despite the lack of representation not being a new phenomenon, it does confirm other scholarship that has looked into this topic, as well.

This study did find a number of new and innovative conclusions regarding food critics and their depictions in visual popular media. These new findings show them as being a unique subsection of journalism, despite originally being grouped together with other critics and columnists by certain scholars. They are different because of specific themes that are associated with them that cannot be associated with other types of critics such as a theatre critic. These themes include the proclivity for anonymity or disguises, their tendency to be taken hostage or tortured, or others. While Saltzman (2005) has

claimed that critics tend to be villains in stories that feature journalism, this research asserts that they are far more likely to be antagonists than villainous characters, although with questionable ethics. In both the real world and fiction, if we look at chefs as heroes in their own stories, then there is no one better suited to challenge them with a knowledge of their craft and an opinion that holds weight with others than a food critic. Without the food critic the chef could have the tendency to remain static. What may be most interesting is that these themes and their tendency to be antagonists stretches across different visual media because the same themes and tropes are appearing again and again in film, television, graphic novels, commercials, and more.

The key implication posed by this study is that food critics, for a large number of reasons, are most often depicted in a negative light. Food critics have been shown to be snobby, unethical, or outright evil, and they are almost always portrayed somewhere on the negative spectrum as characters. Journalists in general should be taking note about these overtly negative, problematic portrayals because it perpetuates public opinion that journalists are bad people, that food critics (and journalists by extension) are unethical, selfish, and untrustworthy. All of these can lead the public to question journalism in general. More specifically though, at a time when there has been a noticeable decrease in actual food critic positions at news outlets of all kinds (magazine, newspaper, television, radio, etc.) these depictions could give further reasons to get rid of real-world positions.

## **Practical Implications**

There are a number of implications that this study can have for food critics in the work force. For food critics, critics, and journalists in general it should be worrisome that the overwhelming and lasting depiction of critics is that they are unethical, or in this career for themselves. With ever-lessening funds in journalism, as a general thought that makes food critics expendable. That perception may be what is causing the career to be disappearing. In the journalism community it is common knowledge that food criticism is disappearing, whether through individuals being fired, retiring, or entire food-focused outlets like *Gourmet* ceasing to exist, there are simply fewer food critics out doing work.

In addition to the dwindling number of critics in existence, the few that are out there may just be proving the fears exhibited in the worst popular media depictions, namely, unethical behavior. In just this last year, three critics were fired from their posts for fabrication and plagiarism. In Australia, *The Sunday Times* let go Chole James and Kelley Ramsay when they admitted to basing the review off of a meal James had eaten months earlier that she had not even paid for. The pair also had made up an interchange they had written was said by James as they left the establishment (Rainey, 2016). Elliot Shaffner was proven to be plagiarizing Jonathan Gold for years for both the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* as well as *Style Weekly* in a number of articles (Mullin, 2016). With these incidents acting as confirmations for food critic's already poor general reputation, it may prove to have a negative effect on other food critic jobs being opened up or continued. Despite a few of these incidents occurring recently, an entire class of journalists cannot be judged on the actions of a small number of individuals. Undoubtedly the vast majority

of food critics out in the world are doing their jobs ethically, but are just not getting media coverage for doing their jobs as they should be.

### **Limitations**

There were, of course, limitations to this study. With a finite time to conduct research, texts that included food critics in films, television series, commercials, or graphic novels, some texts were likely missed. There was a finite scope in mind as well. Only visual media were included in this study so certain popular culture texts, namely books or radio stories that could have had supporting or contrary information were not analyzed. Further, because of the finite scope, this study exclusively looked at fictional depictions of food critics, excluding texts like documentaries and other kinds of non-fiction. Perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, the research design could have been a bit more limited in scope. Although I stand behind the idea of trying to see if themes of food critic depictions were the same across various mediums, only being able to find one graphic novel and one commercial to depict a food critic meant that those findings were a much more limited compared to the dozens of television series and dozens of films that were included.

## **Future Research**

A number of different directions could be taken for future research that would relate to this thesis, namely, further studies that delve more into the arena of food criticism. Meanwhile, other research could be done that continues on the path of illuminating depictions of journalists and specifically critics in popular culture. Both could yield valuable practical and theoretical information like this study has aimed to do.

When it comes to food criticism and research concerning it in general, any research in the area would be useful considering the substantial dearth. Despite substantial attempts at finding research concerning food critics and their role as journalists, only a few articles in journalism, tourism studies, and hospitality studies even touched on the duty, relevance, prominence, or worth of food critics. With this study's findings in mind, future research could look to see if these depictions of food critics are accurate. Do food critics tend to be more unethical than journalists in general? Are food critics too harsh, mean, or unfair with their reviews? Do they tend to be older white males in the real world as has been the case with fictional depictions? Although there is research to suggest that there is a more even split of food critic genders and that they are reluctant to write negative reviews, this most recent journalism study was from three decades ago (Burry, 1987). It should be patently obvious that much has changed in the world of food and journalism in that time and this area of journalism needs some new attention. Perhaps this could be something even as simple as to look into the difference in amount of staff food critics versus freelance ones.

In a related line of questioning, researchers could look into completing audience reception studies to see how these negative stereotypes, so often seen in fiction, apply to

the opinions of real life people. Those studies could look to interview the general public to see if they agree with stereotypes of food critics being vile and unethical people or if the stereotypes they see in popular fiction do not bleed into their opinions of real life food critics. Another interesting audience reception study would be to interview working food critics to see their opinion on the state of food criticism being depicted in popular fiction.

In the realm of popular culture depictions of journalists it still remains to be seen if Saltzman's findings about general journalistic critics stand up when looking at the various kinds of other critics including: film critics, theatre critics, art critics, music critics, or any other kind of more specific critic. If one were curious about testing the various findings and conclusions that are established with this paper concerning critics depictions in general there are certainly ways to do that outside of the parameters of this study. If one had a passion for film or theatre, film or theatre critics can be found to be analyzed in a number of fictional films and television series including: *All About Eve* (1950), *The Critic* (1994), *Lady in the Water* (2006), *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), *Birdman* (2014), *The Film Critic* (2015).

Since nonvisual media was not included in the study, that could be an area to expound on, discovering if food critics were depicted similarly in novels, radio stories, podcasts, and other pop culture media. For example, the novel series identified as the "Key West Food Critic Mystery" by Lucy Burdette has seven books published and all focus in on a food critic as main character. Another novel, "Food Whore" by Jessica Tom, focuses too on a food critic as the central character. Neither was included in this study.

In the same way, since this study focused on fictional depictions of popular culture journalists, a future study could do the inverse, studying documentary and other non-fiction depictions of food critics to see if similar findings were discovered. One such documentary would be *City of Gold* (2015) where the Pulitzer-prize winning food critic Jonathan Gold talks about his life as a food critic and food criticism at length. If one had an interest in non-fiction written to analyze, Ruth Reichl's autobiography "Garlic and Sapphires" focuses on her life as a food critic. Both of these, and many more texts would be excellent for further analysis.

### **Conclusion**

At the beginning of this thesis we opened on a scene of a disguised food critic with her pen and pad of paper just sitting down to dinner. Like a spy, she was on a mission to uncover some hidden truth. But while the fruits of a spy's labor might only be known to a few, anyone that reads a food critic's words will be enlightened to their experience. Yet, despite this journalistic concern for the public's enjoyment and pleasure of life, a stereotype of a white, arrogant, self-interested, and unethical male food critic has emerged. But at its core, journalism in an altruistic pursuit, and the dissemination of knowledge, even if it may seem trivial, is good. So at its best, so too is food criticism. Food criticism can contextualize and negotiate races, ethnicities, genders, and entire cultures. Who better to help in understanding that complex buffet of information other than an expert who has written about and deeply analyzed hundreds if not thousands of different dishes?

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## Appendix

1. *Alice* – “The Last Review” (1976)
2. *Columbo* – “Murder Under Glass” (1978)
3. *Three’s Company* – “Critic’s Choice” (1982)
4. *Mystic Pizza* (1988)
5. *Charles in Charge* – “Five Easy Pizzas” (1988)
6. *Cheers* – “Airport V” (1988)
7. *Kate and Allie* – “The Review” (1989)
8. *Twilight Zone* – “The Misfortune Cookie” (1989)
9. *Twin Peaks* – “Laura’s Secret Diary” (1990)
10. *Full House* – “Another Opening, Another No Show” (1993)
11. *Golden Palace* – “You’ve Lost that Livin’ Feeling” (1993)
12. *Murder She Wrote* – “Proof in the Pudding” (1994)
13. *Frasier* – “Frasier Crane’s Day Off” (1994)
14. *All That* – Good Burger skit, season 3 episode 14 (1997)
15. *My Best Friend’s Wedding* (1997)
16. *The Simpsons* – “Guess Who’s Coming to Criticize Dinner?” (1999)
17. *Gilmore Girls* – “The Deer Hunters” (2000)
18. *Nash Bridges* – “Heist” (2000)
19. *The Parkers* – “Food Fiasco” (2002)
20. *Friends* – “The One with the Cooking Class” (2002)
21. *Law and Order: Criminal Intent* – “Death Roe” (2005)
22. *Recipe for a Perfect Christmas* (2005)
23. *Larry the Cable Guy: Health Inspector* (2006)
24. *The Suite Life of Zach and Cody* – “Heck’s Kitchen” (2006)
25. *Ratatouille* (2007)
26. *Psyche* – “Meat is Murder, but Murder is also Murder” (2007)
27. *Spongebob SquarePants* – “The Krusty Sponge” (2007)
28. *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* – “Paddy’s Pub: Worst Bar in Philadelphia” (2008)
29. *Chew* Volumes 1-3 “Taster’s Choice,” “International Flavor,” and “Just Desserts” --- (2009)
30. *Bitter Feast* (2010)
31. *The Good Guys* – “Common Enemies” (2010)
32. *Drop Dead Diva* – “Begin Again” (2010)
33. *Love’s Kitchen* (2011)
34. *The People that Touch Your Food* – “The Food Critic” on FunnyOrDie.com (2011)
35. *Le Chef* (2012)
36. *Bob’s Burgers* – “Moody Foodie” (2012)
37. *Haunted Hathaways* – “Pilot” (2013)
38. *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014)
39. *Chef* (2014)
40. *Master of None* – “The Other Man” (2015)
41. *Burnt* (2015)

42. *Brothers and Sisters* – “The One that Got Away” (2015)
43. *The Mysteries of Laura* – “The Mystery of the Frozen Foodie” (2015)
44. *Fresh Off the Boat* – “Phil’s Phaves” (2016)
45. Tostitos commercial – “Critic” (2016)
46. *BoJack Horseman* – “Best Thing that Ever Happened” (2016)