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MASCULINITIES ON A SPIT: TRAVELS WITH A COMPETITION BARBECUE TEAM

MASCULINIDADES À VOLTA DO ESPETO: VIAGENS COM UMA EQUIPA DE CHURRASCO DE COMPETIÇÃO

Jonathan Deutsch

Resumo: O conceito de Hauck-Lawson a propósito do papel da comida defende que, os comportamentos alimentares podem ser fortes testemunhos identitários. Através de um qualitativo trabalho de campo com uma equipa de churrasco em competição, aprendi que as suas interpretações gustativas pareciam assemelhar-se muito pouco aos seus comportamentos quando comparados às experiências alimentares; uma duvidosa retórica alimentar no mundo hiper-masculino do churrasco de competição.

Depois de uma descrição e explicitação do mundo do churrasco competitivo e uma introdução às principais temáticas do trabalho de campo, o debate situa-se em redor dos estudos sobre os hábitos e percursos alimentares como ferramentas analíticas.

Palavras-Chave: churrasco, interpretação alimentar, comida e masculinidade

Abstract: Hauck-Lawson's concept of food voice argues that food behaviors can make powerful statements about identity. Through qualitative fieldwork with a competition barbecue team, I learned their food voice seemed to have little resemblance to their spoken voice as it related to their experiences with food, a food voice rhetoric of uncertainly amidst the hyper-masculine world of competition barbecue. After a description and explanation of the world of competition barbecue and introduction of major themes from the fieldwork, an argument is made for foodways study and "food voice" as an analytical tool.

Keywords: barbecue, food voice, food and masculinity

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INTRODUCTION

> "…Feeding others is women's work. Women collect, prepare, and serve our daily bread. So doing, they care for us. The acts of feeding and caring, as connected to each other as earth to water, maintain and sustain the family."
>
> Catharine R. Stimpson (in DeVault, 1991, viii)

The quotation from Stimpson above solidifies much of our thinking on women, food and family. Women, for centuries, have been the primary cooks and nurturers in most cultures. They have filled this role with great success amidst careers, household management, child raising and eldercare, social demands, and a host of other obligations and obstacles (DeVault, 1991; Ellis, 1983; Murcott, 1983). Men, on the other hand, rarely represent family primary food providers (Warde & Hetherington, 1994; DeVault, 1991; Ekstrom, 1991; Charles & Kerr, 1988).

Of course it is hardly unusual to see a man in the professional food sphere. A quick check of the food network line-up in the US (foodtv.com) will help to reveal where the gender balance lies, at least in the professional world: Emeril Lagasse, Mario Batali, Ming Tsai, Alton Brown, David Rosengarten, Jamie Oliver, and the Iron Chefs dwarf Sara Moulton, Rachel Ray and the Two Fat Ladies. The titles "Iron Chef" versus "Two Fat Ladies" work to emphasize this disparity even further. On the other side of the continuum, we have also accepted and embraced the idea of men cooking recreationally. Backyard barbecues complete with "kiss the cook" aprons are as masculine a phenomenon as mowing the lawn or scowling under the hood of a car in suburban Middle America. Adler (1981) helps to codify the idea that an important part of fatherhood in the United States is preparing a festive signature dish. But between these extremes of cooking men, from professional chef to recreational "burgermeister," is another important, and often neglected group of male cooks—men who are amateur cooks, who feel a need to and choose to cook.

My interest lies in what happens when men who are not food professionals develop into this role of primary cook in a situation. I recently spent a year doing qualitative fieldwork with one such group, the

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men of Swine by Design, a pseudonym for a competition barbecue team. These men—and one woman—are all design and office professionals, who spend hundreds of dollars and hours each summer to travel the country competing in barbecue competitions. Why? What can we learn from their experiences and what can it tell us about gendered relationships with food?

This group calls into question much of the framework that we typically draw upon to analyze a group's foodways. A study of a group's food habits would likely consider distinct gender roles, shared cultural identity, a stratified class structure within the larger cultural group, and an established relationship with the environment (Brown & Mussell, 1984). With these groups, and others like them, this framework may not be sufficient. Gender becomes at once pressing and moot, in that in a primarily male environment one cannot help but think about gender and gender roles, but in what terms and context? For example, roles traditionally ascribed to women at times become self-consciously "masculinized" when performed by the team members. Similarly, cultural differences clash or complement one another when men of different geographies and cultural backgrounds strive to cook a "perfect" representation of "authentic" southern barbecue. Unlike a cross-sectional slice of society, the team shares a class identity, whether by working together, or by self-selecting into a group with which they can identify. And the men are transposed to an unfamiliar environment, away from the food system upon which they depend.

Theoretical Tool: The Food Voice

Hauck-Lawson's (1991) concept of food voice argues that what a person chooses to procure, prepare and eat—and what a person does not choose—can make powerful statements about identity and culture. "The food voice became a category through which I interpreted each participant's perspectives about community, economics, gender, nutrition, ethnic identity, and traditions" (Hauck-Lawson, 1992, 6). Many times the food voice expresses boldly what the spoken voice struggles to articulate. In other instances the food voice itself can serve as a window for telling a story about its "speaker's" experiences (Hauck-Lawson, 1998).

Scholars have been implicitly or explicitly listening to the food voice as it tells the stories of migration, assimilation and resistance, changes over time, and personal and group identity. In short, the facets of the human experience can be accessed through what is eaten, avoided, no longer or more often eaten, and, of course, what is produced and prepared and how it is done. Perhaps most obviously, food choices—what a person or group decides to produce, prepare and consume—can represent a conscious affirmation and expression of personal (Counihan, 1998; Avakian, 1997; Adler, 1981), group (Limon,

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1998; Gutierrez, 1998; Bass, 1995), ethnic (Blend, 2001; Ray, 2001; Gabaccia, 1998), or national identity (Raviv, 2002; Bentley, 1998; Pilcher, 1998). Beyond who we are, our food voice is often politicized in the form of food protests, riots, philosophies of eating, and socially conscious food choices to additionally express how we feel and what we want (Dusselier, 2002; Belasco, 1993; Adams, 1990). The food voice can work in tandem with the spoken and written voice in order to enact a holistic representation of identity, politics, and human experience (DeSalvo, 2004; Diner, 2002; Aaron, 1996).

During my time in the field, I tried to approach the data I collected on two levels. First, like most qualitative research, I relied heavily on the words of the participants—what were they saying in general and specifically what were they saying about their relationships with food? The second level was to use the concept of the "food voice" as an analytical tool to move beyond what the participants were saying. How did they procure, prepare, and consume food and what were their food behaviors—their food voice—saying that amplified, contradicted, or questioned what they communicated in their spoken voice?

After briefly explaining my method and, at greater length, attempting to descriptively situate the reader into the world of competition barbecue, I will explore the major categories that emerged from this study—masculinities and femininities in the barbecue context, and the performance of barbecue—through spoken voices and food voices.

Method

Data for this study were collected and analyzed using qualitative methods, specifically participant observation and interview, recorded in a thick log, and analyzed recursively through a variety of tools (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & Steinmetz, 1991). Consistent with the research paradigm, the field site was selected by convenience sample (Creswell, 1994) and a signature of informed consent was obtained from all participants. All names in the field log and in this document are pseudonyms, and other identifying markers have been changed as well. Under US federal guidelines, this study qualified as "exempt" from supervision by the University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subjects.

The transcription format I used throughout the fieldwork and in this document is a variation of one established by Patai (1988) in her interview study of impoverished Brazilian women. Patai's contention is that to transcribe speech into neat and fluid blocks of prose is not a realistic or trustworthy way to represent the data. Who of us speaks in paragraphs? Rather, she allows a line for every group of words spoken by her participants, with a line break allowed for pauses.

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Barbecue Background

> Barbecue's appeal isn't hard to fathom and may explain why barbecue cookery seems such a Neanderthal corner of modern gastronomy. It elegantly embraces several stereotypically Guy Things: fire building, beast slaughtering, fiddling with grubby mechanical objects, expensive gear fetishes, afternoon-long beer drinking, and, of course, great heaps of greasy meat at the end of the day. Top this off with the frisson of ritual tribal warfare and you've got the mother of all male pastimes (Dudley, 2000).

Barbecue, in its most basic form of meat slowly smoke roasted over indirect heat is probably not much younger than the union of fire and meat themselves. Like many of the world's simple but enduring and culturally significant foods—pasta, cheese, ices, flatbreads, and fermented drinks such as beer and wine—barbecue as an entity probably developed in numerous locations throughout the world with the rise of civilizations, rather than originating in an epiphany-instigated epicenter as if man first discovered that tough cuts of game slowly roasted and smoked away from the fire was more tender than that grilled over direct heat, and disseminated his revelation through cultural exchange.

Nevertheless, historians and barbecue aficionados continue to seek out documentation of "the first barbecue," and just as passionately discuss the origin of the term "barbecue." The catchiest, and notably Francophile explanation is that the term "barbecue" comes from the French "*barbe a queue,*" meaning from "beard to tail," said to represent the whole spit roasting of a pig or other animal. Some Eastern Carolina barbecue cooks, for whom whole hog is *de rigueur* take stock in this definition for its implicit endorsement of whole-hog barbecue over separate butts and ribs, as is more typical elsewhere in the South. But the pervasiveness of the "*barbe a queue*" definition does not make up for accuracy. Most scholars argue that while "*barbe a queue*" is cute and seems logical, it is based solely on the coincidental sounds of the words (Carriere, 1937). The etymological roots of the term are more likely found in the American Indian and later Creole term "*barboka*," used to describe the grill-like assembly of sticks over a fire on which whole fish and meat was slowly grilled over the coals. The Spanish adopted the term as "*barbacoa*" and the French as "*babracot*" where it evolved into English as "barbecue," or "barbeque." "*Barbacoa"* is found to first appear in print in 1526 in Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo's *De La Historia General y Natural de Las Indias* (Elie, 2003), where the term is used to describe spit roasting among Caribbean natives.

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In the US, the term "barbecue" is often applied to grilling, specifically to its festive, group entertainment aspects. Thus we may "grill" a hamburger but "have a barbecue" of such grilled food for friends and family. For the purposes of this paper I will restrict my use of the term "barbecue" to the tradition and method of cooking meat indirectly for a long period of time indirectly over wood or charcoal. This is the definition likewise adopted by the United States Department of Agriculture (Saporito, 1984). "Barbecue" in this usage may also represent an actual event of cooking such food and eating it in a group, and of course, the food itself, but should not be confused with "backyard barbecuing" of steaks, hotdogs, hamburgers, or chicken, which is more likely to be grilling, direct cooking over high heat for a short period of time using tender cuts of meat, poultry, fish or vegetables, rather than smoke cooking.

Men and Barbecue

Regardless of whether we are discussing backyard barbecue or the "authentic" type of Southern barbecue, barbecue is considered a man's domain. What is less clear is why this is the case. Much of the literature is quick to point out the machismo of barbecue, but begs the question of "why" with clichés and stereotypes, as does the opening quotation in this section. More interesting than the quote itself, however, is where I found it—it stands as a beacon on the website of the barbecue team that I studied. By giving this magazine quote prominence, the team is identifying with its explanation, or at least, similarly begging the question.

Consider a similar explanation from a competition barbecue cook himself,

> It's the caveman in us. I think that's why you see more and more men barbecuing. It's a macho thing. Playing with fire and being outdoors, bragging about how good you cook, it's got all the macho rush to it without any of the violence (Elie, 1997).

Terms like "caveman," "Neanderthal," and "macho" abound in explanations of the relationship between men and barbecue. While I take issue with the implied assumption that females during the Neanderthal era did not cook or did so differently than their male counterparts, the prehistoric simplicity of barbecue should not be ignored. Barbecuing, a variation of roasting, requires no utensils and little mediation from human or material (Levi-Strauss, 1968). The essential ingredients are fire, meat, and appropriate proximity between the two. Everything else—seasoning, off-set cast iron smoker, digital thermometer, sauce, or even tending the meat as it cooks—are simply additional niceties.

Competition Barbecue in the US

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The origins of competition barbecue in the US are as futilely sought and almost as frequently debated as the site of the "first" barbecue. Like barbecue itself, barbecue competitions are a simple concept that likely evolved in multiple locations, at multiple times, whenever one person said to another, "My barbecue's better than yours."

Indeed, many cultures celebrate the slaughter of an animal with a festival or feast (Haid, 2003; Santino, 2003; Dietler & Hayden, 2001; Humphrey & Humphrey, 1988). There are doubtless many material and social reasons for this phenomenon. Practically speaking, beasts are large and feed many people. The hours, and sometimes days, it takes to slowly roast an animal demand many hands to tend the meat and many more to eat the finished product. In days before refrigeration and especially in tropical climates such as Papua New Guinea or The Philippines, animal slaughter demanded immediate cooking and consumption, as meat would quickly begin to spoil, necessitating large gatherings. In cooler climates, of course, meat could be preserved by drying or salting. But beyond these material reasons, meat is a high-status, celebratory and celebrated food. Whether celebrating the sacrifice of the animal as early as ancient times, the passage of the spirit of the animal, as in some tribal traditions, or man's accomplishment in slaying a beast, as in a bull-fight, roasting meat brings people together.

Barbecue as a public event has a long history in the US, stemming largely, it seems, from English traditions of spit roasting hog, beef, or lamb in a festive atmosphere (Elie, 2003; Mennell, 1985). Writings of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson mention barbecue (Elie, 2003) and in much of the South, barbecues are still an integral part of the political scene, from fundraisers to "pig-pickings" hosted by candidates to garner local support (Bass, 1995; Egerton, 1987).

This long barbecue tradition makes the public event of a barbecue competition a somewhat natural outgrowth of these public feasts. Competitions today, no matter their location, are huge public events, often accompanied by food for sale to the public, live music, and games and amusements. The largest of these events, the Memphis in May world barbecue championship, claims to generate over thirty million dollars of economic impact to Memphis each year by hosting the festival (memphisinmay.org).

Barbecue competitions have existed for decades as offshoots of county, regional, or state fairs, and informally for much longer as fundraisers and unofficial get-togethers (Elie, 1996). It is only in the last twenty-odd years, however, that competition barbecue as a national phenomenon has really taken hold. Due to the relative youth of competition barbecue, the literature is somewhat thin and scholarly literature nonexistent in my searches. While there are many individuals and organizations responsible for the growth of competition barbecue, the Memphis in May festival has generated a tremendous amount of

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press, first by hosting the championship competition since 1980, and then by sanctioning a network of regional competitions across the country (memphisinmay.org). A number of similar organizations such as the Kansas City Barbecue Society and the American Barbecue Society are similarly structured, sanctioning regional competitions, and uniting the regional winners at a national competition at season's end. Teams typically compete in competitions of various societies which each have different rules, meat categories, judging criteria and procedures. Regardless of the sanctioning body of each competition, the prize is money and a chance to advance. Often the money is significant, up to ten thousand dollars per event, with potential winners in multiple events. This prize money is raised through entrance fees, admission charges to the public, and sponsorship, making competition not only a hobby but also an investment.

Travels with Swine by Design

Ely et. al (1997) suggest that a pastiche, like a patchwork quilt, can help to show the complexity of a setting with an economy of words. Succinctly conveying the "flavor" of a field site and group of participants is always a challenge in even a book-length document. The following pastiche is composed of quotations spoken by members of Swine by Design, a pseudonym for the competition barbecue team that I studied as well as by other participants at the competitions and can serve as a useful entry point to their world.

Figure 1. A Barbecue Pastiche

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<table>
<tr><td>Somebody died
on another team
or something.
Had a heart
attack.
That was it.
So they had an
opening.</td><td colspan="3">“Hey, I hear the judges like things really black and charred this year.”</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">I hadn’t really
cooked a whole
lot no
You know
A little bit
Backyard stuff
Like any other
American</td><td>“Hey, you need any help?”
“Sure come on down!”
I’ve been here ever since.</td><td rowspan="2">But, you know before
you go drop a couple
thousand on a cooker
you’d kinda at least
like to see one?</td><td rowspan="2">You don’t see
too many
barbecue wives
do you?</td></tr>
<tr><td>“…the intoxicating aroma
that is the essence of
barbecue.”</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">And you know
we’re still
mainly
architects
If not architects,
married to one</td><td rowspan="2">She’s just tired of the
whole barbecue thing
It’s one of those things she
just doesn’t see the point
Oh my wife is just sick of
the
Oh you know, the heat
And just why would you
wanna do that?</td><td>In a judging
competition you’ve
got one bite
Two at the most
To make your
impression
And I’m not sure I’d
want a plateful of a
first impression</td><td>You know, if
we weren’t
winning, I
don’t know if
we’d all be
doing this.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">It’s fun to sit back
Get away from your
house
Get away from your
normal
responsibilities</td><td rowspan="2">When it snows
I have two
paths out my
family room
door

A path to the
hot tub
And a path to
the smoker</td></tr>
<tr><td>I just enjoy fooling around
in the kitchen

It’s therapy for me</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">It’s just not her thing. She don’t see the sense in it. She has a stereotyped view of barbecuers. And it’s not particularly favorable.</td></tr>
</table>

The Barbecue Battle

It seems fitting that my first exposure to the world of competition barbecue be the reader’s as well. The following description comes from my first weekend of fieldwork at a Swine by Design barbecue competition:

I arrived at the competition site before the team did. I took a walk, looking at some of the other team sites, and taking pictures. I was fascinated by the team names, like "Close Encounters of the Third Swine," and "Fuhgeddaboutit, the NYC barbecue team." I took a few pictures to remind me of the setting. I was also taken with the backyard-like decorations of the teams' twenty-foot by twenty- or thirty-foot areas—pig lights, picnic tables, checked tablecloths, pig candy dishes, road signs, lawn chairs, and

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inflatable recliners. Later I am told that the Swine by Design site used to have a much more "architectural" look—a couch with a corrugated steel wall, a TV, and a "modern home feel." I also noted the corporate presence—a sausage company's "world's largest grill," a giant peanut sponsored by the peanut board, ice cream, pizza, tires, detergent, pens—-the list of sponsors and scope of this competition was much larger than I had anticipated.

Andrew, the leader of the team, a barrel-chested architect in his 40s, insisted on giving me a tour of the rig to help me observe safely for the weekend. He explained that the rig was designed by RT Enterprises, which I recognized as being a company run by Roger Thomas, a barbecue champion who now sells cookers he designs, teaches barbecue around the country, and consults to teams. The rig was bought from a professional caterer, who had a problem using it commercially. It did not meet health department regulations, because it is not screened-in and has Formica rather than stainless steel cabinets. The caterer, in turn, bought it from a championship barbecue team, who did well with it in competition. I remember being fascinated by this provenance of competitive cookers. Looking at the classified ads in the barbecue newsletters emphasizes this heritage as well—who owned which cookers that are for sale and what awards they won with it.

Andrew first showed me the water tank. He explained that it fills and provides its own pressure, though it is not potable. The cold water goes directly to the sink, bypassing a now defunct filter. The water for the hot water tap is routed around the back of the rig, through the cooker itself, which heats the water, and back to the sink, thereby providing hot water while the cooker is being used. On the side of the rig, between the sink and the cooker is a long black counter with cabinets and drawers beneath it. The drawers are filled with supplies such as utensils, plastic ware, paper plates, and a stereo that plays music through speakers that Andrew attached to the rig. The cooker itself is opposite the sink and works on a three-chamber system. At the bottom is the firebox, where the team burns maple, cherry, and hickory, with no particular system other than using mainly maple, the most neutral of the three, to get the fire going. Use of gas or electric heat is not allowed in competition, though propane ignition sometimes is. Above the firebox is a trough of about ten gallons of water, which boils and steams the meat once the fire gets sufficiently hot. The water also tempers the heat to keep it even. Above the water, the meat sits on racks. The smoke comes up the left hand side of the cooker goes across the water and meat to the right side and out a smokestack on the right. The Swine by Design team made one modification to the original cooker by adding an additional smoke stack on the left, which allows them to release some smoke before it goes across to the meat, thereby letting off excess smoke or heat. The desired cooking temperature is between 200 and 250 degrees, and there are thermometers on each side of the cooker indicating the

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temperature. Andrew said that opening the left-hand stack, the cook can lower the temperature by 10 or 20 degrees quickly.

Andrew left the site to go get the meat from the meat truck, a local vendor who sells regulation competition meat from a freezer truck. Teams may also purchase their own meat elsewhere, though getting it at the competition from the official vendor is often seen as insurance that the meat will pass the judges' inspection. Judges look to ensure that the meat is safe, particularly that it is kept iced or under refrigeration, that the teams have not yet begun to marinate, rub, trim, or otherwise prepare the meat, and that the particular cuts of meat are those approved by the sanctioning body for that particular competition. Brian, the unofficial co-team leader, a short stout engineer, flagged down the meat inspector as he passed in a golf cart. The meat inspection took less than a minute and seemed fairly cursory. "OK, good luck," the inspector said, checking boxes on his clipboard, and left.

With setup in place, the cooking began around ten o'clock in the morning. Brian took the shoulders out of the cooler and with a large knife began to trim them. He previously strained a half-gallon jug of marinade into an aluminum pan and as each of the six total shoulders was skinned, Frank, an architect as well, injected it with the strained marinade using a brine pump, a large syringe that shoots brine from many angles and depths, inserting the pump every two inches or so to allow the brine to penetrate the meat. Once the shoulders were brined, they were placed in a black plastic garbage bag inside a cooler and allowed to sit for six hours or so. They were to be cooked around five o'clock in the evening.

Once finished with the pork shoulders, Brian asked Deirdre, Swine by Design's only woman member, who is being trained at this, her first competition, if she would like to skin the ribs. She agreed enthusiastically and he showed her what to do. On the underside of each rack of ribs is a membrane that peels off easily once one end is gripped firmly. Deirdre used a paper towel to hold one end and peel off the membrane. Brian explained that removing this "skin" allows the smoke to better penetrate the meat and creates a tenderer product. Just as he did for the shoulders, Frank, along with help from Brian, injected marinade into the ribs, this time using strained commercially bottled Italian dressing rather than a homemade marinade and using a smaller syringe to inject the marinade between each rib rather than the larger brine pump.

There was some down time around noon, once the pork ribs and shoulders were marinating, the small smoker for the chicken set up along side the big rig, the fire in the big cooker not yet started, and all of the other business attended to. During this time the team members continued setting up the site, wiping down the counter, unpacking boxes, and icing cases of sports drink, bottled water, and beer.

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Brian produced some tortilla chips and salsa and sat down to snack and chat with the other team members.

A bit later in the afternoon, Ed, an architect who, with Andrew, Frank and Hugh, comprised the original Swine by Design team, began working on the chicken which was to be judged that evening. He burned some charcoal in a pail along side the small smoker and when it was no longer flaming he added some to the smoker. Ed brought chicken thighs marinating in zipper plastic bags. He took the thighs from the marinade, trimmed the excess fat, and applied a dry rub, a mix of spices. When the small smoker was up to temperature, he put the chicken on the smoker, dropping a digital temperature probe into the smoker from a hole in the top. The chicken cooked for about two hours at two-hundred and twenty-five degrees Fahrenheit.

Around the same time the chicken thighs were finished cooking, the fire in the big cooker was started. The shoulders were also to be dry rubbed and were to go on the fire around 5 o'clock in the evening and were to finish cooking around mid-morning the next day. All evening the meat and fire would be tended by Cam and the night crew.

Hugh joined the group in the afternoon with cases of beer. He is also an architect, has a "beach bum" look, wearing shorts and large colorful shirts, and is rarely seen without a cigar. He is married, with three children, and has an average build.

When the chicken was cooked the thighs were removed from the smoker and carefully placed on an aluminum tray. Ed carefully painted barbecue sauce on each thigh and then returned them to the smoker to brown, cooking them for another thirty minutes or so. When they were finished the six best looking thighs—evenly browned, trimmed of fat, and plump—out of the twenty cooked were submitted for blind judging in a Styrofoam clamshell.

After the chicken judging, the evening was a fairly slow time. Each team member ate one remaining chicken thigh and Brain put the rest on a paper plate to share with competing teams. Zeke, from the competing team at the adjacent site, brought his chicken for Swine by Design to taste. The team will not know the results of today's competition until the next day, so the members seemed to have little to do. The shoulders cooked and were basted and rotated every hour or so and as long as the fire was at the right temperature, things were under control. Between six o'clock and nine o'clock in the evening most of the day crew started to leave. Some went home if they lived within driving distance while others slept in the team's hotel room nearby.

Around nine o'clock in the evening, Cam and James arrived to run the overnight shift. Cam immediately went to a cabinet on the rig and set up a small coffee maker. James is a young man, in his

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mid-twenties with a small build. He is also an architect and is single. He often volunteers for the night shift. The night shift's main job is to monitor the cooking temperatures of the meat, keeping the fire going, and to get the site ready for inspection. Just before dawn the ribs went on the grill and the shoulders were wrapped in foil and basted with apple juice so they could continue cooking while staying moist until judging in the early afternoon.

The rest of the crew arrived early on the morning of the second day. The second day is the serious judging day and tone was decidedly more serious as well. Some of the team members arrived in their official red Swine by Design polo shirts, while others brought them on hangers to change later. Cam from the evening crew debriefed Andrew and Brian regarding the shoulders that had been cooking all night, "The spreadsheet says they should cook 'till six but they looked done so we foiled them early." Andrew seemed tense to me. "You foiled them early. Are you sure they were done?" Brian and Andrew checked the ribs, while Ed and Deirdre continued straightening up. Cam and James announced that they were going home to sleep, but James said that he will return in the afternoon for the award presentations.

Meanwhile, Hugh rehearsed his presentation for the onsite judging. He paced back and forth in the middle of the fairway, cigar in hand, rehearsing his talk. Later in the morning, the team converted the site into a "set" for the judging and did a full dress rehearsal. They folded the numerous chairs, and hid the coolers, boxes, cooking equipment, and personal items behind a tarp. They put up red tarpaulin walls, which Andrew says enhance the appearance of the meat, and set a table in the center of the site. They set the table with a table cloth, a vase of flowers, and silverware for two settings—-the judge's and Hugh's. Opposite the judge were two easels with posters of the Swine by Design principles from which Hugh spoke later when he gave his presentations. Behind the judge's place was a wall of about twenty-five trophies from past competitions. There was an effort to make everything clean and polished, despite the fact that the team was competing on a city street and there was smoke everywhere. Deirdre polished the trophies. Brian swept the pavement frequently throughout the morning. Andrew even swept the dust off of the wood samples that they would show to the judge when explaining the Swine by Design process. Shortly before each judge came, Ed placed leaves of kale and whole bell peppers on the grill to garnish it as well.

The team asked me to step away and look at the actual judging from afar so I was unable to listen in. In the past, Hugh explained, they had the entire team lined up inside the rig watching the judge's tasting. Now, however, the team shakes hands with the judge and steps back because Andrew suggested that watching the judge taste might make her or him feel uncomfortable.

Sunday after the rehearsal was a frenzy of activity. Blind judging came first and each category

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was separated by thirty minutes. The teams had a five minute window on either time of the official time in which to submit their blind boxes. Whole hog, a category in which Swine by design does not compete, was first, followed by Shoulder and Ribs. The presentation of the food in boxes was strictly prescribed. Acceptable garnishes were lettuce, parsley, and cilantro only. Sauce could not be pooled, which was defined as sitting with an area larger than a fifty-cent piece, or drizzled, especially in a pattern, which could be used to communicate with the judges, as if Swine by Design wrote "SD" in sauce for example. Sauces could be "striped" in a straight line across the meat. Meat from the shoulder may be pulled, shredded, chopped, and/or minced, provided there was enough of each style for the judges to taste.

After the blind boxes were submitted, the team quickly straightened up to get ready for the onsite judging. The team members who had been wearing other shirts changed into their team polo and the team members congregated in front of the site. The judges arrived one at a time in fifteen minute intervals. Teams are downgraded for delaying a judge, so the team was very conscious about having the routine move smoothly. As each judge arrived, Brian introduced himself and welcomed her or him to the team site. He then announced that the remaining team members would introduce themselves. The team stood in a semicircle and each member beginning with Deirdre and ending with Hugh introduced him- or herself. Hugh ended his introduction by indicating that he would be leading the tour of the site. He walked the judge under the tarpaulin roof of the rig, where Deirdre offered a drink of iced tea or water and the extensive spiel rehearsed earlier began.

About an hour after the onsite judging for each category ended, there was a gathering outside the judges' tent. It was here that a staff member wrote down the three teams that were finalists in each category. These teams had a second onsite judging in the finals round and the winning teams in each category received prize money as well as eligibility to compete at the national competition.

Andrew waited outside the judge's tent both times, but came away looking dejected. Swine by Design did not make the finals in shoulder or ribs. Out of thirty teams, Swine by Design placed fourth in shoulder and sixth in ribs, missing the prize money and finals in both categories, but making the list of the top seven, the magic number for being announced at the awards ceremony and winning a trophy. They did not place in the top seven for chicken, which surprised the team as they seem to feel that this is their strongest category. Overall the team seemed neither overly happy nor overly disappointed with their placement, but acknowledged tough competition and a good time.

While each subsequent competition differed, the above description is meant to give the reader a sense of how a barbecue competition works.

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Making Meaning: Men, Women, Masculinities and Femininities

Joining the Team

When I began interviewing the Swine by Design team members well into my fieldwork with them, I often began my interviews with a seemingly simple question that served to provide some insight into the team members, their personalities, backgrounds, and stories, as well as the origins and history of the team, and perspectives on barbecue culture in general. Though I had a short list of possible interview questions prepared, the first, "How did you come to join Swine by Design?" was typically the only scripted question that I needed.

James tells me how he joined the team:

It was the name
The name actually
I live near here
So came down here with my dad one year
As a tourist you know
I guess that was three or four years ago
And I saw "Design" I wonder if they're in design you know
Or if it's just the name they picked
So I walked up and asked one of the guys
Brain actually
"Hey are you guys in a design field or is that just your name"
And he said "yeah mainly architects or designers"
And he introduced me to Andrew, who's an architect
And Andrew knew my firm
And said hey you know
Come down next year and cook with us
So I did
The rest you know
And the rest is history

I got some other guys from my company

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And I've been doing it since

You know the thing about this team
That's nice
Well maybe
Nice yeah
And different
Is that because it's professional white collar people
We're really open as far as new members
Welcoming
Some teams
It's all part of a family
Or a small group of friends
It's a little different for us

Though each team member obviously has his own story regarding how he joined the team, this interview excerpt is representative of the underlying reason that many Swine by Design members say they connect with the team. Most had no initial intentions of competing in barbecue but rather were seeking guidance in a hobby where it seems challenging to have mentorship. Barbecue, when done at home, is largely done individually. Though it is often used in entertaining, true barbecue—meat slowly smoke-roasted over indirect heat—takes hours or even days to prepare, and the actual cooking is often done individually. Furthermore, unlike many hobbies that are more easily learned from books, barbecue is probably best learned through a multi-sensory hands-on experience. Even the best food writing cannot teach someone how something should taste. These qualities manifest themselves in team members joining Swine by Design not to compete per se, but rather to learn. This distinction is further belied by the fact that Swine by Design's members, all white suburban middle class or upper-middle class professionals are fairly unlikely to come from a barbecue tradition, where techniques are passed down from father to son as it is done in some African-American southern rural traditions (Elie, 1996).

Indeed, it is this mentoring, learning environment that James finds so valuable in Swine by Design's receptivity to new members. Both Hugh and Brian speak of their joining the team in some ways with regard to the distinction between grilling, quick direct-heat cooking as for hamburgers, chicken

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breasts, or vegetables, done “like any other American” (Hugh) or “like most people” (Brian) as opposed to barbecue, a skill not as easily learned. Deirdre, the newest member of Swine by Design, and the only woman member, also joined not to compete but to learn more about barbecue, meeting Brian and Andrew virtually via an online barbecue discussion board as well.

On the level of the food voice, Swine by Design is for a few reasons not the obvious choice of a team to join in order to learn more about cooking traditional or competition barbecue. First, all of the members are amateur cooks. Some members of competing teams are foodservice professionals and some teams even boast barbecue cookbook authors, restaurateurs, and television cooking show hosts, but Swine by Design is composed of design and other office professionals. Second, none of the Swine by Design members identifies him- or herself as a barbecue expert or offers formal instruction in the form of barbecue classes, a side occupation of some successful teams. Third, Swine by Design, while good, is not generally considered to be an upper-echelon barbecue team, nor do they portend to be one. Swine by Design members seem to self-select on the basis of education level, occupation, class, and an educational rather than a lifestyle or purely competitive interest in competition barbecue. Members’ interest in learning barbecue seems to be prominent within Swine by Design not because the team members *know* more than other teams, but because they engage in active online and face-to-face discussions about barbecue nuance and are willing to share what they have learned. There is very little information that the team holds proprietary, and Andrew’s off-season experimentation makes him a known as a popular coworker, carrying in racks of ribs and pulled pork to share at the office on Monday morning. These are educated people who like to cook, talk, and think barbecue.

I ask Grant to elaborate on how he joined the team:

So your wife works with Andrew that’s how you got into this?

Uh huh
Yeah they all worked at the firm in Baltimore together
And it kinda came about that way

Is she into barbecue?

Yeah
Well
She
Ah

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She used to help out
We had our daughter about four years ago
In fact her last contest would have been
Would have been '97 I guess
The last time she helped out she was pregnant and didn't know about it and was sick the whole weekend
Plus it was about 99 degrees
So it just took a toll on her system
And that was it for her

Women

Grant's discussion of his wife's previous involvement with competitive barbecue, as well as the group's makeup of mainly male participants, raised many questions regarding the roles of women with Swine by Design. There is no question that despite the recent addition of Deirdre to the team, Swine by Design is—however unofficially—very much a men's organization. Most of the team members come alone to competitions, "getting away" from their families, as Hugh discusses, and women, while frequently discussed, are much less frequently seen at the Swine by Design site. While their professional class spoken voice may identify a welcome attitude and equanimity toward women team members, and a spousal contempt or, at least, indifference to their husbands' activities, their food voice expresses the need to protect a masculine sphere. Almost as evocative as the question of how each member joined the team is the question of women's roles in competition barbecue. I ask Hugh for his take on the issue:

You don't see too many barbecue wives do you?
My wife doesn't like it

Why do you think she doesn't like it?
My wife doesn't like it because I'm away overnight for
You know
Or an entire day really
So I only do a couple contests a year now
Because if I'm not around she's alone with the kids so
It's a little tough

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I think most of the wives love it when you *cook*
You know
They like the food
But they just don't like the time it takes
It's a very time consuming thing
If the other guy's wives feel the same way I don't know
I doubt it
But I don't know

It's a lot of money
Last year we brought in over five grand in prizes

Significant in Hugh's comments is the distinction between "most of the wives lov[ing] it when you cook," and men being absent for part or all of the weekend to cook competitively, often, in the case of Swine by Design, sandwiched between two full weeks of work away from the home. On the surface, the distinction seems less one of the activity itself than the time commitment involved. Would Hugh's spouse have the same concerns if he hunted, fished, or mountain climbed with friends rather than family on weekends? Or is there added tension because Hugh is doing something—cooking—that can be done at home or nearly anywhere and that is otherwise his wife's responsibility?

I ask the resident expert, Deirdre, a woman in competition barbecue and the collaborative nature of the quasi-focus group on-site interviewing allows the discussion to spread from there:

JD to Deirdre: So how is it being a woman in this man's world of barbecue?

Excellent
[laughing]

Do you have any difficulties?

Well you know this is my first season really
So
People are really friendly

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Brian:
Well we'll change that
[laughing]

I know

Why do you think more women aren't involved in barbecue?

Because it's so time consuming
They really don't have time

Because they're busy taking care of children
And a house
And everything else
And cooking because they have to and not because they want to
Yeah

I bet you'd find that
I don't know if it's true
My guess would be
That
Women who are involved in this don't have kids
Don't you think that's probably-?

Brian:
Well, probably,
That's really close to true
Or they're grown maybe

Deirdre:

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Yeah

Brian: Deirdre:

The ladies I know

Laney

No Kids

No Kids

Or maybe Toni I think has grown kids but they're *his* kids

Yeah

And ah

Ellen

No Kids

Yeah no kids, right

And

Ann Ann

No kids right

No kids that we *know* of

Right

Um

Jon: Are you single, Deirdre?

I'm um

Separated from my husband

J: So you're now single

D: So I'm *not* single

And I'm not married either

So it's interesting

I'm still wearing my ring but he's not wearing his

J: Did your barbecue interest start after your separation?

D: No, no my barbecue interest started about four years ago

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You don't have kids?
Yeah I don't have kids

JD: And you're married right Brian?
Yes

Did your wife come to this?

No

Won't have anything to do with this

Nothing at all?

Nothing

She's obviously supportive by letting you go?

She tolerates it

Why is she um
Not into it?

It's just not her thing
She don't see the sense in it
Um
She has a stereotyped view of barbecuers
And
It's not particularly favorable
And um
Our team is a bunch of professionals
And
Um you know we're
Professional
White collar people

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And ah
The stereotype barbecuer is almost 180 degrees out from that
And
It's not her thing

Even in competitions?

[emphatically] The stereotype of that is 180 opposite of that
It's just like every stereotype
There's a grain of truth
And a whole lot of not necessary true

JD: It just seems like a pretty expensive sport for a blue collar um-

B: You'd be amazed
At
I don't know what some of these folks do but
It's not a white coat and tie event
I mean a white shirt and tie event
It's a good ol' boy event
Whether you are one or not
And um
That's
She works for one of the big law firms in town
And lives in a very white shirt and tie
Environment
All day long
And this just isn't her thing

While I had anticipated discussions about the usual issues that arise in any type of qualitative research—gender, race, and class—I had not expected such strong feelings expressed within the team itself. Again with Brian, his spouse's feelings concern not the cooking itself, as evidenced through the

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actual food voices, but the "good ol' boy event" of the competitions, which while admittedly expensive, have participants that Brian's wife identifies as rural working class. I asked to speak with Brian's wife to learn more about these powerful feelings but Brian anticipated that she would decline and she did. I wondered, then, if any of these men's wives or girlfriends was encouraging of their partner's role in Swine by Design. Even Deirdre, after all, joined the team once she was separated. Cam mentions that his wife is a food professional so I wonder if she has more positive feelings about his participation than the other wives do:

So what does your wife think about all this?

Actually
She's pretty supportive
Um
Yeah
It's only about five weekends a year
Um
That we do it so
You know she's pretty supportive of it

Does she come to these competitions?
Actually I have yet to get her to come to one
I had um
I took the judging class this summer
And I actually tried to get her to take it earlier in the spring
But
I tried to get her to take the judging class so that then um
When my daughter is in college we could um
Yeah there's a lot of contests down in the mountains of North Carolina and stuff we could
Go down
Get a B&B
Make a weekend of it
Um

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I might still get her to take the class
We'll see
She's done some other food judging
So I think she'd enjoy it so
We'll see but

Oh right, because she's in the food business
Yeah
She mainly teaches child development but
Um
I used to be employed by the agriculture foundation so
Was real involved in a lot of county fairs
And so
We both ended up judging a lot of county fair stuff
And
She judged foods
And generally enjoyed that so

Yeah and even if she doesn't judge we can still use it as weekend getaways
Judging really only takes a couple hours so
Ah
Yeah we'll see
But
Nah she's pretty supportive of it

What does she think of barbecue?
Oh she likes it
Um
It's funny actually um
I have a seventeen year old daughter
And
She likes the pulled pork she's not real big on the ribs

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And um
But actually my wife um
Enjoys eating it
She hasn't really done much along cooking it's kind of funny one time
I don't know what I was doing but I had to leave the house for a couple hours while I had some stuff on
And so she was in charge of
Keeping the temperature right
And she was very proud of the fact that she watched it very meticulously and kept it very close to the right temperature
Um
But that was a good thing
Um
We need to foil some ribs

In Cam's thoughts I was struck by the fact that even though he identifies his wife as supportive through his spoken voice, a look on the food voice level—what is happening at the site—reveals that the support is tacit. She, like Brian's wife, does not prevent his participation but does not seem to think it is the best use of Cam's weekend and chooses not to participate despite Cam's encouragement. At the competition following this interview, Cam tells the group he was berated for coming home so tired last time after doing an overnight shift and then having to take a three hour drive to pick up his daughter from summer camp.

Finally, Andrew's wife, Ann, plays a highly involved role with Swine by Design as their webmaster as well as being the spouse of the leader who the team acknowledges invests the highest amount of emotional and physical energy into the team. I ask Andrew what Ann's involvement in the team is:

She came down last night
She's kind of like Brian's wife
She's just tired of the whole barbecue thing
It's one of those things she just doesn't see the point
So

Why do you think that is?

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I think
It's like
You know
Oh my wife is just sick of the
Oh you know, the *heat*
And just *why* would you wanna *do* that
I don't know

Do you think now that you have a woman working with you it will be a push in either direction?

No

So what does she do while you're here?

Rent movies
Um
Does work
And basically enjoys the fact that I'm not in the house

Why?

Ann's question of "And just *why* would you wanna do that?" resonates. These men and one woman spend hundreds of dollars in a weekend in gas, meat, lodging, dues, and supplies, drive hours to competitions, spend weekends in the summer heat next to a fire, and complain about heat, bugs, logistics, and competitors, lose sleep to tend a fire, and share hotel rooms with four or more of their sweaty smoky companions. If they do win prize money, it is invested into the team rather than shared by the men. Though most of the team members may join to learn barbecue, they do not pick up what they need to know and then move on. Rather, they pay dues, wear the uniform, travel to competitions, and compete. The ultimate question to me, then, is "Why?" This question came up during fieldwork at a firehouse as well, where a standard comment to the thoughts of the work involved in meal preparation, the multiple interruptions, the difficulty of pleasing everyone, and the occasional bad meals was, "We'd be better off ordering pizza," despite the fact that they never did. In fact, a very similar conversation takes place a few times during my time with Swine by Design. In one instance Andrew mentions that the local

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fire department is charging a twenty-five dollar propane permit fee to ignite their cookers with propane. Hugh comments that for twenty-five dollars the team could buy a case of beer instead. "Good beer." Andrew ends the discussion saying, "For twenty-five dollars we can buy barbecue from a restaurant and just go ahead and submit it." This sentiment underlies much of what I learned in my fieldwork. These amateur cooks invest huge amounts of time, money, energy, and emotion into a hobby that yields results sometimes superior to but often comparable or inferior to a cheaper, more convenient commercially produced product.

Jon to Brian: Let me ask you the obvious.

What's that?

Why do you do this?

It's fun

What makes it fun?

I like to cook
I'm a fairly decent indoor cook
[laughing]
what makes *anything* fun?
it's an activity that one derives pleasure from
even though it can be aggravating at times
and
I like the cooking part of it
I like the competition part of it
And I also like the *friendly* competition part of it
There's not a team here that if you needed something
And they had it
They'd be happy to loan it to you whatever it is
And there's a certain type of competitive camaraderie that
That exists among all the teams whether you know 'em or not
That is different
It's not a cut-throat kind of thing at all
And
It's an opportunity to socialize too with people who share your interests in

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In the activity

I found Brian's response to this question fascinating not because of what he said, but because of what he struggled to say with his spoken voice. In a separate interview, when I ask Brian how he joined the team, I have over fourteen minutes of tape answering that question-—no probes, no follow-ups, just Brian talking. Here it takes multiple prompts to get him going, and he begs the question with a definition of the term and a qualification before getting to what seems to me to be the heart of competition barbecue's appeal for him, the friendly competition and social aspects of the activity, which is certainly reinforced by my listening to his food voice, in that Brian, more than any other team member, spends hours visiting other teams' sites, invites them over to the Swine by Design site and seems to know many competitors and judges, despite only joining the world of competitive barbecue about halfway into Swine by Design's existence.

Hugh, when asked the same question, responds in a way that I was surprised shares many aspects of Brian's response with some additional reasons:

It's fun
Fun
Enjoyable
It's fun to sit back
Get away from your house
Get away from your normal responsibilities
Have a couple beers
Have a couple cigars
Sit around and BS with people
Now
Now we know so many people
You know you go to a competition
Everybody's known you a long time
I have three kids at home
So it's really nice to get away with some of your best friends
And just kind of hang out
Plus it's fun to win

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You know, if we weren't winning, I don't know if we'd all be doing this

Ken echoes James's thoughts as they talk together in response to my question during the overnight shift:

It's the outdoors
Sitting around
Feeling the chill of a summer night
Getting hopped up on espresso
Listening to tunes
Drinking Jack [Daniels brand bourbon]
Tending fire
It's primitive
It's nature
It's companionship
It's conversation
It's fun
It's guy stuff
You know?

Guy Stuff

In thinking about Ken's summative comment that all of this—the competitive barbecue scene—-the outdoors, the music, the meat, the coffee and whisky, the fire, the friendships, the discussions, and, I would add, the competition—makes it not only "guy stuff" as a popular culture stereotype, but a food voice performance of masculinity in a self-conscious, affirmative way. Examples of complex feelings, thoughts, and actions concerning maleness, masculinities, and identities abound in the field log, an exploration of which yields a sense of how closely interlocked are these ideas of men and barbecue.

To say that the members of Swine by Design have a masculine food voice may seem absurd. After all, there is no definitive way that men or women do things with food. But in working with Swine by Design, one gets the sense that their cooking and food habits in general differ widely from how they do things during their daily home lives away from competitive barbecue.

One particularly telling aspect to this distinction involves what the team actually eats over the two

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days of the competition. The answer surprised me. When I embarked on this project I anticipated returning from my fieldwork well-fed on barbecue staples—chicken, pulled pork, brisket, and ribs, of course, but also the sides that I love as much as the meat—coleslaw, beans, cornbread, potato salad, hush puppies, and so on. I was surprised then, when after a full day at my first observation, meals were never made. All of Swine by Design's food preparation energy is focused on the competition, and meals during the two days of competition are afterthoughts at best and more likely not thought of at all. Meat is always tasted after someone, typically Andrew, determines that the official submission process has finished and everything else is leftover. But the tasting is just that—a taste. The team scrutinizes their submission for smokiness, moistness, color, tenderness, and meat flavor, some talking through each point, like Brian, and others popping a bit in their mouth and walking off to consider it in quietude like Ed. Cam says that after inhaling smoke for two days and feeling smoke roasted yourself from the heat, the last thing you want to do is sit down to a thick rack of ribs.

When there is food to eat, it is typically snacks like salsa and chips that Brian brings to the competitions, or food bartered for or given by another team. Cam brings a salmon that he smoked at home for the team to taste one morning, and after the team had their fill, he barters with Zeke for eggs benedict that he and his wife, restaurateurs, have made. At another competition the wives of the neighboring team members boil crabs and corn (only the husbands barbecue on that team) and after they have eaten and entertained their guests, invite Swine by Design to partake. Another weekend, Swine by Design hosts a barbecue for the team's sponsors the evening before the judging but does not cook anything for the party on site. Hugh brings all of the food from home, including barbecued ribs and pulled pork, and heats it on site in crock pots and portable burners, avoiding using the cooker with the competition meat. This stands out to me as a stark contrast to another neighboring team, a family, where the mother of the family brought potato salad, coleslaw, rolls, cornbread, and cobbler to the competition and her husband cooked some extra barbecued chickens and ribs so that they could sit down to a family meal at the end of the first day.

Often, the team consciously and deliberately works with their spoken and food voices to make masculine what they perceive as a feminine or domestic food behavior, or else exaggerate and parody the effeminate features of such activities. So, for example, in the first aspect of "masculinizing" a domestic food voice, we see Hugh cooking a sweet Thai banana sauce on a portable burner with a cigar in hand or mouth the entire time, when otherwise he only smokes when the meat is not being tended. Or we see Frank, asked to toast some nuts for garnish, pound at them aggressively and ineffectually with the blunt end of a knife, when earlier he was using a syringe to inject marinade to the meat with surgeon-like

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concentration and precision.

In the second strand of parodying domestic or feminine tasks, examples from the field are much more colorful. Of the few roles that Swine by Design explicitly brand as feminine, that of "Garnish Fag" is the most glaring. The moniker is ingrained enough in the workings of the group, that Ed, bearing supermarket bags full of lettuce, parsley, bell peppers, and curly kale announces to the team, "I'm garnish fag this weekend, guys," and Brian says the same thing when his turn in the season comes. Produce for garnish is the only food that is neither meat nor sauce in the competition and it does stand out as a unique departure from the rest of the weekends' cooking activity. For blind box submissions, meats may be garnished with lettuce leaves, parsley and/or cilantro leaves and it is the "Garnish Fag's" duty to clean these ingredients and keep them fresh for judging, no easy task in the summer heat. Garnishing for onsite judging is much more elaborate in that, though the food itself is not actually garnished on-site, the judge inspects the cooker, at that point cooling to about two-hundred degrees Fahrenheit, which he opens to find not only picture-perfect pink shimmering-sauced meat, but a cornucopia of crisp produce—-curly kale and colorful bell peppers—-adroitly arranged by the team member responsible for garnishing just seconds before the judge's arrival, in order to keep it looking fresh in the smoky heat, and then freshened for subsequent judges.

But the mocking of the "Garnish Fag's" food voice does not occur in name alone. At competitions where there is no on-site judging, the presentation and garnishing portion of the competition does not begin until the music is cued, blaring Broadway show tunes, which this season is most often the cast recording of *My Fair Lady*. Ed is careful to announce after he suspects my interest in this practice, "For the record, this is my wife's CD." Furthermore, the Swine by Design manual, which Andrew wrote and is the bible of the team, containing elaborate and exacting recipes, photographs of plate presentations, equipment checklists, Gantt charts of cooking times, and diagrams of site setups also includes instructions for garnishing. After step-by-step recommendations for cleaning the greens, ideas on keeping them fresh, and diagrams of how the meat should be placed in relation to the garniture, comes the admonition to, "Serve with a limp wrist."

Often when the team members perform what they see as "feminine" tasks, such as garnishing, their teammates take this as an invitation to engage in homoerotic banter. For example, Brian, seeing Ed arranging the floral centerpiece for the on-site judging table says, "Ed, you're gonna make somebody a good wife." Other men sashay and flirt with the "Garnish Fag," no matter who he is on the given weekend, and Andrew, as the leader of Swine by Design, will emphatically have nothing to do with the garniture, though he does the majority of plating the meat along with the "Garnish Fag."

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Throughout this discussion I have not mentioned Deirdre's role in all of this. I see Deirdre in a variety of roles throughout the season—-in two competitions as a team member, in one as a blind judge, and entirely absent for two others. The main reason I have not addressed her much in the sense of qualifying the above discussion about the performance of masculinities on site, is simply because I do not see her as changing things much. Deirdre is not tasked with roles more or less "womanly" than others, with two major exceptions. Once, during her first competition, she decides to polish the trophies in advance of the onsite judging, which the team typically does not do, and Brian comments that it's good they have a "woman's touch" for that. At the same competition, Hugh asks Deirdre to serve the drinks to the judges, a particularly domestic role, significant, I think, in its public performance aspect. That is, working with the team day-to-day, she ices drinks, skins ribs, adds wood to the fire, and acts as "one of the guys." During the judging however, her position as woman on the team is highlighted to the point that, though she is the newest member of the team, and most of the team members are asked to leave the site after shaking the judges' hands, she is asked to play a more active but domestic role in the performance of the on-site judging process.

The Performance of Barbecue

Athleticism

Competition barbecue is hardly a sport in the conventional sense. There is a lot of sitting around, drinking beer and sports drinks, talking, and listening to music, and very occasional strenuous physical activity such as icing drinks with fifty pound bags of ice, carrying six ten-pound pork shoulders from the meat truck, or stooping at an odd angle to get the fire going. It may seem even more ridiculous to think that a competition devoted to sedentary activity and consumption of fatty meats, where competition seeds become available due to coronaries rather than injury, is anything but loafing. But in many ways, sport and athleticism are important aspects to the performance of competition barbecue. My field log begins: *I'm writing this on Tuesday because Monday I was dead to the world. My muscles were aching, my nose and throat were bathed in phlegm, the back of my neck and legs were enflamed with sunburn, and I had a headache. Rough weekend, huh? Was I hiking a remote mountain trail? Kayaking through rapids? Playing in a rugby tournament? No. I was doing qualitative research at the Barbecue Battle*.

Now admittedly I may not be the most robust of qualitative researchers but the point itself is important. Competition barbecue involves two full days of sun, smoke, heat, and physical activity, which, however light, is more than I did in two days of writing a field log, as well as, for smaller teams without

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distinct shifts, an overnight of hourly waking to check the meat and fire. It can be exhausting to the uninitiated. By the end of the season I came home without needing to recover, but also better knew how to pace myself during my observations—-keeping better hydrated, in the shade, and with my face further from the constant plume of smoke.

Even a casual observation at the competitions reassures me that others find these competitions deserving of the marker of a sport. Many teams, like Swine by Design, have team uniforms. In fact, Swine by Design has two sets of uniforms, a practice T-shirt, which they wear for cooking during the weekend, and a "game time" golf shirt for judging and awards ceremonies. Consistent with the team's style, Swine by Design uniforms are somewhat understated, with simply the team logo over the heart, but other teams' uniforms are much more elaborate. Many of the teams have "Pit Crew" emblazoned across their shirts, identifying them as a barbecue pit team member in a direct analogy to another sport with pits, auto racing. These teams are often the more entrepreneurial ones that sell T-Shirts without the "Pit Crew" designation to fans and visitors.

Like an organized sport, these competitions are held in conspicuous spectator-oriented places. The logical place to hold a competition for outdoor cookery might be a field or parking lot adjacent to a building, which could potentially provide water, electricity, restrooms, and shelter for the cooks. What we see instead are competitions held as major tourist attractions as downtown rejuvenation activities, chamber of commerce-sponsored events in small towns, or fundraisers for firehouses and other nonprofit organizations. Though the competition cooks do not typically offer tastes of their food, and indeed at some competitions are forbidden by local public health departments from doing so, these competitions are spectator events. There is ironically, for the most part, not much to see. Of the thirty-six or more hours of a competition, actual food handling where a spectator can see team members preparing meat might be only two or three hours in the aggregate. The remaining time meats cook slowly in a closed cooker. As a consequence, the actual "event" for the spectators often consists of commercially vended barbecue and other foods, live music, a beer garden at some competitions, seeing the awards ceremony, and glimpsing the teams in action. The teams, unable to show much "action," sometimes sell sauces, rubs, or memorabilia if allowed, and decorate their site to differentiate themselves from their competition.

The spectators' role at the competitions does much to change the dynamic of the team from one of pure recreation and competitive spirit to one of crowd-pleaser. Many teams, like Swine by Design, use creative team names, signage, trophies, elaborate rigs, and memorabilia to draw interest in their site. Others, especially small teams with less time to spare, tend to discourage tourist traffic by maintaining a relatively low profile through a more utilitarian design and minimal signage. Some members of Swine by

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Design like Frank and James are happy to stand atop the rig and people-watch, not looking to engage with the crowd. Others, like Brian, are game for conversation and explaining the Swine by Design process, even spending downtime in front of the rig on the main fairways, inviting questions and comments from the public. Still others, in this case, Hugh, says all of my questions, observations, and interest come down to one thing:

Barbecue chicks
Groupies
That's the answer to everything
That's why we do it
That's why our wives don't like it
That's why we spend the money
The team a few down
Last year at this competition they had girls all over the place
One of them bent one over the cooker and was fucking her up the ass that night
We were dying laughing
I wanted to warn the judges "you might want to skip theirs"
That's it
It all comes down to barbecue chicks

While Hugh might truly believe that "barbecue chicks" are the *raison d'etre* of Swine by Design, as his spoken voice expressed, the individual or collective food voices of the group do not reinforce his comment. At no point in any of the competitions was Swine by Design visibly admired by groupies of any persuasion beyond general interest inquiries such as "What's cooking?" or "What kind of wood do you use?" But Hugh's comment is too emphatic—not to mention graphic—to be dismissed. What Hugh sees, I think, is the masculine team sport element of mild-mannered architects suiting up for the game to become perceivably admired masculine heroes, wanted by women and envied by men. In the same way that a group of men in public is quite unremarkable but the same group of men in fire service uniforms, football team uniforms, or even club uniforms take on another aura entirely, so does the competition team of Swine by Design represent a set of ideals and mythologies separate from and not necessarily representative of the individual players.

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Showmanship

The team name, Swine by Design, alludes to a dichotomy that runs as an undercurrent throughout the competition barbecue world. There is levity, a considerable amount of self-parody, and a high social value placed on the "sport" of competition barbecue, as reflected by their spoken voice team names, while at the same time these teams are investing huge sums of time, money, and energy into the competition and want to win for prize money, esteem, and entry into national forums, which is reflected in their food voice. At the conclusion of a cook's meeting later in the season, a contest organizer summarizes this dichotomy in his conclusion to the meeting, "All you new teams, if you have any questions, there's a lot of teams here that have done this competition before. Ask 'em. There's not a team here that won't help you out. I strongly recommend, however that you *not* accept any unsolicited cooking advice." Zeke reinforces this statement from the back of the tent, yelling, "Hey, I hear the judges like things really black and charred this year."

The other important dichotomy that shows itself repeatedly in competition barbecue is the different way that the team has to behave when they are competitor versus a public spectacle. With the exception of extroverted Brian, Swine by Design is not a showy team, preferring to let their considerable mass of trophies speak for them, and often covering the front entrance to their site with the banners of their corporate sponsors, rather than encouraging spectators to approach. Other teams' members stand to the front of their site, hawking merchandise, answering questions, and generally being crowd pleasers. Swine by Design has much less tolerance for this. Andrew nearly loses his composure, when, trying to restart some dying coals with an electric fan, a woman walking by says, "You should use water to put that fire out." Andrew comments through clenched teeth that he wants to get the fire going, providing a mini-lecture on the physics of fire.

The team seems to be in a difficult situation in that they need the public for cash prizes garnered from admission fees, public support for permits and street closings to accommodate the competitions, and awareness, especially valuable to the corporate sponsors, but are really there to compete rather than to entertain. This issue increases in tension at some competitions over others. At one competition in a major city, a US seven dollar admission fee is charged to the general public, and while many visitors assume it includes all-you-can eat samples from the teams, the health department has threatened disqualification and fines to any team giving samples as only licensed caterers are allowed to distribute food in that locality. The paying visitors, however, do not understand the seriousness and gravity of the order, nor do the homeless people congregating along the fence behind the sites, begging for food as

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pounds and pounds of leftover meat goes to waste, sitting in the heat, swarming with flies after the boxes have been submitted for judging. Brian tells me that after the awards are announced he tries to feed anyone who asks, but that it would be a shame if slipping someone a rib had the team disqualified.

Design and Gadgetry

Another important aspect to the performance of competition barbecue for Swine by Design is the actual role of design in their cooking. As James mentions, as white collar, largely design professionals, Swine by Design differentiates itself from the competition. But does their professional orientation actually influence their barbecue or team dynamics as their name suggests? Hugh is quick to dismiss this line of thinking:

No
It's a gimmick
It makes us stand out as different
Gives the judges something for the judges to remember us by
You know, at [some] competitions
Because you get points for showmanship
And the design thing let's us do that without being too tacky
But the meat is the same

If you have a good look
And what being an architect does for us
I would like to think it gives us a little bit of credibility
And that we're just not a bunch of people that decided to come in and cook something

You know we used to have a television
And a couch
We used to have a much more architectural look
But now what we do is we just incorporated the whole architecture thing into our spiel

Though Hugh—through his spoken voice—identifies the team's design orientation as a

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constructive gimmick but not necessarily influential to the way they operate, much of what I learned through listening to the food voice questions this idea. While the team realistically does not "design" its barbecue, much of what they do seems informed by their perspectives as design professionals.

All competition barbecue teams need to be organized. They are competing sometimes hundreds of miles from their homes, have a ten minute window of time in which to submit their entries for foods that take hours or even days to prepare, and are often operating in locations without access to supplies. Indeed, that is one reason teams, despite being competitors, support each other so much. Everyone forgets *something* sometime—-paper towels, plastic baggies, garbage bags, brushes, knives, and dishes move graciously from rig to rig. Other teams I spoke with use checklists, post-it notes, and timers to keep them organized and on schedule, but Swine by Design seems to take organization to a new level. In the week before a competition the team's organizer for that particular contest distributes a large spreadsheet file to the team by email. The heart of the file is a Gantt chart with a bar for each member of the team and a timeline from competition commencement to finish. Each team member is assigned a shift and at various times throughout each shift are tasks for the team members: "3:00 Start Cooker, 5:00 Start Shoulders, 8:00 Rotate Shoulders, 5:00 Foil Shoulders," and so on. From this chart team members know days in advance who they will be working with, what they will be expected to do, and who will be working the other shifts. Another page of the file itemizes each piece of equipment every team member is expected to bring, and still another shows the schematic floor plan of the site setup, drawn to scale using architectural tools. A master copy of these spreadsheets is kept in a fat Swine by Design binder which contains recipes, instructions, photographs, logistical information such as directions, parking permits, and hotel reservation numbers, and nearly every other imaginable bit of information.

But despite the team's obsessive organization, things go wrong. Brian recounts one incident:

Whoever put the recipes together
Misinterpreted one of the
Several of the
Ingredients
And
I don't know whether it was
It was
A little t big t tablespoon teaspoon thing
Or

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Or or or what
But it was something of that nature
And we didn't do worth a damn
And
After it was all done
We were all packed up and we were ready to leave
And we were sort of gathered in our
We had everything all folded up
And
We were really ready to pull out
And we were so shell shocked
That we opened up one of the boxes and started going through stuff
Trying to
Trying to
One decompress
And two debrief
Try to see if we couldn't sort out what happened
And we got back to the rub that we used
And it was the saltiest crap that ever was
And our stuff is *not* salty
And
And it's got a modicum of salt in it of course
Like every rub does
But it was just awful
[coughing]
And
We went this has got to be it
You know
Everybody
Everybody's tasting this the same way
And it was *disgusting*
We wouldn't have placed it either

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We were probably lucky to get the poor placement we did
And ah
So that was a lesson learned

And then we started
We started
You know
Kind of like when you lose something
Okay where did I have it last
What was I doing
Trying to think
Think your way backwards
Upstream
To the site of the disaster
And

Deirdre:
The lesson to that story is taste your food

Brian:
[whistles like a bomb dropping]
Yeah
True
Yeah
You're right

D: You know what I'm saying?

B: Yeah
You're right
Well that's the
Hmm

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Rub
[laughing]
Therein lyeth the
You're right

But the lesson to taste, despite being articulated through the spoken voices of Deirdre and Brian, was not learned, as evidenced by the food voice, during my time with Swine by Design. The field log explores numerous discussions that deal with the tension between what the spreadsheet determines is the appropriate time to do something and the team members' intuition, observation, or sense about the matter. In every instance, though, these discussions are philosophical and theory-based, rather than settled by tasting the meat in question.

In much the same way that the team emphasizes organization and thought, at times to the detriment of the sensory properties of the food itself, so does gadgetry play an important role in the mythology of the competition barbecue team, at times with a similar deference to the equipment in favor of the sensory considerations of the food itself. A neighboring team has a police light on a timer so that every forty-five minutes, no matter where on the grounds they are, someone is reminded to baste the meat. Swine by Design's new addition in gadgetry was a set of digital thermometers that wirelessly transmit temperature data to a remote location and be further enhanced by high- and low-range alarms for when the cooker or meat reach a certain temperature. Andrew tells Frank, "With this baby I can be asleep in the hotel room and be woken up when the meat's done." I find his spoken comment and the introduction of this new tool interesting for two reasons. First, Andrew seldom leaves the site and the thermometers are used to transmit from the cooker to the rig a few feet away. He seems to value the *potential* convenience of the tool. Second, the idea of technology, while to allow for greater ease and leisure becomes ridiculous when it is being used for what is strictly a leisure activity. The food voice reveals the team spending hours as is standing, sitting, talking, drinking, and checking thermometers, all quite voluntarily. Were the last part not necessary, they could *really* be doing the rest anywhere. That is to say, if every logical convenience were incorporated, the team would do what Andrew jokingly suggested-—buy barbecue and submit it for judging, saving them time, money, and energy, but which would no doubt be unfulfilling in other ways.

CONCLUSION

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By listening to the voices of the members of Swine by Design—spoken voice and food voice—many questions came to mind about the US institution of competition barbecue and those who participate in it. Consistent with qualitative research, these questions continue to emerge and definitive answers are absent. Why do these men really do this? How do the experiences of Swine by Design compare to other teams? What would a predominantly female team's food voice say? How will the team evolve over time? What is the symbolic meaning of barbecue in the US? How did competition barbecue come to be the spectacle it is today? What do the team members' food voices say about their identities as individuals and a team?

The conclusions that I submit, though, are that (1) applying the lens of the food voice to a group can be a useful analytical tool, (2) that looking at the foodways of a group can serve as a powerful and useful entry point to other issues such as personal and group identity, gender, race and ethnicity and class, and (3) that in light of the first two conclusions, food habits of any individual or group must be studied—often, continually, and well.

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