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## **GUT AND BUTT DESIRES AND THE HETEROSEXUAL IMAGINARY: THE PIONEER WOMAN BLOGS ABOUT FOOD, FAT, AND COWBOYS IN CHAPS**

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The photograph depicts a yellowish-pink hand with a wedding band intimately holding a smaller and similarly colored hand. Some fragments of cheese from preparing baked ziti cling to the fingers. Food blogger Ree Drummond presents this affective and culinary union and advises readers to have their “daughter add more mozzarella”; “Then “check her fingernails and say, “Ew! Grody, man”; “Then listen to her retort, ‘I learned it from you, mom;’ Then cry and imagine a different way of life. One that involves lovely fingernails and pantyhose.”<sup>1</sup> Drummond associates cooking and related forms of domesticity with white heterosexual women. She dreams of a feminine world where the combination of physically touching and emotionally feeling produces clean whiteness.<sup>2</sup> Through such images and accounts, Drummond and many of her readers articulate a culture of shared tastes, histories, and identities and begin to trouble these positions by offering visions of the queer relationship and child—the daughter as dirty, “man,” and husband.<sup>3</sup> Drummond thus performs a version of the “heterosexual imaginary” that, as Chrys Ingraham argues, is a “way of thinking which conceals the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender” while constantly hinting at the queer.<sup>4</sup>

Drummond’s articulation of norms should be cause for concern because her The Pioneer Woman blog has millions of readers every month.<sup>5</sup> In the blog, Drummond promises that she is “Keepin’ it Real”; indicates her “love” for readers; and chronicles her life as a rancher, wife, mother, homeschooler, author, and television personality.<sup>6</sup> Drummond’s self-identification as an ordinary white heteronormative woman, without of course ever using these terms, is undermined by her own corporeal expressions and a group of blogging critics, including the Pie Near Woman blogger who deploys photographs of doll tableaus as a means of parodying Drummond. Through Drummond’s accounts, food is connected to the stomach, gut, breasts, and butt as well as the mouth. These visceral experiences and readings move with food and digestion through and around the body and establish conceptions of gender, race, and sexuality. In examining these sites, I continue the project of connecting food studies to critical interrogations of identity, including writing about affect, fat, monstrosity, whiteness, and the rectum and anal sex.<sup>7</sup>

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In Drummond's accounts, food produces appropriately gendered subjects. Yet there is also something decidedly fluid about Drummond's descriptions of her love of recipes and incorporation of food into her erotic and romantic life. She engages food with the phrase, "Mmmmm. Hello, lover" and highlights varied sorts of gut feelings.<sup>8</sup> *Pie Near Woman* stresses the queer eroticism of these addresses by depicting Drummond rubbing against, penetrating herself with, and dousing herself in food. Unfortunately, *Pie Near Woman* also renders servile people of color and ridicules Drummond's body and sexuality as a means of critique.<sup>9</sup>

*Pie Near Woman* presents photographic tableau with vomit, diarrhea, and the anus as the monstrous afterward of Drummond's food. Drummond more positively displaces vaginal and labial eroticism with her descriptions of "hiney tingles" and associates anal pleasures with cooking and eating.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Drummond presents a sauce "that'll make your spirit soar. And your tummy jiggle. And your hips spread. And your hiney droop to the floor."<sup>11</sup> She promises that her food will drop the anus to the floor in a kind of reversal of the surprised mouth. She connects with readers over these fleshy pleasures and moments of fat acceptance and coaxes, "c'mon—let's jiggle our tummies together!" Food thereby allows Drummond to engage in a sort of caress with readers.

Drummond links female empowerment to the craft of cooking, binary distinctions, and satisfying the needs of men. Drummond's "Cowboy Food" category provides "recipes that scream 'Man Food'" and constructs gendered subjects.<sup>12</sup> She writes, "I am woman. Hear me roar. But my husband's tastebuds I can not ignore."<sup>13</sup> Yet her habit of viewing her husband from behind and photographing his chap-clad buttocks associates the empowered gaze and sexual activity with the female blogger and readers and feminizes and queers her husband. It also makes her husband into a form of sustenance since Drummond often posts these images as part of her recipes. Drummond's focus on the bottom and back, including her concern about "back fat" rather than other forms of fleshiness, turns the body and eating around and supports a wider erotic life for heterosexual women.<sup>14</sup> In these cases, the heterosexual imaginary reflects Drummond's claims to heterosexuality and assertions that heterosexuality is "naturally occurring" and "unquestioned."<sup>15</sup> *Pie Near Woman* writes that other female bloggers "complete" her, without interrogating this connection, and evokes the homoerotic conversations that are part of some female Internet production cultures.<sup>16</sup> These queer moments are embedded in, at odds with, and support a set of deeply normalizing practices. They point to fissures in people's claims about heterosexual identity and encourage an interrogation of the larger ways personal connections function in Internet settings.

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> Ree, "Baked Ziti," *The Pioneer Woman*, 26 November 2012, 1 March 2015, <http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/2012/11/baked-ziti/>
- <sup>2</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).
- <sup>3</sup> I am relating this notion of the queer child to Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
- <sup>4</sup> Chrys Ingraham, "The Heterosexual Imaginary: Feminist Sociology and Theories of Gender." *Sociological Theory* 12 (1994): 203.
- <sup>5</sup> Amanda Fortini, "The Pioneer Woman Gets Lost on the Range," *The New Yorker*, 3 February 2012, 1 March 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2012/02/the-pioneer-woman-gets-lost-on-the-range.html#ixzz2Co8LJs8u>
- <sup>6</sup> Ree, "About Pioneer Woman," *The Pioneer Woman*, 3 January 2013, <http://thepioneerwoman.com/about/>
- <sup>7</sup> Considerations of the relationship between food, gender, race, and sexuality include, Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber, eds. *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005); Carole Counihan, *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1999; Sherrie A. Inness, ed. *Pilaf, Pozole, and Pad Thai: American Women and Ethnic Food* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: Sage, 1996); Elsbeth Probyn, *Carnal Appetites: Food, Sex, Identities* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
- <sup>8</sup> Ree, "Molten Chocolate Lava Cake," 29 July 2009, 1 March 2015, <http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/2009/07/molten-chocolate-lava-cake/>
- <sup>9</sup> Pie Near Woman, "There's Dirt in my Vagina – An Instagram Ode to Joe," 1 March 2015, <http://www.pienearwoman.com/2012/04/theres-dirt-in-my-vagina-an-instagram-ode-to-joe/>
- <sup>10</sup> Ree, "For You Men," *The Pioneer Woman*, 13 September 2007, 1 March 2015, [http://thepioneerwoman.com/blog/2007/09/for\\_you\\_men\\_by\\_ree\\_drummond/](http://thepioneerwoman.com/blog/2007/09/for_you_men_by_ree_drummond/)
- <sup>11</sup> Ree, "Eggs Benedict," *The Pioneer Woman*, 12 October 2007, 1 March 2015, [http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/2007/10/eggs\\_benedict/](http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/2007/10/eggs_benedict/)

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<sup>12</sup> Ree, "Cowboy Food," The Pioneer Woman, 1 March 2015, [http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/category/man\\_pleasers/](http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/category/man_pleasers/)

<sup>13</sup> Ree, "Pan-Fried Pork Chops," The Pioneer Woman, 6 October 2009, 1 March 2015, <http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/2009/10/simple-pan-fried-pork-chops/>

<sup>14</sup> Ree, "All I Wanted Was a Doughnut," The Pioneer Woman, 23 December 2011, 12 February 2013, <http://thepioneerwoman.com/blog/2011/12/all-i-wanted-was-a-doughnut/>

<sup>15</sup> Ingraham, 204.

<sup>16</sup> Pie Near Woman, "Inspiration," 13 December 2012, <http://www.pienearwoman.com/inspiration/>