

The reappropriation of the meaning of food and fine dining through US city lifestyle and luxury magazine's coverage

Denisse Acosta

Florida International University

Abstract

This paper examines how the textual language used in three US city luxury lifestyle magazine's food and dining section spreads the concept of the meaning of food and fine dining through reappropriation. Using textual analysis, the author evaluates content in three issues from St. Louis magazine, Milwaukee's Lifestyle magazine and New Orleans Magazine. The findings show that these magazines emphasize the reappropriation of the meaning of food from upscale and fine dining restaurants because they want to appeal to the masses of wealthy, educated, and healthy conscious readers, that have the means to spend money at these restaurants, because they want to capitalize. This leads to creating boundaries between social and economic classes and, furthermore, enforces the capitalist

ideology in which media sets, redefines and spreads food appropriations to audience for profit.

Keywords

Food meaning reappropriation, luxury and lifestyle magazine, cultural appropriation, fine dining, food news

Intro

Aside from a city's daily newspaper, a lifestyle and luxury magazine is one of the most influential and viewed localized news media coverage in a community. "As "collectibles," magazines are commodities, arguably more so than newspapers (which don't cost as much, and their purchase is often thought of as a duty or habit rather than choice) or television news (which is technically free.) Therefore, many critics consider them a commercial venture, pop culture for sale with content devised for profit, rather than a form of journalism." (Kitch, 2005, pg. 8) The dominant elite society look for these magazines to tell them what's new, where it is they need to shop and eat, and where they can spend a big amount of money for entertainment. This gives lifestyle and luxury magazines the opportunity to capitalized and use the power given to them to appeal to the masses of wealthy, educated, and socially privileged individuals.

In a sense, these magazines help create and define some of the cultural identities of these cities. This is caused through cultural appropriation, which

“refers to a particular power dynamic in which members of a dominant culture take elements from a culture of people who have been systematically oppressed by that dominant group.” (Johnson 2015) This is not to say that the dominant culture’s act of oppression to the other culture is always done maliciously but things to take into account are traditions, beliefs, the history and political power struggles.

By evaluating how these magazines cover certain topics and issues, through textual analysis, it will show an insight on how the reinforcement of food and fine dining reappropriation is made.

The magazine maintains the readers’ loyalty by the type of language they use in their stories. This occurs because “their editors and writers address readers in a conversational way, anticipating their reactions and incorporating their impressions.” (Kitch 2005, pg. 9) This establishes the authority the magazine writers have to redefine the meaning of American life (Kitch 2005, pg. 9) and contributes to the branding of “the branded ‘lifestyle’ of a given metropolitan region” (Greenberg 2000, pg. 231).

We look to the cities demographics to show what they are accustomed to and what identifies them. “By emphasizing some qualities of cities and ignoring others, lifestyle and luxury city magazines overlook opportunities to offer alternative interpretations,” in this case, different appropriations for food and fine dining. (Jenkins 2014, pg. 2) This also helps the writers and editors behind the magazines

give a voice to the concepts of the reappropriation of the meaning of food, culture appropriation and reinforces the capitalist ideology that will create some of the boundaries between the rich upper class and the people not considered in that category.

Background

Demographics-

St. Louis has a population of 317,419 people in 2014, which is 43.5% white, 47.9% black, 3.7% Latino, .3% American Indian, 3.1% Asian and 2.3% two or more races. (US Census 2014) St. Louis magazine has a total circulation of 208,058 and a monthly circulation of 50,000. It's the oldest magazine in New Orleans and has the second largest paid subscriber base after the daily newspaper. The magazine is owned by Ray Hartmann and Mark Vittert and has been published since 1995. Since 2004, earned 12 City & Regional Magazine Awards and 5 Rarly Awards.

Milwaukee has a population of 599,164 in 2013, which is 44.8% white, 40% black, 17.3% latino, .8 American Indian, 3.5% Asian and 3.4% two or more races. (US Census 2013) Milwaukee's Lifestyle Magazine has a readership of 105,039 and average monthly circulation of 105,039.

New Orleans has a population of 378,715 in 2013, which is 33% white, 60.2% black, 5.2% latino, .3% American Indian, 2.9% Asian and 1.7% two or more races.

(US Census 2010) New Orleans Magazine has a monthly circulation of 30,176. The magazine is owned by Renaissance Publishing LLC, which is locally owned by Todd Matherne, Errol Laborde and Alan Campell.

- Perceived dominant audience

St. Louis Magazine has an audience of 31% male and 69% female, 62% are ages 25-54, 63% earn more than \$100,000 and 82% have advanced degrees. St. Louis magazine is distributed in luxury hotels, spas and organic food markets.

Milwaukee's Lifestyle Magazine has an audience of 28% male and 72% female, 52% are ages 25-54, 86% have an annual household income between \$75,000 and over \$200,000, 69% have advanced degrees and 95% of readers who indicated they plan to spend in dining services in the next 12 months. Milwaukee's Lifestyle Magazine is distributed in over 1,000 medical facilities, health clubs and spas, guest rooms at Milwaukee's highest-end hotels and members of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce receive the magazine in their offices.

New Orleans Magazine has an audience of 33% male and 67% female, 75% are ages 25-54, the average household income is \$188,919 and 65% have advanced degrees. This magazine, like the other two, focuses their distribution in spas, luxury hotels and food markets.

Lifestyle and luxury magazines focus on reporting news to appeal to the idealistic community, which isn't concerned with other traditions, money, culture and authenticity, especially when it comes to the food they eat. Herbert Gans (1979, 61) supports this when he notes, "the news pays most attention to and upholds the actions of elite individuals and elite institutions. It would be incorrect to say that the news is about elites per se or a single elite; rather, the news deals mostly with those who hold the powerful within various national or societal strata." In the topic of food and dining the writers of these magazines are concerned with what the rich dominant population will want to consume and influences where and what they eat. The writers do this by using text to re-identify with ingredients and relating them to aspects that is geared for their target audience to understand.

Luxury lifestyle magazines depict a sense of reappropriation of food to reinvent and to benefit from their wealthy, educated, white audience and to gain power and profit.

Method

The author chose to focus on these three us cities, St. Louis, Milwaukee and New Orleans, because they are not global cities. The fact that they are not global cities helps simplify and prevents added influence that global cities have by capital markets and other countries. These cities are similar in population and racial demographic make up and that is important because that keeps two key factoring variables constant.

Lifestyle and luxury magazines were chosen as the media outlet of preference in this analysis because it intentionally focuses their news content on a specific social and economic class, which is associated with being educated, having money, power and being superior to the population that has a different income. One popular lifestyle and luxury magazine was chosen from each city with all of them having a similar perceived dominant audience.

Three issues from each publication were picked and analyzed using textual analysis based on the month of the year. January, March and July issues were picked to represent each seasonal change of the year: winter, spring and summer. The most recent issues of the year 2015 were analyzed to ensure the relevancy of the content being reported.

Of the main topics written in these magazines, local fashion, dining, culture, home and medicine, this paper focuses on the reporting of new dining trends and food. Textual analysis “is a methodology – a data-gathering process – for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live.” (Mckee 2003) Textual analysis is used in this paper to evaluate the different magazine issues and to interpret the meaning of the language used in the food and dining articles to get a better understanding of how boundaries are created between the people of these cities.

Photographs were also analyzed to determine quality of images, placement of people and objects, if the people in the images are racially diverse and the message the visual is depicting. Also, the photographs were analyzed to determine whether they supported the context and language used in the articles or whether they provided a different narrative to the pieces.

Analysis and Discussion

In St. Louis Magazine's January 2015 issue, "Puttin' on the Ritz" article, The Grill at The Ritz-Carlton was featured and the writer, David Lowry, used an interesting metaphor to highlight this restaurant. He focused on his opinion that the dining experience at the Grill, including the furniture, was like walking through an art exhibit. He emphasizes several dishes, one of which is "a simple appetizer of three versions of hummus is rendered like a sculpture." The image taken of this appetizer provided a colorful array of three different ingredients used to make the hummus, according to the caption of the image: "lentil, red and classic varieties. The author's interest in cooking and recipes caused to look up recipes for different ways and ingredients to make hummus. Then, the author stumbled upon an article in Saveur, which a reader, Alia Yunis, submitted her family's "authentic" and "classic" hummus recipe. She talked about a moment of a cultural clash in her family.

Alia Yunis talks about how her brother's Polish-American girlfriend proudly served black bean hummus to her Palestinian-Lebanese mother. Yunis recalls her mother's reaction to her brother's girlfriend black bean hummus, she says, "Why

do Americans have to mix every-thing up until you can't even tell what it is?" Yunis polled her Arab-American friends who confirmed what the traditional way of making hummus is and what ingredients it did not include. (Yunis 2011)

Upon reading this piece the author decided to search the history and origins of hummus. Within the research it was learned that hummus means chickpea in Arabic and that there is a war between Israel and Lebanon "over the national identity of hummus." (Ariel 2012, pg 34) Ariel notes that, "as foods become increasingly global and foodways are gradually homogenized, national groups affirm their distinctiveness through assertions of food authenticity." (Ariel 2012, pg 34)

In "Just Eat It: A Comic About Food and Cultural Appropriation" the terms are explained through a sense of humor. The artist shows three people, appearing to be Vietnamese, Indian and Hispanic, their first names are all a dish of the places they are from. In this comic he talks about how white people look to their "exotic" friends to define and determine the authenticity of a dish. The friend's thoughts and judgment are taken into account only until they are no longer deemed valid by what appears to be a more valid source. But, some white people don't understand that their friends from foreign countries have been living in the states for so long that they are not considered authentic to their own people. Even so, white people still look for the food and cultural appropriations of their friends to identify the truth. Meanwhile, the ultimate goal for these people is to be considered "global citizens and eaters without borders." (Ho 2015)

Sometimes, I feel like you care about our food more than you care about us.

Like we're a collection of authentic ethnic food advice, not people.



You'll take my thoughts into account until you find someone more authentic. I've lived in Los Angeles for ten years; my tastebuds must be undeniably corrupted by cheeseburgers and tacos and rotisserie chicken.

When I return to my birth country, they call me American. I myself am no longer authentic, no longer an exotically gleaming example to be worth a box on your cultural diversity bingo card.

And still - you look for this mythical authentic food, this white whale of your gastronomical adventure.



cultural diversity BINGO			
black friend!	cajita burrito	k-town karaoke	muslim friend.
chinese only menu	native friend.	yellow friend.	rosetta stone
read people's history	visit thailand	gay black friend.	date an asian
brown friend.	go to asian night	wear head scarf	eat weird sushi

That brings in question the use of the reappropriation of hummus as the appetizer at the Grill at The Ritz-Carlton. The chef of the grill is taking an inexpensive ingredient that's high in protein and reconstructing it as an Americanized version of a cultural dish used to identify a certain ethnic group and neglects what it means to this group to change and marginalize their identity for profit at an upscale dining restaurant. As Soleil Ho stated in her "Craving the Other" article, "American chefs like to talk fancy talk about "elevating" or "refining" third-world cuisines, a rhetoric that brings to mind the *mission civilisatrice* that Europe took on to justify violent takeovers of those same cuisines' countries of origin." (Ho 2015)

"Hummus was introduced to Americans by Arab immigrants under the wider category of "Middle Eastern cuisine," but it was not until Israeli entrepreneurs successfully marketed hummus through advertising in the media that hummus gained widespread popularity in the U.S. The cultural appropriation of hummus to fit the tastes of American consumers created a subgroup of ethnic food enthusiasts seeking "real" hummus." (Jacob 2012)

What westerners think of hummus is as a much healthier version of a dip. Americans have reappropriated the term dip and its meaning to fit this healthy alternative. Dip has the connotation of being rich and fattening and instead of indulging in a highly processed mix of ingredients, people choose hummus, which

people assume is healthy. Example, when you have a party and offer dip to a friend and they say “do you have hummus instead?”

The writer talks about an appetizer served at the Ritz Carlton “Teardrop ramekins of the stuff are neatly arranged on a rectangular plate, with angular points of pita alongside for dipping.” (Lowry 2015) Once again aiding in the continuation of it being identified as a dip. This appropriation of hummus is used to appeal to the healthy conscious and pockets full of money readers that these lifestyle and luxury magazines aim to profit from. An interesting point Ho makes in her article to support the reappropriation of the meaning of food is, “The positioning of Western aesthetics as superior, or higher, than all the rest is, at its bottom line, an expression of the idea that no culture has value unless it has been “improved” by the Western Midas touch. If a dish hasn’t been eaten or reimagined by a white person, does it really exist?” (Ho 2015)

In Milwaukee’s Lifestyle Magazine January 2015 issue there is a feature, which focuses on private dining. David Magnasco, took the fine dining experience to the next level when he opened his restaurant, The Chef’s Table, “Milwaukee’s first fully private dining experience.” (Fiorita 2015) Just to be able to reserve Magnasco, guests need to have the funds and means to spend a bare minimum of \$2,500 otherwise it’s not possible to experience a private dining experience. Only the readers of the elite status have the leisure to spend that much money on a dinner.

In addition, Magnasco makes sure to state that he intentionally choose not to add a sign to the exterior of restaurants to add a sense of exclusivity and “v.i.p.” treatment to his guests. Magnasco adds, that he also locks the doors of his restaurant after all guest have arrived to keep anyone from wandering in. Which sets this idealistic way of life for the readers of this magazine: the only way to dine is to have a private chef prepare a meal in front of you and your friends, to show privilege. The fact that no one else is allowed negates a sense of community and continues to set boundaries between the rich upper class and other members of the community.

In the March 2015 issue of Milwaukee’s Lifestyle Magazine a fine dining restaurant staff focused on the preparations they take for guests who dine in their restaurant. One method is that they make sure to do research on their guests, specifically the elite upper class. According to an article by Vicky Gan, “whenever you book a table at an upscale restaurant, expect to be Googled before you show up for dinner. If that preemptive sleuthing creeps you out, you’re in the minority.”

Not only do the writers of this magazine set, redefine and spread the reappropriation of the meaning of food and the fine dining experience but also they show favoritism for establishments that will take the time to seat you appropriately and “google” guests to appeal to the wealthy masses.

As a counter narrative to the way the writers of these magazines feature food and dining they could provide features that will appeal to different economic and social classes. They could also use different language that can be understood by all people, even those that are not educated. Instead of, lifestyle and luxury magazines capitalizing and using the power given to them to appeal to the masses of wealthy, educated, and socially privileged individuals, they will appeal to all individuals.

Resources

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