



# From meat and potatoes to “real-deal” rotis: Exploring everyday culinary cosmopolitanism

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to broaden our understanding of the lived experience of cosmopolitanism and to expand the notion of multiple everyday cosmopolitanisms. Drawing from 40 semi-structured interviews with 20 families living in Toronto and Vancouver, we propose examining cosmopolitanism as a type of cultural repertoire that contains a range of cosmopolitan eating practices. Based on an in-depth reading of these interviews, we map out three modes of cosmopolitan consumption: a knowledge-focussed connoisseur mode, a pragmatic mode centred in lived experiences and social connections, and a tentative mode of engagement with cosmopolitan culture and cuisine. This research questions the idea of cosmopolitanism as a homogenous cultural practice or as a purely elite phenomenon. At the same time, we also demonstrate how cultural and economic capital are concentrated in and associated with certain cosmopolitan cultural styles and practices.

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## 1. Introduction

Cosmopolitans have a reputation for being open-minded and elite. Cosmopolitanism is generally understood as a disposition and an aptitude to embrace cultural differences across national borders. This disposition is most often attributed to classes with the cultural and material resources necessary to travel and take a leisurely interest in the cultures of others (Atkinson, 2011; Binnie et al., 2006; Cheyne and Binder, 2010; Hannerz, 1990). But in an age of highly globalized flows of culture, commodities and people, does this elite association hold? We address this question by looking at everyday culinary cosmopolitanism in two globalized urban centres:

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Toronto and Vancouver. In such cosmopolitan urban spaces, we suggest that scholars can better understand everyday cosmopolitan culture by studying people's relationships to the myriad food options on offer—choices that include everything from Korean food trucks to Indian thali to Parisian macarons. While cosmopolitan culture is an integral part of day-to-day experiences in large global cities, especially as seen through the globally diverse food items on restaurant menus, cultural stratification theories suggest that different classes and social groups experience everyday cosmopolitanism differently. It is precisely the everyday, stratified nature of cosmopolitanism that we interrogate in this article.

Our emphasis on the everyday lived experiences of cosmopolitanism draws from the trend in social theory that attempts to “enliven” our scholarly understandings by “injecting living, breathing, feeling bodies into social methods and conceptual frameworks” (Carolan, 2011, p. 9). As such, cosmopolitanism can be viewed not simply as a set of intangible ideals (e.g., global democracy, or universal human rights), but as a mode of everyday cultural consumption that is “articulated, embodied, and materialized” (Skey, 2012, p. 473). In other words, contemporary cosmopolitanism is not an empty abstraction, but an important part of everyday lived experience—particularly in global cities characterized by regular flows of people, culture, commodities, and ideas across transnational borders. The intensity and the span of global cultural flows today lend credence to the idea of “cosmopolitanism. . . as the cultural habitus of globalisation” (Devadason, 2010, p. 1). Cosmopolitan taste preferences obviously can be applied to a range of cultural items (e.g., music, art, travel), but in this article, our focus is food. We examine the everyday eating practices of urban Canadian families from diverse class backgrounds to see how cosmopolitanism manifests in lived experiences with cooking and eating.

While cosmopolitanism has historically been associated with the “mobile” and “wordly” upper classes (Cheyne and Binder, 2010; Hannerz, 1990; Skey, 2012), contemporary cosmopolitanism cannot be simply discounted as a practice enjoyed exclusively by transnational elites—even though the world's richest 0.1% undoubtedly have a distinct experience of cosmopolitan consumption. Scholars like Lamont and Aksartova (2002) have shown that non-elite socio-economic and cultural groups can engage with cosmopolitanism, albeit differently than dominant groups. Using interview data on everyday eating practices, we develop Lamont and Aksartova's insight further by mapping three key modes of everyday cosmopolitan consumption. Our analysis moves away from a dichotomous characterization of cosmopolitanism that juxtaposes the “cosmopolitan” and the “non-cosmopolitan,” and, instead, establishes cosmopolitanism as a kind of cultural repertoire (Lamont, 1992, 2000; Swidler, 1986, 2001).

To be clear, our aim in this article is not to classify people as cosmopolitan or non-cosmopolitan (Skey, 2012, p. 473). Rather, we examine cosmopolitanism as it is articulated through different modes of food consumption. This research questions the idea that cosmopolitanism is a purely elite practice, but critically, we also show how certain types of cosmopolitan consumption are interconnected with class and taste hierarchies. High cultural and economic capital remain concentrated in and associated with certain kinds of cosmopolitan consumption, in spite of the permeability and expansiveness of culture across national borders. Cosmopolitan food consumption certainly is not limited to globetrotting elites, but our data suggest that cosmopolitanism can operate with, and reinforce, taste hierarchies documented and analysed by sociologists of art and culture. Certain types of cosmopolitan food knowledge and eating practices continue to be used as status markers—markers that resemble processes of status attainment and distinction theorized by Bourdieu (1984) and further elaborated by sociologists of culture in analyses of omnivore cultural consumption (Johnston and Baumann, 2010; Ollivier, 2008; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Rossman, 2008).

Drawing on 40 interviews and accompanying photographs on everyday food practices with 20 families from Toronto and Vancouver, this article deconstructs the ideal of cosmopolitanism by examining its operation in daily life. We begin by unpacking the concept of everyday cosmopolitanism used as a starting point for our analysis. We continue by arguing that culinary cosmopolitanism, like cultural omnivorousness, is part of a taste hierarchy. While suggesting an open stance to a variety of cuisines (or cultural products, in the case of omnivorousness), culinary cosmopolitanism operates as a form of distinction through specific mechanisms, including the continued valuation of European over other “ethnic”<sup>1</sup> cuisines and the significance of formal channels of cooking expertise as gateways to knowledge. We discuss key themes related to a range of cosmopolitan eating practices—from more intellectually curious, knowledge-oriented eating practices to tentative, less engaged eating practices. Using these themes, we map out three modes of engagement with cosmopolitanism that contribute to scholarly understanding of how cosmopolitan taste preferences take shape in everyday life, and how they are implicated in the reproduction of class and tastes hierarchies. More generally, our goal with this mapping of cosmopolitan modes of consumption is to build on and contribute to previous work seeking to move the field towards nuanced, non-dichotomous theories of cosmopolitanism (Lamont and Aksartova, 2002; Ollivier, 2008). We also hope to emphasize two other points that seem critical to theorizing cosmopolitanism: acknowledging (1) both the agency and the inequality embedded in global cultural flows; and (2) the importance of studying how cosmopolitan culture is consumed, not just what kinds of culture are consumed (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 28–30; Friedman, 2012; Holt, 1998).

## 2. Everyday cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism has been theorized extensively and diversely. Recent research examines how this concept is explored and understood as “cosmopolitanism on the ground” (Calcutt et al., 2009) rather than at the abstract level of “global citizenship” or “boundarylessness.” This growing body of literature recognizes the importance of mapping the conceptual underpinnings and political implications of cosmopolitanism, but focuses on grounded instances of cosmopolitanism as it is manifested in everyday encounters (Binnie et al., 2006, pp. 89–111; Calcutt et al., 2009, p. 173; Johnston et al., 2009, p. 163; Oleschuk, 2012, p. 126). The work of Lamont and Aksartova (2002) on working men’s “cosmopolitanisms” across national and ethnic boundaries contributes to this research by pointing to the ways that ordinary people use different types of cosmopolitanism to bridge differences between themselves and others, and it moves scholarship away from more abstract conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism found in the work of authors like Beck (2006a,b). Similarly, Duruz’s (2005) examination of the “complicated allegiances” to the local and the global that develop in the context of everyday spaces in multiethnic shopping streets and neighbourhoods in London, England and Sydney, Australia also focuses on this idea of lived cosmopolitanisms. In interviews with women who reside near these neighbourhoods and shop there regularly, Duruz (2005) uncovers engagements, or “entanglements” with varied conceptions of cosmopolitanism (see also Pollock et al., 2000).

Food is an ideal vehicle for studying the meanings of cosmopolitanism in everyday life because it stands at the crossroads of daily sustenance and cultural identity. Studies like Johnston et al.’s

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term “ethnic” foods to connote foods that draw from ethnocultural traditions outside the Anglo-European mainstream. We do not use square quotes around the term “ethnic” for reasons of readability, but we would like to signal our awareness of the problematic Eurocentricity of this term at the outset.

(2009) examination of American foodways point to the ways abstract notions like the “national” and the “nation” appear and are reproduced through daily practices like eating. This work draws from Billig’s (1995, p. 6) insights on “banal nationalism”—which insists that ideological notions of the “nation are not removed from everyday life,” but rather, “the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged’, in the lives of its citizenry” on a daily basis. As the counterpoint to nationalism in food, cosmopolitan eating can also be framed as a form of “banal cosmopolitanism” (Beck, 2002; Kuipers and de Kloet, 2009, p. 101)—that is, as “a set of ideas that structure everyday lives, identities and cultural practices” (Johnston et al., 2009, p. 163). The concept of banal cosmopolitanism reminds us that globalization’s trademark flows of people, commodities, and culture across national borders is not an abstract occurrence, but is “flagged” on a daily basis through everyday acts like eating. Food serves as a clear marker of banal cosmopolitanism, not simply through its material existence (e.g., the global *mélange* of commodities that may appear on a Toronto dinner table), but through its symbolic presence as globalized taste preferences.

Together, this literature leads us to suggest that cosmopolitanism is neither a dichotomous, static condition nor a normative ideal. We lose analytic depth and complexity when we conceptualize cosmopolitanism as an idealized orientation of multicultural openness that one either possesses or lacks. Instead, when examined through the lens of people’s lived experience, cosmopolitanism can be usefully conceptualized as one component of a broader cultural repertoire. The concepts of “tool kit” (Swidler, 1986, 2001) or “cultural repertoire” (Lamont, 1992, 2000) contest the interpretation of culture as a unified system dictating social action, and they emphasize how people, in daily interactions, creatively, and actively employ culture. In keeping with the idea of a cultural repertoire, our understanding of cosmopolitan eating emphasizes how it involves a multiplicity of cultural practices (e.g., preparing Indian food at home or eating at a taco stand) and a range of knowledge (e.g., recognizing the differences between various French cheeses or knowing how to eat Ethiopian stews with injera). Cosmopolitan culinary practices, and cosmopolitan experiences more generally, are cultural products of contemporary globalization processes—the output of a historical moment where capital, people, and culture move voluminously across national borders. This does not make cultural repertoires of cosmopolitanism inevitable or uniform. Not everybody has equal access to cultural repertoires of cosmopolitanism, and their application takes various forms. However, in the contemporary context of economic and cultural globalization, the cultural tools of cosmopolitanism involve a degree of agency—they can be actively sought out and creatively employed in everyday life. Our task in this article is to shed light on the agentic employment of cosmopolitan cultural repertoires—while being mindful of how access to these repertoires, and the capacity to employ them correctly and skilfully, is shaped by economic and cultural privilege. By studying how cosmopolitan eating is articulated and understood by urban dwellers in Toronto and Vancouver, we hope to add greater nuance to our understanding of the availability and variability of cosmopolitan repertoires in everyday lived experience.

### 3. Cosmopolitanism as part of a taste hierarchy

#### 3.1. *Cosmopolitanism and omnivorousness*

We suggest, as others have, that there are important parallels between cultural omnivorousness and cosmopolitan eating (Skrbis et al., 2004; see also Holt, 1998; Skey, 2012). While our task in this article is not to document omnivorousness amongst our participants, these parallels can enrich our understanding of what cosmopolitanism is, and why it matters. For that reason, we

briefly outline the connection between cosmopolitanism and the literature on omnivorous cultural consumption.

We start with a basic question: What do sociologists mean when they use the term “omnivorousness,” and how does it relate to food choices? In recent decades, the empirical link between high status cultural consumption and highbrow people, or elites (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Levine, 1990) has been progressively displaced by studies that connect high status with omnivorous cultural consumption (e.g., Johnston and Baumann, 2010; Peterson and Kern, 1996; but see Atkinson, 2011; Friedman, 2012). The omnivore thesis proposes that consumers are increasingly moving towards the consumption of cultural products from a wide variety of cultural genres and that the homology between high-class status and highbrow cultural consumption documented by Bourdieu (1984) in 1960s French society has broken down. In North American contemporary culture, persons wishing to express their higher status do not exclusively gravitate towards “highbrow” cultural products like opera or modern art.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, these status-seeking individuals consume both highbrow and lowbrow cultural products. Peterson and Kern (1996, p. 906) connect this increase in omnivore tastes to the spread of globalization, and indeed, the cultural products consumed across brow levels frequently transcend national and culinary national boundaries (Johnston and Baumann, 2010).

A key element of the emerging research on omnivorousness is that omnivore tastes are not random, nor are they devoid of patterns. Particular rules govern preferences for omnivorous cultural products. Johnston and Baumann’s (2010) research on omnivorous food consumption found that these tastes often valorize border-crossing, cosmopolitan foods that are considered new, “authentic,” and “exotic.” Choosing to eat authentic roti or to taste exotic beef tongue tacos is not just a celebration of rustic eating or unusual foods. These choices point to the ways that certain foods are valued and legitimized in omnivorous culinary discourse, through logics validating authenticity and exoticism more specifically. These choices are opposed to old-fashioned snobbery, but are still connected to elite processes of status and distinction (Johnston and Baumann, 2010, pp. 94–95), and involve very specific ways of legitimating culture as high status. Consider the omnivore preference for authentic foods and cultural experiences. The concept of authenticity is certainly complex and often contradictory (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Zukin, 2008), but the search for culinary authenticity has a certain pattern. Omnivores’ interest in culinary authenticity is flagged by displaying a distrust of mass-produced industrial food and by a complimentary valuation, and even fetishization, of foods (and food knowledge) connected to a specific geographic location, historical tradition of production (preferably non-industrialized), and/or a specific ethnocultural grouping (Johnston and Baumann, 2010, pp. 69–96). Culinary authenticity often overlaps with the valuation of exoticism, as seen in the high status given to foods like small-batch heritage cheeses linked to a remote people raising a rare breed (Paxson, 2006; West and Domingos, 2012). In contrast, low cultural status is given to inauthentic, unexotic foods that are mass-produced, commonplace, and lack connection to a specific place—like fast-food (Johnston et al., 2012). Below, we explore how certain cosmopolitan eating practices are overlaid with an omnivorous valuation of exoticism and authenticity and, thus, function as status markers—they provide a way of re-creating cultural hierarchies around food, even as status hierarchies may appear to be diminishing in omnivorous times.

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<sup>2</sup> Omnivorous cultural consumption has also been observed outside of North America—for example in France (see Coulangeon and Lemel, 2007), in the UK (see Friedman, 2012; Warde et al., 2008) and in the Netherlands (see van Eijck, 2001).

As concepts that highlight how people express cultural preferences, both omnivorousness and cosmopolitanism are concerned with breadth and variety of cultural consumption. Cosmopolitans and omnivores are likely to share tastes and preferences; indeed, some studies of cultural consumption and taste use “omnivorousness” and “cosmopolitanism” interchangeably, implying that they mean the same thing (Cheyne and Binder, 2010; Ollivier, 2008). Rather than collapsing the two, we treat these concepts as compatible and overlapping, but not identical. Where omnivorousness focuses on breadth in terms of cultural consumption from different high/low brow levels, cosmopolitanism primarily relates to breadth in terms of cultural consumption from a variety of cultures, both from within the state’s boundaries (for example, the cultures of different ethnic groups in Canada) and beyond. While the topic of omnivorousness inevitably relates to our findings on how cosmopolitan foods are experienced and validated, our primary focus in this article is cosmopolitan cultural tendencies (on the distinction between these terms, see Peterson, 2005, p. 260; for a fuller account of culinary omnivorousness, see Johnston and Baumann, 2010).

### 3.2. *Cosmopolitan openness and the exotic Other*

When research on omnivorousness replaced the conceptualization of the cultural “snob” with the newly articulated “omnivore,” elite status became associated with the willingness to explore and be open to a variety of cultural products, rather than just highbrow culture (Peterson and Kern, 1996). Yet as we state above, this does not mean that omnivores, or cosmopolitans are open to consuming anything. In her study of different modes of openness to diverse cultural forms, Ollivier (2008) questions whether omnivores necessarily demonstrate more open attitudes when discussing and justifying their tastes and preferences for diverse cultural products. Ollivier conceptualizes different modes of openness amongst omnivore consumers by classifying cultural consumers and practices, and she argues that openness to cultural diversity does not remove existing hierarchies of taste, but is embedded in pre-existing culture and taste hierarchies.

Building on Ollivier’s (2008) important work, we contend that the modes of cosmopolitan consumption we document and develop in this study can also be understood as part of broader taste hierarchies. Cosmopolitan eating practices are articulated in diverse ways and take on various meanings for different groups of respondents, yet these different cosmopolitan dispositions remain stratified forms of cultural valuation. While certain cosmopolitan eating practices and the “openness” they imply are valued and put forth as desirable qualities, it does not follow that this form of openness is equally available to all, or that it is politically “innocent.” Post-colonial theory since the seminal work of Edward Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* has drawn connections between the cultural construction of a mainstream “center,” and the images projected onto an exotic, Oriental “Other.”<sup>3</sup> As Bell Hooks (1992, p. 21) remarks, the search for the exotic Other can become “spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.” Previous research related to food suggests that the search for an exotic Other through food can serve as both a kind of “culinary colonialism” (Heldke, 2003, p. xv), and as a reinforcement of processes of status-seeking and distinction (Johnston and Baumann, 2010, p. 103). At the same time, we recognize in the politically fraught terrain of cultural colonialism interwoven in the search to consume the cuisine of exotic Others, it is important to be wary of the opposite pole of “food parochialism” (Narayan,

<sup>3</sup> In this article, we define “Other” as non-Canadian or North American cuisines, foods and recipes.

1997). In Narayan's (1997, p. 180) words, "a willingness to eat the food of Others seems to indicate at least a growing democracy of the palate."

This seemingly intractable divide between cosmopolitan foodways as "culinary colonialism" (Othering) or as "food democracy" (multiculturalism) cannot be easily resolved, as it embodies the tensions endemic to cultural consumption in a broader global context of racialized class inequality (Johnston and Baumann, 2010, p. 106). In our study, we wish to show how the lived experience of culinary cosmopolitanism sheds light on the ambiguous middle-ground of transnational cultural exchanges—an area structured by maldistributed power resources within and across national boundaries, but also marked by the valuation of, and desire for transnational cultural and culinary exchanges. As Narayan (1997, p. 161) writes, "thinking about food can help to reveal the rich and messy textures of our attempts at self-understanding, as well as our interesting and problematic understandings of our relationship to social Others."

#### 4. Research methods and data

The data for this article draw from interview and photographic data collected in the context of a multidisciplinary research project examining the influence of geographic and social factors on everyday eating practices and health behaviours. For this study, 105 families were interviewed in ten communities in rural, small town and urban Canada between 2007 and 2010. Families were recruited through advertising and word-of-mouth and were selected to ensure variety of family income, family type, age and gender of participants.<sup>4</sup>

In a first interview—using a semi-structured interview format—selected families were questioned on topics like typical eating habits and meals, food shopping, healthy eating and the influence of culture and upbringing on eating. At the end of this interview, participants were asked to take photographs of foods they ate regularly, enjoyed, or even disliked, and of the food places they frequented in their communities (restaurants, grocery stores, shops, etc.). During a second interview, respondents' photographs served as a starting point for discussion. Since interviewees' own photographs usually focalized on foods and food places that were comfortable for them, and because photographs were unique and difficult to compare across families, a second photo-elicitation activity was included in the study. In this activity, participants were asked to sort two sets of food photographs according to several criteria, including their degree of comfort (comfortable, neutral, uncomfortable) with different cuisines, restaurants and eateries. This sorting exercise prompted discussion on how respondents viewed the different cuisines and food places featured in the photo sets, and also highlighted their relative knowledge and ease with these foods and cuisines. Participants across all the sites were shown the same photographs.<sup>5</sup> In short, respondents developed distinct cosmopolitan "food voices" in their interviews and

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<sup>4</sup> Families in this study were recruited from ten different communities across four Canadian provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Nova Scotia) and included at least one teenager and one parent. To qualify for the study, participants had to be able to converse in English and to have lived in their present community for a minimum of two years. The call for participants did not specify that the family have a particular interest in food, but it is likely that at least some respondents were interested in the project because of their pre-existing interest in food.

<sup>5</sup> The use of photographs is a unique aspect of this study, designed to solicit ideas about food that exist at the level of practical consciousness. These photographs helped to complement data gathered through the interviews by bringing to light significant, but perhaps less conscious aspects of the everyday eating habits of participants. The first set of photographs depicted various dishes, and the second showed different food places.

photographs, pointing to the ways in which food tells a story about people's individual and group identities (Hauck-Lawson and Deutsch, 2009, pp. xiv–xv).

Interview and photographic data for the larger research project were archived, organized and coded using ATLAS.ti. We used ATLAS.ti to perform query searches on the data using preexisting codes that spoke to participants' openness to cosmopolitan foods and cuisines (e.g., codes for "cosmopolitanism," "othering" and "narrow repertoire"). We also carefully read the participants' interviews in their entirety to draw out further themes relating to cosmopolitan food practices—like travel or living abroad, knowledge, sense of adventure or curiosity about different foods. In our analysis of the transcripts and photographic materials, "cosmopolitan eating" was defined minimally to connote a heightened willingness and interest in engaging with varied cuisines outside the mainstream Canadian culinary canon, with its historic focus on Anglo-Canadian cuisine (described by participants as a "white-bread," or "meat and potatoes" food culture).

Our data analysis in this article focussed on a subset of participants living in three urban neighbourhoods: Riverdale and Parkdale neighbourhoods in Toronto, and the northern part of East Vancouver. These neighbourhoods provide an ideal context for the qualitative study of cosmopolitan consumption because they showcase an array of diverse restaurants, food shops and culinary ingredients literally at the doorsteps of the people who reside in them. Urban environments are most often linked to the availability of global culture, be it music, food or art (Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 2006). In a large city, accessibility to varied cuisines may appear self-evident, allowing us to pay attention to variances in how people consume cosmopolitan foods, rather than simply focussing on what they consume (Friedman, 2012; Holt, 1998). The three neighbourhoods were also chosen to reflect a variety of income levels, classes, ethnic diversity, and levels of gentrification.

It is worth briefly describing these three diverse neighbourhoods to situate how context and place affect cultural and cosmopolitan consumption in the city (Babon, 2006), and food practices and choices more specifically (Johnston et al., 2012). Riverdale, in the East end of Toronto, is a multicultural neighbourhood with varied income levels that is bordered by Danforth Avenue to the north and Gerrard Street to the south. The neighbourhood is especially known for its proximity to numerous restaurants along the Danforth (with a large, but not exclusive presence of Greek cuisine) and for a pocket of Asian stores and restaurants on Gerrard Street baptized "East Chinatown." Historically a working class neighbourhood, Parkdale, in the West end of Toronto, is less prosperous but rapidly gentrifying, and is home to a mix of low and high-income families from diverse ethnic groups. The area boasts a variety of restaurants and multicultural cuisines (e.g., Tibetan, Indian, French and Italian) in varying price ranges. The Northeast part of Vancouver includes a variety of residential and commercial areas, as well as a mix of different income levels and of types of housing. Commercial Drive, a street that is lined with multiethnic businesses, crosses the neighbourhoods in this area. In several neighbourhoods, English is only marginally more common than Chinese as the mother tongue. Our focus on these three urban sites allowed for a nuanced analysis of the different shades of cosmopolitanism that emerge in urban environments where diverse foods are widely available. We could then focus on the different ways cosmopolitan tendencies are understood by participants and related to their class background.

Our sample focuses on interviews with adults, rather than the teenage children who were also interviewed, because adult tastes were more established, autonomous and clearly articulated. Teenage tastes appeared more in flux, dependent on parental access and shaped by teen culture. We selected participants with Canadian-European backgrounds in order to create a culturally homogeneous sample that can be used as a baseline group with the aim of comparing this

culturally dominant group's cosmopolitan eating practices with the practices of other ethnic groups in the study's sample in future analyses. Our final sample was formed of nine families in Riverdale, six families in Parkdale, and five families in northeast Vancouver, for a total sample of 20 families. Class allocation for families in the study was determined primarily by considering the sources of people's income, namely, their occupation (Gilbert, 2008). (For a summary of demographic information, see Table A1 in Appendix A.) All participants were interviewed twice, and our final sample consists of 40 interview scripts.

## 5. Everyday cosmopolitan: an interpretive framework

Our analysis led us to understand cosmopolitanism as a type of cultural repertoire that contains different ways of articulating and engaging with cosmopolitan eating practices. We examined how people discuss diverse foods, cuisines and dishes in their day-to-day lives and how these “food voices” (Hauck-Lawson and Deutsch, 2009, pp. xiv–xv) were expressed through interview and photographic data. We quickly noticed that despite an urban environment that is eminently cosmopolitan—all respondents have geographic access to a wide range of ethnic foods, restaurants and cuisines—there are clear differences in how respondents engage with cosmopolitan eating. These differences clustered around how participants become familiar with varied foods and cuisines; the enthusiasm and deliberateness applied to culinary cosmopolitanism; the value and interest in authenticity; and the perceptions of ethnocultural Others. By comparing these themes, we mapped out a range of modes of consumption in a broader cosmopolitan repertoire that we label *connoisseur*, *pragmatic*, and *tentative*.

In this next section, we document the key ways these three modes of cosmopolitan consumption manifested in our interview data, and we analyse the status implications of these various modes. Some people participated in multiple modes of cosmopolitan consumption, making it difficult to classify participants exclusively within one mode, while other participants' views tended to congregate in a particular mode of consumption. In light of this, our framework is intended to reflect modes of engagement with cosmopolitan consumption, rather than categorize participants in the study.

### 5.1. *Connoisseur cosmopolitanism: pursuing and perfecting food knowledge*

Expert knowledge and the search for authenticity are key themes within a *connoisseur* cosmopolitan mode of consumption, and they suggest that similar processes of cultural hierarchy can be found across omnivorous and cosmopolitan consumption (see Holt, 1998, pp. 12–13; Johnston and Baumann, 2010). Here, the key characteristic is not so much what food is being eaten, but the manner in which the food item is researched, sought-out, and appreciated. Put more concretely, what distinguished a *connoisseur* mode of consumption is not whether a taco (or roti, or crêpe) is consumed, but how the taco is researched, legitimized and understood as authentic, exotic, and culturally interesting. As such, the *connoisseur* mode of engagement with cosmopolitanism has much in common with Bourdieu's (1984) ideas of an upper-middle class application of an “aesthetic disposition” to everyday cultural items, like food and home furnishings. Significantly, the *connoisseur* mode of engagement with cosmopolitanism is articulated most frequently by the upper-middle class voices in our sample, and not as strongly by the working class and underclass families. However, it is important to note that not all upper-middle class families engaged with *connoisseur* modes of cosmopolitanism. Put differently, we did not document a strict class homology in our study, where social class could be simply mapped

on to modes of cosmopolitan consumption. It is also important to note that although connoisseur practices involve the pursuit of knowledge about diverse global cuisines, knowledge of European cuisines appeared most highly valued amongst our participants, and those cuisines were given more culinary authority than cuisines originating in countries in the Global South. This finding is in keeping with other research documenting how gourmet food culture tends to legitimate weakly exotic foods (as opposed to foods that are extremely distant socially or geographically) (Heldke, 2003, p. 19; Johnston and Baumann, 2010, pp. 113–114).

Perhaps the most striking characteristic in the connoisseur mode of cosmopolitan consumption is the possession and showcasing of specialized, expert knowledge about global foods and cuisines. We observed this trait when participants vividly described the pleasures of learning about and researching different kinds of foods. Participants portrayed these food-related educational pursuits as meaningful, time-consuming and deliberate. This was signalled by elaborate descriptions of dishes and recipes, including rich detail about ingredients and methods. One participant, Brent Vernon, an architect from Vancouver, frequently articulated this aspect of a connoisseur mode of culinary cosmopolitanism. Brent photographed several French cheeses beside an open reference book on cheese. He also talked at length about his enjoyment reading and learning about cosmopolitan foods, saying that his family owned several reference books on cuisines and food which he used to “deepen [his] interest in [food].” For Brent, it is important “that there is not only the food in the house, but some books that tell you about the food too. . . . So we, you know, understand the life that, or the culture around the food. And that’s very interesting.”

Brent’s inclusion of a reference book into his food photographs speaks to the common connoisseur theme of seeking out expert food knowledge. This knowledge was often textual, coming from sources like food magazines, cookbooks and reference books, but it could also be attained more formally. Taking courses in cooking schools or with local chefs was described by some participants as an important route for knowledge acquisition of different cuisines—particularly cuisines from the European culinary traditions, like French or Italian cuisine, which are thought of as complex, canonical, and requiring formal instruction to execute properly (for a historical account of this tendency, see Mennell, 1996). Brandon Vessey, a 59-year-old upper-middle class father from Vancouver, explained that he took cooking classes “because [he] wanted to learn how to do French cooking,” and also spoke about taking French language classes in tandem with his cooking classes to enhance the depth of his learning experience. Similarly, Trish Rendell, a 43-year-old upper-middle class teacher, took a class on traditional French cooking at a college in Toronto because she wanted to improve her knowledge and ability to recognize foods and dishes in restaurants: “[what] I wanted from it was to be able to, you know, when I do go to a restaurant or out somewhere and I taste something and I have no clue how it was made to taste the way that it did, how do they do it?” For Trish, learning about French food is presented as a way to be more savvy and skilful in her home-kitchen as well as in a restaurant setting. Both Brandon and Trish are motivated to formally learn more about the techniques of French cuisine (and the French language) because they see this as a way to expand their knowledge base and personal expertise of this canonical European food tradition.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Thus, the interest in expert knowledge in the connoisseur mode has to do with getting “the right” recipe—i.e., the most authentic recipe that will allow the person cooking to make the dish properly and not just prepare an ersatz of a well-known dish. Experts are usually chefs, that is practitioners, who are sought out as knowledgeable sources of validated, authentic versions of recipes, and not necessarily for their approval as tastemakers, as Jamerson (2009) finds among certain wine consumers in her study of wine critics and symbolic boundaries.

A connoisseur approach views cosmopolitan foods—whether they are French, Thai, or Tibetan—as a potential source of “interesting,” “fascinating,” and aesthetically appealing food knowledge. The cuisine of social Others is regarded as a source of intellectual curiosity and exotic interest. In keeping with other research, we found that connoisseur cosmopolitan practices involved a strong appreciation of foods that have connotations of authenticity—for example, foods that are produced according to historical traditions, or foods linked to a specific geographic place or ethnocultural group (see Johnston and Baumann, 2010, p. 99). Even when the term “authentic” was not referenced by interviewees, it was clear that great importance was given to foods that are the “real deal,” as Therese Parsons, a 45-year-old upper-middle class woman from Toronto, put it. Finding the “best,” “truest,” and most authentic version of a food—like a tortilla, a roti or a churrasco chicken—was presented as an important culinary goal, and knowledge was key in achieving this goal. Trent and Tina Payne, an upper-middle class couple from Toronto, show this ability to discriminate between different types of foods and to recognize authentic versions of exotic foods when they talk about a famous roti shop near their home:

*Trent:* It’s [a famous roti shop] [near] our street so if you go up [name of street—explanation of location]. It’s the best.

*Tina:* It’s Guyanese roti so different than some of the Caribbean rotis and we’ve got friends who swear by other roti shops. We’re like no, no, no.

As shown in this quotation, consumption is highly selective in the connoisseur mode of cosmopolitanism. The objective is not simply to consume a cosmopolitan food item—like a roti—but to draw from one’s food knowledge to consume and appreciate the more legitimate, more authentic, and ostensibly more delicious version of the item. Put differently, connoisseur cosmopolitanism is not just about eating a roti, but how one can distinguish a particular roti as significantly different and unique. This mode of consumption often involves travelling to highly specific places in the city to get authentic food items that can be distinguished from mass-produced, more commonly found items bought in big box stores. For example, Therese Parsons rejects the idea of one-stop food shopping, and frames her choice to shop at a particular Latin American shop that sells tortillas as “just. . . an example of how I don’t just go to the one [grocery store].” Like I will look for places even if it’s out of my way The availability of these “authentic” food places is heightened in an urban environment, which makes the hunt for authentic cosmopolitan foods (e.g., handmade, small-scale, linked to a specific region or historic food tradition) more commonplace. Trent Payne describes a similar consumption pattern, when he discusses how his family actively seeks out authentic ethno-cultural eateries in Toronto’s ethnic neighbourhoods. Such places are actively researched and sought out because of their connection to a specific ethno-cultural food tradition: “. . . we search out some places. So there’s a great little Brazilian bakery up on Dundas Street. Every little neighbourhood, so maybe that’s one of the differences [in their distinctive eating style].”

In the connoisseur cosmopolitan mode of consumption, the interest in understanding, studying, and seeking out the best, most authentic foods works to create a high degree of comfort with different kinds of global cuisines. Within this mode, every cuisine can potentially be researched, understood, studied, and consumed. Participants who predominantly articulated a connoisseur mode of cosmopolitanism often claimed that they would be comfortable eating “anywhere” when shown photographs of different kinds of ethnic foods. Ted Rodger, a 52-year-old upper-middle class actor from Toronto exemplifies this sentiment when he says: “I’m

comfortable in a fancy place. I'm comfortable in foreign places. I'm comfortable with buffets<sup>7</sup>...anything that has wine or beer on the table, looks good to me. . .foreign place, fancy place. . ." Similarly, Tatjana Radanovic, a 53-year-old lower middle-class landscape architect says, "I love, I love all foods. Like all national, different national foods."

While knowledge can be used as a basis to potentially learn about and appreciate any kind of ethnic cuisine, this does mean that all variants of ethnic cuisines are viewed equally, or have equal legitimacy, in a connoisseur mode of consumption. The connoisseur mode involves knowledge of and appreciation for ethnocultural authenticity. This is used to establish distinctions between different versions of a same dish, and to reject "inauthentic," "place-less," mass-produced food items or restaurants. For example, when Bernice Valverde, a 43-year-old upper-middle class architect from Vancouver, looked at a photograph of a red checkered tablecloth aesthetic of an Italian restaurant, she suggested that she would not eat there if it was a clichéd, inauthentic imitation of an Italian restaurant. However, she did suggest that this restaurant aesthetic would be acceptable if certain conditions of authenticity—either geographic specificity or historic continuity—had been met: "if this was Italy, or was, I mean there's some amazing restaurants in Toronto that have been around forever. . .I might go into it." The drawing up of boundaries between different types of ethnic foods used in the connoisseur mode points to a process of distinction that is reminiscent of Bourdieu's (1984) thesis on the connection between taste and status. The use of authenticity to differentiate between ethnic foods mirrors the characteristic behaviour of culinary omnivores (or "foodies"<sup>8</sup>) discussed by Johnston and Baumann (2010), who argue that authenticity is used to ". . .constitute and reproduce a culinary scene rife with cultural hierarchy and elitism" (Johnston and Baumann, 2010, p. 95).

## 5.2. *Pragmatic cosmopolitanism: happening upon new food experiences*

While the connoisseur mode of cosmopolitan consumption has an erudite quality to it, the pragmatic mode of cosmopolitanism centres on people's experiential, interpersonal connections with different food cultures. Pragmatic modes of consumption are inspired by practical, day-to-day lived experiences—like working or living with somebody from a different ethnocultural background. Pragmatic cosmopolitanism may involve acquiring knowledge about a new food or cuisine, but unlike the connoisseur mode of cosmopolitanism, this knowledge acquisition often happens through non-expert sources and interpersonal events, like eating with friends from diverse backgrounds. These kinds of cosmopolitan food experiences happen organically and unintentionally, and they are catalysed by the global flows of people and food culture that take place in everyday lived experiences. Pragmatic consumption hinges on the availability of cosmopolitan cuisines in the diverse urban environments where people live. The pragmatic mode of cosmopolitan engagement was expressed by participants with varying degrees of economic and cultural capital in our sample, although this style of cosmopolitan consumption was predominantly articulated in interviews with less privileged participants. We speculate that this was because these participants lacked access to connoisseur modes of consumption—like formal

<sup>7</sup> The photographs depicting buffets in the photo elicitation activity were mainly of ethnic restaurants, such as Indian or Chinese restaurants.

<sup>8</sup> Johnston and Baumann (2010, p. 67) define "foodies" as persons who are "well-informed, discovery-minded, discerning consumers." Several participants in our sample who exhibited connoisseur and pragmatic tendencies referred to themselves as "foodies." This lends support to our initial parallel between omnivorousness and cosmopolitanism, as it points to a similarity between foodies (who are akin to omnivorous cultural consumers) and cosmopolitans.

culinary training (e.g., taking French cooking classes) or deliberate educational food projects (e.g., researching the most authentic restaurant serving Tibetan cuisine)—but were still interested in showcasing their cosmopolitan food mores.

Trina Parker, a 58-year-old unemployed grandmother from Toronto, provides a rich demonstration of the pragmatic mode of cosmopolitan food consumption. Trina lives with her granddaughter on a very low income, and she clearly enjoys living in a diverse, multicultural neighbourhood. In her interviews, she spoke very eagerly about dishes spanning several types of cuisines and showed her strong preference for a globally diverse diet, saying, “I think the one food I don’t prefer the most is the basic North American food.” Trina expresses a definite openness towards different ways of eating, dressing and viewing the world, but she also talks about developing a better understanding of the xenophobia and racism that immigrants go through after her own adoption of immigrant eating styles. After spending some time with Muslim friends and adopting the habit of eating with her hands, her boyfriend began to berate her, calling the habit “piggish”—a slur that Trina vehemently rejected.

Trina exemplifies the pragmatic cosmopolitan engagement with eating practices and foods that are removed from her culture of origin, yet at the same time, also demonstrates that this mode of eating need not be accompanied by connoisseur cosmopolitan practices. Trina does not demonstrate the same accuracy or attention to detail exemplified in connoisseur practices when discussing ingredients, or types of cuisine. For example, Trina forgets the name of a “green paste” that is very hot (i.e., wasabi) and generically refers to the spices in a roti as “Indian spice.” Other participants in our sample demonstrated how connoisseur and pragmatic modes of cosmopolitan consumption can overlap. Brenda Voisey, a 49-year-old mother on disability from Vancouver who trained briefly as a chef in a French cooking school but never worked in the industry, shows connoisseur tendencies when she differentiates between versions of ingredients and dishes. For example, she discerns between various sausage types available in a local Italian deli, stating that “[t]here’s no two sausages the same, I think,” and also mentions Callebaut chocolate (a top quality Belgian chocolate) as her “number one” chocolate. While Brenda exhibits some of the expert knowledge that characterizes the connoisseur mode of consumption, the knowledge of cosmopolitan foods described most frequently in her interviews is reliant on lived and sincere experiences like community and family connections (e.g., learning about curries and Indian cuisine through a job as a waitress in an Indian restaurant or enjoying the perogies her Ukrainian mother-in-law makes), rather than seeking out and accumulating expert food knowledge.

Pragmatic cosmopolitan practices are also characterized by an ethnographic interest in experiencing the food and culture of other ethnocultural groups. In this way, knowledge about new foods and cuisines is acquired through practical, first-hand experiences, rather than through formal channels like reference books or cooking classes. We see this when Bronwyn Vale (a 41-year-old lower-middle class consultant from Vancouver) describes how she goes to a Ukrainian orthodox cathedral to eat a satisfying meal of “perogies and kubasa and cabbage rolls” that are “made by the babushkas” (an Anglicized term for a headscarf worn by elderly Russian women): “there’s just something [great] about showing up at a church and getting this huge plate of Ukrainian food.” The desire for a pragmatic cosmopolitan food experience—like eating perogies prepared by Ukrainian grandmothers in an orthodox cathedral—appears motivated by the desire for a unique and satisfying cross-cultural food experience, and it is less about acquiring encyclopaedic food knowledge that can be used to distinguish different kinds of food—like the connoisseur knowledge required to compare and contrast regionally different varieties of perogies, for example.

The pragmatic mode is focussed on having experiences with different food cultures, as well as the people that cook and eat these foods. Such pragmatic cosmopolitan food experiences often emerge from a place-specific engagement with global foods. For example, for Brenda Voisey, who moved to Vancouver from a smaller city in early adulthood, waitressing at an Indian restaurant “was like [she] was in India.” Working at the restaurant allowed Brenda to discover and experience Indian cooking and culture up close. In Brenda’s own words, learning to cook curries from the chefs at the restaurant is a “big influence” on her daily cooking, as well as an interesting new cultural experience: “I just found [the food] fascinating. I found their culture fascinating. . .” Participants who articulated this mode of consumption frequently expressed the idea that they could acquire cross-cultural food knowledge by using their neighbourhood or community as a gateway to global culture. For example, Trina Parker describes the global culinary features of her neighbourhood with pride and enthusiasm:

. . . basically anything you feel like eating you can probably find that type of food here. If you want perogies, I’ll take you out to [a street nearby] for a perogy dinner. There’s Tibetan here, there’s an Ethiopian place, there’s Chinese, there’s Vietnamese, there’s Pizza Pizza, there’s Caribbean—there’s like three roti shops. . . There’s a lot—anything you want, you can probably get.

In multicultural cities like Toronto or Vancouver, cosmopolitan ingredients, food stores and restaurants are widely available in many neighbourhoods. In the culturally diverse neighbourhoods we studied, many immigrant communities live and set up businesses. Trina Parker talks about several restaurants she frequents—Caribbean, Chinese, Vietnamese—that are all within her immediate community. The same is true for Tandy Price, a 49-year-old lower-middle class student, who overwhelmingly discusses restaurants and shops that are within her multicultural neighbourhood of Parkdale. Thelma Read, a 47-year old upper-middle class piano technician, is another participant who demonstrates this tendency to incorporate cosmopolitan cuisines mainly through locally available foods and neighbourhood establishments. In her interview, she describes her own home cooking as relatively unsophisticated and “pretty much meat and vegetables and potatoes.” By Thelma’s own admission, her interest in incorporating cosmopolitan cuisines in her daily cooking is limited, and she relates this to the picky tastes of her family. At the same time, when she talks about the restaurants her family frequents on a regular basis, she names a variety of ethnic restaurants, including Japanese, Greek, Indian and Chinese. All these restaurants are in the immediate vicinity of her family’s Riverdale home. Even though Thelma’s cooking is not very adventurous at home, we observe that cosmopolitan cuisines become part of her eating habits outside the home because they are ubiquitous to her Riverdale neighbourhood.

The main sources of pragmatic cosmopolitan food knowledge are not textbooks or expert sources, but colleagues, neighbours and the community at large. This is illustrated by Trina’s positive description of her discovery of ethnic foods through interactions with the multicultural patients at the doctor’s office where she used to work. This introduction to different foods through the doctor’s multicultural clients (and through some co-workers, as she mentions later in her interview) plays a key role in Trina’s openness to different cuisines. As she indicates, “. . . once I was introduced to them [new foods she tried when working at doctor’s]. . . I gave up a lot of the other [North American/traditional] stuff that I didn’t like.” Similarly, Taylor Ronald, a 55-year-old unemployed participant discussed learning about different cuisines through contact with a Vietnamese neighbour and through a women’s centre she used to frequent. Through these experiences at the women’s centre in particular, Taylor indicated: “You sort of develop a palate you know, some of it is really good.”

In short, participants who engage with the pragmatic mode of cosmopolitan consumption describe the foods of the “Other” as a way to make culinary and human connections, rather than primarily as an intellectual pursuit or a means to deliberately accumulate culinary knowledge. Openness to the food and culture of different ethnocultural groups are shaped by an enthusiastic, embracing attitude, as well as a practical engagement through everyday life experiences, like working in a multicultural doctor’s office or going to a women’s centre and interacting with diverse communities. These pragmatic cosmopolitan experiences clearly hinge on accessibility to global cultural flows of people, capital, and goods. Our data suggest that such experiences are a distinctly rooted variety of cosmopolitanism, and one that is available even to those with limited economic and cultural resources, as well as minimal geographic mobility. Contrary to the notion that cosmopolitanism is exclusively about the display of cultural capital and status, these pragmatic cosmopolitanism practices demonstrate the interest and the possibilities that some urban dwellers have in developing multicultural culinary tastes.

### 5.3. *Tentative cosmopolitanism: hesitantly experiencing new foods*

Tentative cosmopolitanism points to a more cautious engagement with cosmopolitan eating styles present in the diverse Toronto and Vancouver neighbourhoods where participants reside. This mode of engagement is ambivalent when compared to pragmatic cosmopolitans, less focussed on knowledge acquisition when compared to connoisseur practices, and more interested in connecting with tastes that are familiar and close to home.<sup>9</sup> The tentative mode of cosmopolitan consumption was expressed most frequently by lower income participants in our sample, but it was also articulated at times by participants with higher incomes who appeared to lack cultural capital when it came to food knowledge or who embraced European cuisines while resisting more geographically distant ethnic cuisines.<sup>10</sup>

To begin, it is worth noting that participants who commonly articulated a tentative cosmopolitan engagement also tended to view eating as a functional necessity of life, rather than a source of pleasure or means of adventure and exploration. This emphasis on the more functional aspects food can be likened to the idea of a “taste for necessity,” a way of consuming that has been associated with working class cultures, and which does not involve the application of an aesthetic disposition to the realm of consumption, or of food and eating (Bourdieu, 1984; for a critical account, see also Bennett, 2011). Trudy Patterson, a 60-year-old unemployed woman from Toronto, commonly articulated a tentative mode of cosmopolitan consumption in her interviews, and she also clearly expressed a functional approach to food:

So if I do cook I cook kind of very simply, like nothing that uses a whole lot of ingredients or a whole lot of spices or I don’t try new recipes. I’m just not into that. Food is just

<sup>9</sup> Taken to its logical extreme, a tentative cosmopolitan mode would reject all new foods and cuisines and therefore not be classified as cosmopolitan. The outright rejection of cosmopolitanism is an empirical and theoretical possibility, but not our focus here in this project of mapping modes of cosmopolitan consumption. Additionally, the common pattern in our sample was not outright rejection of cosmopolitanism, but acknowledgement that culinary openness had social value, coupled with ambivalence towards these culinary experiences.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Tori Ramsey a college teacher from Toronto, discussed European foods knowledgeably and extensively in her interviews. However, she also was occasionally dismissive of non-European ethnic cuisines, as when she commented on the creation of a kimchi that can be eaten by astronauts, saying: “why would anyone, unless you’re Korean, try to make Korean food [in space]?”

something to me that's kind of necessary to eat, you try to have something tasty but it's not like huge importance in my life.

This quotation speaks to a view of food that sees eating as mainly concerned with providing basic nourishment, rather than as a source of intellectual curiosity or exploration. As Trudy clearly conveys, food is first necessary and, secondly, tasty. A “taste of necessity” approach to food that places greater importance on “food as fuel” appears to readily coexist with tentative cosmopolitanism. We recognize that the association between the taste of necessity and working class taste is a complex question, as [Bennett \(2011\)](#) points out in his critique of Bourdieu's conceptualization of working class tastes. Instead of relying on taste dichotomies inherent to Kantian aesthetics used by [Bourdieu \(1984\)](#), we think about our interviewee's utilitarian approaches to food, which appear to limit forays into cosmopolitan food practices, as one factor that shapes their engagement with cosmopolitan cultural repertoires. It is not that people with low economic and cultural capital lack taste preferences or eat in a straightforward biological fashion, but that material constraints and a relatively instrumental approach to nourishment appears to dampen interest in cosmopolitan food practices.

In a tentative mode of cosmopolitan consumption, engagement with cosmopolitan food tends to happen minimally and hesitantly. Cosmopolitan food experiences are presented almost as an unavoidable result of living in a multicultural neighbourhood—a kind of culinary osmosis, rather than a deliberate effort at food adventuring or pleasure-seeking exploration. Trudy talks about how living in Toronto has changed her eating habits compared to her family in Nova Scotia, saying that she “. . . [eats] differently now” and that she “. . . [has] expanded [her] repertoire a little bit to include foods that [she] wasn't raised up with,” like rice and pasta. In the following quotation, Trudy juxtaposes how her family from Halifax eats with her own food habits in Toronto:

My food choices have changed a lot, and I guess being away from my family, and not having that influence, because when I go down to visit they all sort of eat the same. Basically, you know? . . . Food choices are different then what I eat [in Toronto]. Probably because of the influence of other. . . the multicultural of Toronto and the choices that are available.

Trudy suggests that her food habits changed as a result of geographically moving away from her family's “influence,” but there is also some distancing in her discussion of multicultural food choices available in Toronto—she displays more hesitancy than enthusiasm for these changes. In addition, Trudy demonstrates markedly little interest in, or attention to, the details of new dishes or cuisines she has adopted into her culinary repertoire. In the same interview, Trudy talks about making a new lentil dish, but has difficulties recalling what she would like to prepare:

*Trudy:* . . . You know, what's that? My daughter eats it. . . It's. . . I forget what it's called, there's a name for it.

*Interviewer:* A lentil dish?

*Trudy:* No it's not, uh, anyway, it's all lentils and it's spiced and it's on a piece of bread or something or a wrap. But I don't eat them that way but I should eat more stuff like that.

*Interviewer:* Are you thinking of roti?

*Trudy*: No, not roti.

*Interviewer*: Or dal?

*Trudy*: Dal, I think may be more of a Greek thing, I'm not sure.

Trudy does not accurately attribute the origins of an Indian dish, dal, instead connecting it to Greek cuisine. She is also quite clear when she says that she would not eat the dish as it is supposed to be made, thus implying that authenticity (i.e., making a dish in the manner of a specific place or ethnocultural group, or experiencing a “real” food experience) is not particularly important to her.

As the quotations from Trudy make clear, the tentative cosmopolitan mode is characterized by ambivalence—there is some openness, but also a reticence about new cuisines. For example, Taylor Ronald, a 55-year-old unemployed woman living in Toronto demonstrates this ambiguity when she says: “I’ve gone to different things where they have food from different cultures. . .”, but also adds in the same breath: “. . . it just depends on how [the food] looks.” Confronted with photographs of Korean and North Indian food, Taylor is again of two minds: “. . . I’ve tried, like I’ve said, a bit of both [Korean and Indian food] but that was a long time ago. But [the food photo] looks very appetizing and I’m sure some of it I would eat, but I’m not sure what it all is, so I couldn’t really say if I would or not.” Taylor expresses some openness to trying foods that are unfamiliar, showing that she realizes that an open stance towards new foods is a socially desirable attribute, but she is equally concerned that she may not enjoy what she is eating (on navigating between “local allegiances” and embracing socially acceptable “open” cosmopolitan attitudes, see [Skey, 2012](#), p. 476).

In some cases, uncertainty and ambivalence expressed towards new foods and cuisines can be surmountable when accompanied by a close personal connection to help bridge the divide between familiar and unfamiliar foods. For example, Tanya Pearce, a 49-year-old lower-middle class office administrator from Toronto, displays considerable hesitancy when confronted with photos of diverse cuisines in the interview. While she would not deliberately seek out these foods, she suggests that she could be convinced to try them:

You know, cause some of [the foods in photos] definitely look “ethnic,” and chances are it would be somebody else suggesting “like how about we try this,” right? . . . I don’t know if I would do it totally on my own, but it’s a whole, you know. . . obviously for some of those restaurants of cultures, like the cultures that maybe I haven’t had their food before. . . but somebody says, “hey Tanya, this is really great, let’s go,” and I say “sure why not?”

Tanya clearly indicates that she is willing to try foods she does not know, but her openness hinges on being introduced to foreign foods through personal contact. It is on the condition that her friends suggest and “vouch” for these unknown foods that Tanya is willing to try them.

While a personal connection can help overcome the divide between familiar and unfamiliar ways of eating in some instances, in other cases, the tentative cosmopolitan mode involves a degree of suspicion or scepticism that is unsurmountable. In these situations, the foods of an exotic Other are viewed negatively as “unappealing,” “awful,” or even “weird,” questioning their very edibility. In one particular instance, Trudy sums up this feeling when she describes photos of certain ethnic foods: “Unknown ingredients, unknown taste. Not appealing to me. Wouldn’t eat ‘em.” Her comments are echoed by Toni Roberts a 49-year-old unemployed participant from Toronto who also reacts mostly negatively to the photographs of ethnic dishes

and restaurants in the photo sort. Faced with a photograph of Korean food, Toni observes: “And with this here, Korean. . .there’s fish in there. There’s some kind of, to me it looks too foreign. I can’t eat it.” When these kinds of resistance are articulated, they usually occur in a broader context where the interviewees are primarily concerned with the responsibility of nourishment for day-to-day living, and as such, do not prioritize the pursuit of new cultural food experiences or the pursuit of new foods as a source of aesthetic or cultural pleasures more generally.

The ambivalent attitude towards “foreign” foods exists in a dialectical relationship with the appeal of foods viewed as traditional, or “Canadian,” especially foods that were eaten in one’s youth. These “traditional” foods feature centrally in interviewees’ discussion of food habits, showing that tastes of “home” are not only valued, but are discussed in opposition to the more exotic fare of the Other. For example, despite talking about incorporating some new ethnocultural foods in her diet, Toni still seems to identify strongly with the foods of her youth: “Basically, I would say that my eating habits are definitely from the way I was brought up.” While at one point in the interview she suggests that her diet has broadened beyond her childhood diet, Toni does not clearly address how multicultural choices fit into her day-to-day food experiences. Trudy similarly frames her foods of origin as central influences in her present-day diet, and the presence of ethnic foods in her daily diet is relatively minimal: “Going back to influences. . .I guess there’s still an influence from my culture growing up like with the big meal. Like Christmas. The meat and potatoes, or meat and fish. Although I’ve incorporated more pasta and rice into our diet now too. So there’s always those influences there.” These quotes show how the tentative mode of cosmopolitan consumption tends to oscillate between cautious attempts at openness to new “exotic” foods, and the strong pull of one’s own food culture—a form of “local allegiance” that persists as a way to anchor the self in a globalized context (Skey, 2012, p. 476). The appeal of “home” is also apparent in the tentative cosmopolitan preference for familiar exotic fare that would be considered inauthentic and low-status by connoisseur standards—North American versions of cosmopolitan foods like Chinese-Canadian food or Italian-American pastas. For example, Trudy mentions ordering Chinese food from time to time as a “treat,” specifying that she prefers the food from a well-known Chinese-Canadian chain, because “they’re a big chain, you know, they’re a very popular restaurant, wonderful website so I just put my trust you know.” North American versions are seen as more palatable, trustworthy, familiar, and less risky than authentic or more socially-distant exotic dishes.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of broad accessibility to cosmopolitan foods and cuisines through the multicultural neighbourhoods where our interviewees reside, the tentative mode of cosmopolitanism involves only glimpses of interest in cosmopolitan eating practices. This mode shows some integration of new foods and dishes, implying a broadening of tastes and a desire to showcase some cultural openness. Yet, this mode also involves disinterest in authenticity, scepticism towards exotic fare, a more limited knowledge of ethnic cuisines, and a general ambivalence about learning more about them. This reaction can be linked to a preoccupation with “tastes of necessity,” as well as a desire to defend and reaffirm the familiar food culture and tastes of home against transnational flows of culture and people across borders (Bentley, 2004; Duruz, 2001, 2005; Skey, 2012; Trubek, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> The issue of “risk” may be especially relevant for low-income people where eating out is a relative luxury and for whom this expense forms a larger portion of their overall budget. For those with a high income, a meal out that is not enjoyed can be more readily replaced with a different kind of food choice.

## 6. Conclusion

We have argued that cosmopolitanism as it unfolds in everyday life is a diverse, complex, and multi-faceted phenomenon. The different modes of cosmopolitan consumption we document in this article expand on Lamont and Aksartova's (2002) concept of multiple ordinary cosmopolitanisms to show that there are important differences in how cosmopolitan culture is lived, absorbed and treated in everyday life. While transnational cultures, people, and foods are omnipresent in the urban Toronto and Vancouver neighbourhoods we studied, engagement with cosmopolitan cultural consumption is highly varied. Still, certain patterns are discernable. Most significantly, we identify three primary modes of engaging with cosmopolitan food repertoires: (1) a connoisseur mode that actively prioritizes the acquisition of new and expert food knowledge, authentic knowledge about foods and cuisines, and where cosmopolitan foods serve as a source of distinction and cultural capital; (2) a pragmatic mode that relies on personal connections and ethnographic experiences of the Other, is rooted in global flows that pass through local places, and which is not exclusively linked to elite food experiences or tastes, but rather to food experiences obtained and shared with others; and (3) a tentative mode that is ambivalent about new food influences and uninterested in authentic food experiences, expresses a yearning to reaffirm the tastes of home, and is connected to the "tastes of necessity" associated with low economic and cultural capital.

The differences we note between connoisseur, pragmatic and tentative cosmopolitan modes of consumption suggest the limitations of relying only on elite criteria or lived experiences when defining cosmopolitanism. Our results point to the need to systematically study how different classes experience transnational cultural flows, and express cosmopolitan tastes, in an effort to articulate more clearly how these cosmopolitan taste preferences might work to reproduce class and taste hierarchies on a larger scale. While our study demonstrates that cosmopolitanism is not limited to elites, as evident in the pragmatic mode articulated by people with varying degrees of economic and cultural capital, we find that a connoisseur mode of cosmopolitanism does imply a taste hierarchy that maps onto taste hierarchies associated with an omnivorous food culture that values authenticity (Germann Molz, 2007; Johnston and Baumann, 2010). Connoisseur aspects of cosmopolitan food practices clearly align with legitimate culture and status because of the importance and value attributed to knowledge about authentic versions of dishes and of in-depth, formal knowledge of cuisines (e.g., the knowledge required to be able to identify, and classify the different geographic origins of cheeses). In contrast, and at the other end of the cosmopolitan cultural repertoire, tentative cosmopolitan practices are uninterested in the pursuit of authenticity, appear enmeshed within a "taste for necessity" (Bourdieu, 1984) that is likely connected to economic and socio-cultural factors, and runs against the possibility of wholeheartedly embracing and exploring a variety of ethnocultural foods, even when these are geographically proximate and accessible.

Our three modes of cosmopolitan consumption thus challenge a dichotomous model of cultural consumption and the idea of a single taste hierarchy (Friedman, 2012). We emphasize instead the myriad ways that urban residents can relate to cosmopolitanism, and we note the possibility of engaging with multiple modes of cosmopolitan consumption. Varied ways of valuing cosmopolitan culture emerged in our interviews, and we saw that pragmatic, experiential cosmopolitan experiences were available to people with limited resources. However, our data also show that these different taste hierarchies remain part of a broader spectrum of taste that places more importance on legitimate forms of cosmopolitan culture. For example, the connoisseur practice of learning French cuisine "by the book" at a cooking school can be

contrasted with the pragmatic tendency to “pick up” cooking techniques and recipes from a Vietnamese neighbour.

Our results also explore empirically the experience of Otherness. Because we use a group of White Canadian urban dwellers as our comparative starting point, we are able to examine how people from different socio-economic backgrounds and with different levels of cultural capital view the cuisines of ethnocultural Others. Our interviews show that higher economic means and cultural resources are associated with cosmopolitan repertoires that emphasize an experience of Otherness that is intellectually interesting and fascinating, and that tends to regard European cuisine (especially French) as canonical and culturally central. While we observed a connection between the connoisseur mode and economic capital, we also saw that low-income participants experienced a kind of pragmatic cosmopolitanism in their food practices. We suggest that this results directly from their experiences living in diverse urban environments characterized by significant transnational flows of people and culture. For some respondents, particularly those with less disposable income and fewer cultural resources, the foods of ethnocultural Others are viewed more cautiously, and even, negatively. Familiar, comfortable dishes are often juxtaposed against the “strange,” “weird” foods of the Other, and we propose that this reaffirmation of one’s own food culture emerges, at least in part, because there is less risk (financial, cultural or taste-wise) involved in consuming it.

By showing that cosmopolitan food consumption involves a range of knowledge and practices, our interviews also demonstrate that cosmopolitan culture is more akin to a cultural repertoire (Lamont, 1992, 2000; Swidler, 1986, 2001) than to a condition or norm that people either possess or lack (Skey, 2012). Urban dwelling families in Toronto and Vancouver, and likely many other global cities, have access to a variety of cosmopolitan cultural knowledge and practices in their globally diverse neighbourhoods, and they articulate these periodically. Our results illustrate that participants are selective in choosing the cosmopolitan elements that ultimately inform their everyday eating practices. At a broader level, our analysis highlights variants in cosmopolitan consumption that can be viewed as parallel (but not identical) to variants in omnivorous consumption (Ollivier, 2008; Peterson and Rossmann, 2008). Our finding—that cosmopolitan cultural repertoires are more commonly accessed by those with economic and cultural capital—suggests that studies of cultural repertoires need to consider the socially specific variants connected to the objective conditions of different social groups. While privilege clearly shapes people’s food choices, there is also a degree of agency and creativity in these choices. Some low-income individuals deliberately and enthusiastically open up their diets to new foods they discover through interpersonal connections, while others express considerable reticence, opting to reaffirm their own food culture. Some high-income individuals focus on acquiring knowledge about European food traditions and display a relative ethnocentricity, while other participants are much more enthusiastic and open to learning about ethnic foods from non-European sources.

We conclude by suggesting that qualitative work can be used as a useful tool for better understanding people’s complex and varied responses to cosmopolitan cultural flows in their everyday lives. These motivations can vary, even when the same cultural product (e.g., a roti) is being consumed (Friedman, 2012). Our intention here was to use qualitative data to shed light on the patterns that make up the complex relationships between global culture, cuisine, and the Other. While cosmopolitan culinary consumption retains a strong connection to economic and cultural capital, it is not straightforwardly determined by the capital one commands. From our conversations with inhabitants from diverse backgrounds in Toronto and Vancouver, we see that living in globally diverse cities with transnational migrants and cultural flows offers significant opportunities for people to connect with social Others through food.

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## Appendix A. Sample information

See [Table A1](#).

Table A1  
Summary of participants' demographic information.

City	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Class
<b>Toronto</b>				
Riverdale	Toni Roberts	49	Unemployed/Disability	Working poor/underclass
	Taylor Ronald	55	Unemployed	Working poor/underclass
	Tori Ramsey	59	College teacher	Upper-middle class
	Tatjana Radanovic	53	Landscape architect	Lower-middle class
	Tihana Raskovic	48	Financial services	Upper-middle class
	Thelma Read	47	Piano technician	Upper-middle class
	Trish Rendell	43	Teacher	Upper-middle class
	Theo Rousseau	42	Art director	Upper-middle class
	Talia Rousseau	43	Teacher	Upper-middle class
Parkdale	Ted Rodger	52	Actor	Upper-middle class
	Tandy Price	49	Student	Lower-middle class
	Tanya Pearce	49	Office administrator	Lower-middle class
	Trudy Patterson	60	Unemployed	Working poor/underclass
	Trina Parker	58	Unemployed	Working poor/underclass
	Therese Parsons	45	Film industry	Upper-middle class
	Tina Payne	51	ESL teacher	Upper-middle class
	Trent Payne	53	Engineer	Upper-middle class
<b>Vancouver</b>				
Northeast Vancouver	Brenda Voisey	49	Unemployed/Disability	Working poor/underclass
	Belva Vernon	50	Dietician	Upper-middle class
	Brent Vernon	53	Architect	Upper-middle class
	Brett Vessey	53	Teacher	Upper-middle class
	Bernice Valverde	43	Architect	Upper-middle class
	Bronwyn Vale	41	Consultant	Lower-middle class

*Note on class categorization:* In families where couples had different class backgrounds, the family was categorized using the higher occupation in the household.

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