Here Comes a Regular: A Psychologist's Perspective on the Restaurant Industry in 2020.

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"It's painful to not go to restaurants. I miss them. I worry about them" (Tejal Rao, *The New York Times* California restaurant critic, April 13, 2020 YouTube panel about COVID-19 and the health of the restaurant industry).

"The state of the restaurant industry is dire" (James Beard Foundation, April 16, 2020).

"So for now, going back to restaurants as I knew them is just that: a dream" (Tejal Rao, "I'm Not Ready to Go Back to Restaurants, Is Anyone?" *The New York Times*, June 30, 2020).

Several years ago, I found myself part of conversations and actions taking place in the Austin, Texas independent restaurant and craft brewery community about mental health. My participation in these conversations grew out of a karmic encounter in 2017 with a Marine Corps veteran who was opening a new brewery and restaurant in East Austin. We were both regulars at a small neighborhood bar, were introduced by the bartender, and we connected on my work with veterans. We talked, often on Tuesday burger nights about the parallels between military culture and the restaurant industry as related to mental health, stress, and stigma, including a suicide in the Austin brewery community. A year later, in the summer of 2018, we talked about the suicide of Anthony Bourdain and glasses were raised, clanked and drank. A bond was forged at the bar through our conversations over time, we became friends, and he introduced me to several thoughtful restaurant and brewery owners. This is the beauty, grace and humanity of neighborhood bars and restaurants.

As a clinical psychologist, I am familiar with the landscape of suicide and with what the writer William Styron described as "depression's dark wood."[1] A completed suicide is like an emotional IED, a roadside bomb, emotionally and existentially blowing up the everyday lives of the living, bringing with great force questions about one's choice to make such a decision, about the meaning of life, about our relationships and interconnectedness, and about suffering and mental health. It is also about the survivors' confusion and pain, remembrance and mourning, and often, anger. We are left to make sense of the fundamentally unknowable, and for a window of time, a window of opportunity, we find ourselves more in touch with our own fragility and vulnerability, bring greater awareness to mental health issues and feel a deeper sense of taking care of each other with kindness and compassion.

The topic of mental health, or more specifically, the problems of mental health working in the restaurant industry enlivened and deepened conversations and connections I was

having going to restaurants, bars, and food events. Restaurant industry people were open and generous, even enthusiastic about sharing their perspectives and experiences. We inquisitive psychologists are good listeners, ask generous questions, and I became very interested in this topic and how it fed bigger questions and issues. I did some consulting and organizing with a couple restaurants and breweries, owners were warm, inviting, and responsive. One of the more innovative projects was assisting in the development of an in-house peer support program. I also continue to devote a portion of my private practice to affordable individual psychotherapy for people in the restaurant industry.

I saw three interrelated issues related to mental health in the restaurant industry: (a) making mental health (including psychopharmacology) and substance abuse services accessible, affordable, and adaptable to restaurant industry workers; (b) creating mental health informed humane, equitable and sustainable work relationships, environments, and cultures; and (c) due to the unique stress of restaurant industry work, making wellness programming available and accessible within and/or outside the restaurant. Over a period of a couple years, I saw both a genuine sense of possibility for awareness and change and the great barriers to change within a single restaurant, let alone industry wide systemic change. I also saw that there needs to be a change in customers' understanding, engagement and support of restaurants, as well as systemic change in the larger ecology of the restaurant industry. The current COVID-19 economic crisis, also highlights the essential role of government in the protection of the larger ecology of the restaurant industry. Change in the restaurant industry has to support but also transcend owners and chefs.

In a 2019 conversation between second and third wave food critics, Ruth Reichel talked to Soleil Ho about the politics and ethics of food and what it means to be a conscientious food critic: "It seemed to me that it is a wasted opportunity to not bring up moral questions . . . I just think you're not doing your job if you're not raising those questions. Otherwise, you're just basically a consumer reporter, and your telling people where to spend their money."[2] Food writing and criticism that consistently raises moral and ethical questions about labor, wages, benefits and working conditions; mental health and substance abuse; sexual harassment; immigrants and undocumented workers; and culinary justice.

As a clinical psychologist working with change in individuals, as someone who values and often practices long-term psychotherapy, and as someone who has worked almost 20 years at the second largest Federal bureaucracy, the Veterans Health Administration, I am well aware of the great difficulties in making substantive, sustainable change individually and organizationally. It seems that in large part, the razor-thin, notoriously slim margin operations of a restaurant leave little space to cultivate non-bottom-line, long-term initiatives like healthy and sustainable workplace values, attitudes, and culture. In the language of the classic business and human systems book, *Built to Last* (1994),[3] it is difficult in the restaurant industry to have a guiding core purpose and enduring core values designed for sustainability, equity and health that are not compromised or defined by short-term expediency, finances, or making money. The restaurant industry has endured in many beautiful ways, as a unique place to work, as a place of hospitality and

service organized around food and drink, and as a multifaceted place of community, creativity and culture, but one might argue that it is not an industry built to last.

According to Los Angeles chef Diep Tran, who paid her Good Girl Dinette staff a living wage and valued keeping the menu affordable, “You have to deal with these razor-thin margins, while still giving people an experience. They’re coming in to be taken care of, not to take care of you.”[4] After almost 10 years, Tran just couldn’t do it anymore, and on October 5, 2018 closed her inventive, Jonathan Gold reviewed Vietnamese-American comfort food restaurant. Tran said in an August 2, 2018 interview, months before her closure, “I created a format that is going to leave me penniless . . . I run [it] like a nonprofit.”[5] Chef and writer Gabrielle Hamilton wrote one of the best pieces about the effects of COVID-19 on the restaurant industry, the story of closing Prune, a small restaurant in the NYC East Village.[6] Reflecting on several of the pre-COVID-19 restaurant industry problems, Hamilton said in a July 20, 2020 interview: “I really wish we would figure out if we can all have health insurance and health coverage or could figure out a fricking wage that would work for people and not have the restaurant itself act as the government which is what we have been doing, subsidizing this experience of working in a restaurant, of going to a restaurant.”[7] This burden is central to the operations and culture of the restaurant industry, to the whole ecology of restaurants, and these conditions have psychological, economic and cultural implications for all the people involved, including customers.

In 2018, Gabrielle Hamilton and her wife and Prune co-chef, Ashley Merriman, made a controversial and much criticized decision to partner with restauranteur Ken Friedman of the Spotted Pig, one of the NYC restaurants at the center of the #MeToo movement. They wanted to actively participate and contribute to “the much-needed paradigm shift in the industry”[8] at this crime scene of a restaurant that was not only about sexual harassment, but many of the problems facing the restaurant industry, including pay parity and immigrant-documentation status. What happened next in the story is that relatively quickly their partnership broke down, Friedman was unwilling to surrender and transfer certain aspects of power and authority in the service of their recommendations and vision of change, and Hamilton and Merriman exited the Spotted Pig rehabilitation project.

Well before COVID-19, reckoning with the revelations of the #MeToo movement and recurrent suicides, mental health, and substance abuse issues, the restaurant industry has largely been immune to change and reform. The above noted story of the Spotted Pig is a particularly interesting case study in this immunity to change, even when “you have two highly qualified and capable women going into the ground zero of the man-made disaster to start to help out.”[9] A prominent theme in my conversations with restaurant industry workers was shared by women, a polyphony of stories and experiences about the pervasive and ubiquitous presence of sexual harassment in the restaurant industry, and if reported, she will often encounter denial, diminishment, inaction, blame, or termination. These conditions and circumstances are detrimental to the wellbeing and mental health of women in the restaurant industry, and perpetuate the practice and trauma of toxic masculinity.

As a psychologist influenced and inspired by design, I find myself thinking about the 1970s design concept of "wicked problems."[10] Wicked problems are social or cultural problems, they are stubborn and relentless, multidimensional and contextual, ethical and political, often costly to address, and always a symptom of a larger ecology of issues and conditions. Poverty, climate change, and police violence are examples of wicked problems. Mental health in the restaurant industry is a wicked problem, or perhaps better stated, it is a substantive problem in a larger set of wicked problems in the restaurant industry. According to Austin, Texas based designer, Jon Kolko, we tackle wicked problems through a diverse, but well composed series of solutions, a mix of short and medium-term, some bold and audacious, some symbolic, but most are disciplined, well thought out, long-term, incremental solutions, all designed together in synergy to "mitigate the negative consequences and position the broad trajectory of culture in a new and more desirable direction."[11]

Bruce Mau wrote in his epic 2020 design manifesto, that we can open up our understanding of the present and our capacity for change if we expand our mental time frame, expand what we mean by the "future" to at least fifty years. According to Mau, "The greater the problem, the worse the crisis, the harsher the experience, the bigger the design [change] opportunity."[12] This is the opportunity and challenge for the restaurant industry. To borrow a line of poetic inquiry from Claudia Rankine's *Just Us: An American Conversation* (2020), will the restaurant industry have whatever it takes to push this moment to its crisis. What will the records reveal many, many years from now about how the restaurant industry (and the larger ecology, including the government) reckoned with its precarity in 2020, and how it shaped the future of the industry.

Empathy, a prominent feature of change in psychotherapy, is also at the heart of contemporary design thinking and addressing human-centered wicked problems. In the practice of psychotherapy or design, empathy is a multifaceted process that takes time, patience and intentionality, genuineness, emotional presence and expression, creativity and imagination. According to the mid-century humanistic psychologist, Carl Rogers, "Empathy is the listener's effort to hear the other person deeply, accurately, and non-judgmentally."[13] Empathy is the flywheel of deeper connection, understanding, conversation and change. Part of the great appeal and impact of Anthony Bourdain's unique food travel journalism was his capacity for listening, empathy, and openness, whether he was filming in West Virginia or Iran, Haiti or Hanoi.

There is a renewed sense of loss in 2020 about Bourdain, imaging his voice and contributions to the conversations about COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter. I feel a certain sadness watching episodes of Bourdain television these days, both because of his suicide and because of the impact of COVID-19 on food culture and travel. Waves of emotion welled as I rewatched the September 25, 2016 Hanoi, Vietnam episode.[14] Through my work at the VA, I carry the stories, history and trauma of American soldiers that served in Vietnam, as well as the context, landscape and culture of this Southeast Asian country in the 1960s and 70s. The episode builds to a scene at a family run noodle shop in a working-class Hanoi neighborhood, where Bourdain sat across from Barrack Obama on low, blue plastic stools, drank cold, bottled beer and ate Bun Cha. The episode

aired shortly before the election of Donald Trump, and Bourdain asked, “As a father of a young girl, is it all going to be okay? Is it all going to work out?” A year later, at the New Yorker Festival[15] on October 25, 2017, Bourdain spoke about America going from Obama to the nationalist-identified Trump, about the role of travel in understanding others and ourselves, about empathy and emotion, and his extraordinarily unexpected and human experience filming the episode of his television show in West Virginia, an episode that aired on April 26, 2018. A few months later, Bourdain was found dead by hanging in the bathroom of his hotel room in France on June 8, 2018. He was 61 years old.

In a #MeToo focused piece about his suicide, Laura McGann wrote, “Then there was Anthony Bourdain. He looked at himself. He looked at the industry. He looked at the system. His conclusions were nuanced and honest. And, given that he did this all in public, it was brave. His contributions to the #MeToo conversation will be missed.”[16] Bourdain’s writing inspired me at the tumultuous beginning of my professional career and his suicide in June of 2018 renewed a desire to write in this middle period of my professional life, to bring the poetics of psychotherapy to my prose. In the year after his suicide, I talked, eat and drank at restaurants more than I wrote about this perpetually unfinished essay, a portrait of Anthony Bourdain and his suicide with a narrative arc of bringing into the foreground, into focus, mental health issues in the restaurant industry.

Then COVID-19 happened in March 2020, and in that slow percolating morass of the pandemic, of home quarantine and working remotely, of not being able to go to restaurants and bars, another June anniversary of Bourdain’s suicide and Anthony Bourdain Day (June 25), I revisited my original essay notes, and I sat at my desk and wrote. I collected and consumed food writing and real-time restaurant industry media about the impact of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter, conducted research and went down rabbit holes. It was a creative passion project that forged a path through the wilderness of 2020. A peculiar and personal coherence and structure emerged from the sprawling ideas, themes and materials as my page count veered toward a monograph in length and form. It was also a way of staying connected with restaurants and bars during the pandemic. It was like painting a kind of mural, perhaps in the style of Diego Rivera, about the restaurant industry, about myself, all configured in this unprecedented time and history.

THE KITCHEN BRIGADE, TOXIC KITCHENS, MISFITS & EMBRACE THE SUCK

The parallels between military culture and the restaurant industry have roots in the European military through the kitchen brigade, la brigade de cuisine, the hierarchical organization of the professional kitchen designed by the French Army veteran and chef, Auguste Escoffier, in the 19th century. At its best, inspired by military teamwork, this structure brings efficiency and excellence to the operations of the professional kitchen. “Yes chef!” In the 21st century, the “militant mentality of the restaurant industry”[17] has a continuity with this history, often an unquestioning reliance, embellishment, even celebration of this militaristic ethos by chefs and owners. It can also manifest in the boy’s club, bro culture of kitchens and the broader restaurant industry. According to chef and restauranteur, David Chang, “The stress level in a restaurant is already outrageously high

without the severe framework of the brigade system forcing everyone to think they're at war."[18]

In a July 15, 2020 article, Kate Telfeyan reported on social media revelations about toxic kitchens at celebrated American restaurants: "Former executive chef at Mission Chinese Food in New York City, posted a statement on Instagram detailing the abusive, misogynistic workplace fostered by chef-owner Danny Bowien . . . former employees of Brooklyn hipster restaurant Win Son, also on Instagram, claimed Tigg Brown 'ran a kitchen rife with verbal abuse and intimidation.'"[19] Telfeyan critiqued and interrogated food journalism's role in the construction of the contemporary celebrity chef, and asked the questions: "Why didn't food journalists already know about these abuses? Or if they did know, why hadn't they reported them?"[20]

In a food media that privileges the voices of restaurant owners and chefs, one might say that these restaurant industry workers, riled by the summer of reckonings, were using social media to find their voice and representation in these larger conversations, to create trouble and disruption of the status quo, and the industry's immunity to change and reform from traditional efforts. Soleil Ho incisively critiqued and deepened the conversation in her December 21, 2020 piece, "The restaurant equity revolution will not be Instagrammed." Ho saw the anonymous social media movement as flawed, part of the endemic brokenness of the industry, animated by the legitimate anger and felt helplessness of restaurant industry workers, but argued that anonymous social media posts are not a platform for restorative justice and actual change. According to Ho, "Accountability means allowing space for constructive conversation and dialogue about harm – to give someone the opportunity to own up to what they did and ask how they can make it right for the people and community they hurt . . . as well as the best way forward."[21] In the same discerning spirit and calls for action, Tejal Rao and Tien Nguyen suggested that food writers give greater attention, prominence and platforms to rank-and-file restaurant industry workers: "[T]he Los Angeles writer Tien Nguyen asked another urgent question: What would food journalism look like if it centered on rank-and-file workers instead of chefs?"[22] These are practitioners of a different kind of food journalism and criticism, one that responsively and consistently raises moral and ethical questions about the restaurant industry, and opens pathways for progressive conversation and dialogue, change and reform.

In a July 10, 2020 article about this social media movement in Portland, Oregon, Brooke Jackson-Glidden and Alex Frane wrote, "Ongoing public conversations about sexual harassment, substance abuse, and the mental health crisis among restaurant workers must also involve a recognition that abuse is embedded in the entire industry."[23] On October 22, 2020, Korean born, (adopted and raised in Oklahoma), chef-owner Danny Bowien posted a confessional response to the abuse allegations at his restaurants. To me, it read as a blend of authentic reflection and reckoning with some inevitable public relations overtones. He apologized and wrote about his own trauma and abuse history, including childhood sexual abuse and being verbally and physically assaulted at his first restaurant job. He unpacked the psychodynamics of the endemic abuse in the restaurant industry where people who come from a background of trauma and abuse often find themselves

further abused or traumatized, or abuse and traumatize others. “I am sorry. I am truly fucking sorry . . . I know the people I worked with who have been through the trauma of abuse, I could sense it and I am sorry we all thought this is what we deserve. We deserve so much more.”[24]

This restaurant industry ethos is situated within a pressure-cooker of issues including the previously noted fragile and precarious finances of running a restaurant, with often single digit profit margins, and a very high failure rate for new restaurants; living wage, working for tips, job insecurity issues; the long, physically taxing, often unpredictable working hours, mostly nights and weekends, paired with easy access to alcohol and a ubiquitous drug use culture; lack of control, lack of benefits (paid sick leave, health insurance, including mental health care); access to affordable childcare; racism, sexism, sexual harassment, LGBTQIA discrimination, and ageism; and the everyday practice of hospitality, of customer serving, especially in the time of the foodie, Yelp, and Instagram, as well as dealing with good old-fashioned, in-person bad behavior by customers. And, there is the infamous 1999 Anthony Bourdain passage about the people that are drawn to the restaurant industry, that both illuminated and perhaps celebrated the brutality of professional kitchen culture. Written over 20 years ago, there is a continuity between his prose and the 2020 Instagram confessions of Danny Bowien, who was featured on the sixth and final season of Bourdain’s *Mind of a Chef* (2017).

“I love the sheer weirdness of the kitchen life: the dreamers, the crackpots, the refugees, and the sociopaths with whom I continue to work; the ever-present smell of roasting bones, searing fish, and simmering liquids; the noise and clatter, the hiss and spray, the flames, the smoke, and the steam. Admittedly, it’s a life that grinds you down. Most of us who live and operate in the culinary underworld are in some fundamental way dysfunctional. We’ve all chosen to turn our backs on the nine-to-five, or ever having a Friday or Saturday night off, or ever having a normal relationship with a non-cook . . . In America, the professional kitchen is the last refuge of the misfit. It’s a place for people with bad pasts to find a new family.”[25]

In a 2016 article written in response to the suicide of the 44-year-old French-Swiss chef Benoit Violer, whose restaurant received three Michelin stars and best restaurant in the world in 2015, Keenan Steiner, cited restaurant industry advocate and educator, Anthony Rudolf, “He says of workers’ mental health, ‘Nobody really talks about it as much as they should.’ He also points to another seemingly admirable, but potentially toxic, trait among restaurant workers: the ‘mentality of courage, the idea that everything is okay and you can just muscle through it.’”[26] There is perhaps an overreliance on grit, an individualistic grit or paying your dues mentality that aggressively eschews admitting to having difficulties, asking for help, setting limits and boundaries, raising concerns or dealing with conflict, and thus largely leaves the endemic abuse, the toxic culture, and the systemic deficiencies intact.

This is a variation of the “embrace the suck” military mentality that my combat veterans talk about at the VA Mental Health Clinic, and perhaps why many veterans are drawn to professional kitchens. I began my professional career at the Veterans Health

Administration in the early 2000s, at VA Medical Centers in Cincinnati and Boston, where I found myself drawn to working with trauma and PTSD. In my experience with the embrace the suck mentality, I have found that one has to regularly restore one's singular belief in its directive, in its delusion, for somewhere in the recesses of the self, some time in one's day, or perhaps in one's dreams, one knows it is a kind of madness. Part of this delusion is the romanization of the stress, challenge and abuse, an iteration of Nietzsche's "what does not kill me makes me stronger."[27] Addictions and bad habits are the most prominent strategies we engage to manage stress, trauma, and/or the embrace the suck mentality, including, alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes; food and eating; oversleeping or not sleeping; materialism and spending; smartphones, the internet, television, and videogames; compulsive sexual behaviors and pornography. There are also self-protective but flawed patterns of emotional and psychological regulation, including distraction, denial, and avoidance, busyness and workaholism, dissociation and numbness, isolation and social withdraw.

In a 2017 mental health study[28] of chefs by Unilever Food Solutions and the FairKitchens initiative: 74% reported severe sleep deprivation; 63% suffered from depression; 60% reported that their work had a direct and negative impact on their mental health; 53% felt pushed to their breaking point; and most in their default mode of serving others, of taking care of others, felt too busy for self-care, to really look after themselves. According to chef Sean Brock, "our bodies, our minds and our nervous systems are not designed to be that stressed out for 15 hours a day."[29] Richly rewarded for his workaholism, Brock broke down after some 12 years in the industry, afflicted by a severe medical disorder that was exacerbated by stress. At age 39, he had to reckon with his physical health, workaholism, depression, and alcohol abuse. A good old-fashioned intervention led to a 6-week treatment program and taking almost 2 years away from his restaurants. He was also diagnosed with PTSD, likely generated through his intense and relentless tenure working in the restaurant industry.[30]

Emersed in "lots of therapy, counseling, treatment and rehab,"[31] including obsessively studying Adlerian psychology, Brock cultivated and practiced new values related to health, self-care, and happiness. He wanted to start fresh and developed plans with his small team for a new restaurant compound in East Nashville. His new restaurants will be ideologically driven and grounded in the wellness of the staff, including a mindfulness center, and a guiding question for all restaurant processes and operations, "What's the stress level?"[32] According to Brock: "We're not taught how to communicate with boundaries and vulnerability, and with empathy. In the new restaurant I'm building a classroom where we will teach people how to speak when there's conflict, how to ask for help."[33] Reflecting on this period of his life, Brock said he is creating and cooking the best food of his career.

And in counterpoint to Brock's story, many individuals who reckon with the restaurant industry ethos choose to leave, to find work elsewhere. But it is complicated, because for people who have worked in the industry for much of their adult life, there is often a sense that this is all they know. That they worked in this subterranean industry of misfits that welcomed and often abused them, and developed a strange and specialized skill set that

leaves one uncertain, uneasy and lacking in confidence about her/his capacity to make a living outside the industry.

Psychiatrist and writer Mark Epstein, suggested that the First Noble Truth in Buddhist psychology, *Dukkha*, generally translated as "suffering," is also about trauma, the trauma of everyday life.[34] Restaurant industry work is very stressful and often traumatic, and has its own unique form of *Dukka*. According to Andrew Zimmern, James Beard award-winning food media personality, Hazelton Betty Ford alumni, and actively sober for almost 30 years: "Trauma that is not transformed is transmitted,"[35] often transmitted and infused into the entire restaurant industry and culture. This is what chef Danny Bowien revealed in his Instagram confessional. I spent almost a decade working full-time on a Posttraumatic Stress Clinical Team (PCT), treating combat PTSD and military sexual trauma. Trauma is the foundation of my formation as a clinical psychologist. It was incredibly meaningful and rewarding work, but it was also very intense and very difficult, not unlike the brutality of working in the restaurant industry.

When I give talks about PTSD, I always include the story that the Chinese director, Kar Wai Wong, used in several of his films, most notably, *In the Mood for Love* (2000): "Before, when people had secrets they didn't want to share, they'd climb a mountain, they'd find a tree and carve a hole in it, and whisper the secret into the hole, then cover it over with mud. That way, nobody else would ever discover it. I'll be your tree!"
In an understaffed clinic in Temple, Texas, the secrets about the horrors of war and military sexual trauma were the substantive part of my work life, my body and psyche their tree. This work was also situated within the context of an epidemic of veteran suicides, where chronic suicidal thoughts and behaviors were often part of my trauma patients' suffering. Most years during this period I saw over 1000 unique veterans a year. On my drive home, I would often scream and cry in my car, regularly eat a small sack of McDonalds cheeseburgers and fries, and I watched my relationship fall apart like watching a slow-motion car crash. I had to acknowledge and reckon with my own well intentioned, but toxic "embrace the suck" mentality toward my work life. In my professional youth, I viewed trauma and PTSD clinical work as the Marine Corps of mental health care, or like working and learning at the highest levels of the restaurant industry, the Michelin star restaurant.

I now work part-time for the VA, built a small, deeply personal private practice in East Austin, cultivated a mindfulness meditation practice, and I have a long-standing gentlemen's bet with my youngest brother not to eat at McDonalds. I lost that bet in 2009, driving back and forth from Austin to College Station, to Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine with my boxer, Lucy for a cancer related hind leg amputation. After a couple days, pondering my relapse and that delicious Quarter Pounder with Cheese, what they call in Paris, "a Royale with Cheese,"[36] I mailed my brother the receipt and a check for $75. I have maintained my sobriety ever since. I still struggle with work, stress and balance, with cravings for comfort food, with vulnerabilities to abuse alcohol, but the conditions are markedly better and more spacious for self-care, self-compassion, wiser and more skillful action.

CARRIBEAN CUISINE

My mom, an immigrant from Trinidad came to America in the mid-1960s, and was an incredible home cook. At least one of her grandparents came to Trinidad from India, as an indentured laborer; one came from France and was an overseer of a sugar plantation. Another was a shopkeeper who sold his handmade coconut cakes and tamarind balls at the entryway of his small general store, where the family lived upstairs. My father, born and raised in Syracuse, New York, enlisted in the Marine Corps in the spring of 1961, and was stationed in Trinidad shortly after the assassination of JFK in November 1963. He met my mother in September 1964. I have a black and white photograph of one of their early dates, they were seated at a white linen covered table, my mom wore a corsage, my dad, a skinny tie and custom made, slim fit two-piece suit.

Diverse and delicious food was the centerpiece of our family life in Upstate New York. Her curry chicken and potatoes with buss up shut roti, was our comfort food. My favorite breakfast was bull johl with sliced avocado (zaboca) and fried bakes, the bull johl made with salt cod (bacalao) that came in small wooden boxes. I didn't fully appreciate her cooking and food until I was an adult. She suffered a severe, debilitating depression for most of my adolescence, part of my origin story of becoming a psychologist, and my own legacy and longstanding struggle with depression. After college, she gave me a Revere Ware covered saucepan from her first collection of pots and pans. I still regularly use and cherish that stainless steel, copper bottomed pot. In another time and place, I could see my mom having a food truck. True to her aesthetic, in 1995, the year her mother died, my mom made a DIY kind of foodzine cookbook, "Caribbean Cuisine," with pages of stories, recipes, photos, drawings, and quotes each fastened together at Kinkos with a plastic spiral binding. She was also a painter and wrote in the introduction: "Pay attention to colour, variety and presentation are extremely important!"

I wrote a bad but earnest poem for Mother's Day when I was in graduate school about my visits home, about our talking in the kitchen while she cooked, about eating her food, about our particular mother and son relationship, and about participating in the deep history of mothers (and grandmothers) cooking for their families. "For all his education, in the darkness of his room, he wondered at the generous spirit of this woman that was his mother." My mom framed the poem and hung it in the hallway. There is something deeply emotional about someone cooking for you, of being served food lovingly prepared, a seemingly basic yet profound and poetic expression of love and care; of visiting home and being greeted in the kitchen by my mom cooking, "I made your favorite, come sit and talk with me." One of my greatest joys as an adult was to cook for my mom. The last elaborate meal I prepared for her (and my dad) was a classic French salad with a simple Dijon dressing and a slow roasted pork shoulder with ginger scallion noodles from the *Momofuku: A Cookbook* (2009). Today, my mom is afflicted with dementia and mostly doesn't remember how to cook. The kitchen in my parent's home, the home where I grew up, feels like an abandoned garden.

KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL, NEW YORK CITY & DAVE CHANG

I discovered Anthony Bourdain through the 1999 *New Yorker* article cited earlier that anticipated the publication of *Kitchen Confidential* in 2000. That year I was kicked out of my psychology residency for insubordination, questioning my own chosen profession, reckoning with my own self-destructiveness, and that book rocked my world: punk rock, gonzo literary style prose; the revelations of a profession and industry that touched my imagination and appetites; depictions of the communal ecstasy of hard work and the brutality of kitchen culture. I was inspired by the parallels between becoming a chef and becoming a psychotherapist, about the journey of finding one's personal technique and style through training and study, mentorship, and the often challenging, formative years of early experience. *Kitchen Confidential* stands with another NYC centered-memoir published a decade later, Patti Smith's *Just Kids* (2010), as two of my all-time favorite books of non-fiction.

In 2011, I went to NYC to see the *Abstract Expressionist New York* exhibition at the MOMA and invited my youngest brother, a filmmaker who was living in Greenpoint, for some Bourdain inspired casual fine-dining. I took him to Brasserie Les Halles for escargot, French onion soup and steak frites, and the next day, pork buns and noodles at Momofuku Noodle Bar. I savored those meals together, shared in conversation and connection with my brother and friend. In 2002, several years after the publication of *Kitchen Confidential*, Anthony Bourdain left his position as Executive Chef at Les Halles, and the restaurant closed in 2017 after the owner filed for bankruptcy. There were stories posted about people gathering at the shuttered Les Halles restaurant after Bourdain's suicide in 2018. Korean-American chef David Chang and founder of Momofuku was featured on Bourdain's first season of the PBS television series, *The Mind of a Chef* (2012). Opened in 2004, I learned that in the early days of Momofuku Noodle Bar, Pavement, a favorite band of mine, was loud and in heavy rotation on their sound system. I celebrated my 50th birthday in 2017 with a dear NYC friend at the chef's counter of Momofuku Ko, a beautiful and inventive tasting menu, a bottle of sake, and the great delight of watching and talking with the kitchen staff who worked inside the U-shaped bar counter. Since the suicide of his friend and mentor, Chang has been an outspoken advocate for mental health in the restaurant industry. I am a fan and regular listener of *The Dave Chang Show*, a podcast that began in late-April 2018. In my fanboy enthusiasm, I learned that Chang is something of a Rorschach inkblot for people that work in the restaurant industry.

On a short and somber podcast episode[37] in mid-June 2018, after Bourdain's suicide, Chang shared his own struggles with the cycles of bipolar disorder, and with a certain anger and rage. He self-disclosed that after years of suffering, he finally sought help, that he has seen a psychiatrist, also his psychotherapist, since 2003, sometimes 2-3 times a week, and that it is one of his longest standing adult relationships. He also detailed the significant challenges and barriers to finding a good mental health provider and paying for often expensive care with restaurant industry wages and the limitations of our current health care and insurance apparatus. He encouraged hope, leaning into the vulnerability of asking for help, persistence in getting the right help, and his own experience of the great value of talking with a professional over time. On September 8, 2020 Chang

published, *Eat A Peach: A Memoir,* an autobiography in part about his struggles with mental health, including suicidal thoughts.

LONE STAR, PABST BLUE RIBBON & RENE REDZEPI

Before COVID-19, I found comfort and counterpoint to my often emotionally challenging work days at restaurant bars and chef's counters, in being served great food and drink, of someone looking after me, and preferably, some good, not too loud music on the sound. I enjoyed talking with bartenders, waitstaff, managers, chefs, and other customers. I started to go more frequently, during less busy evening hours, or the last hour of brunch service on the weekends, and I became a regular at several places. I learned to pay attention to what places restaurant industry people liked to go to eat and drink on their off time, and would often encounter them at the bar as they would reveal themselves in their graciousness toward the bartenders and waitstaff, or someone from the back of house would come out to warmly greet them. I learned a certain ethnography about front of house and back of house, and about buying beer for the latter, where in Austin, Texas, 24 pack cans of Lone Star or Pabst Blue Ribbon, are greatly appreciated. (In retrospect, perhaps not the best idea to reinforce and support the often problematic alcohol culture in the restaurant industry).

In a 2017 speech given to his staff, chef Rene Redzepi said in closing the original Noma, "There's something more than the food. The food is great, but there's something more. And that something is what people do, It's something with people. It's all the people."[38] Redzepi took this impassioned insight about people, hospitality and food to the next level, into larger conversations, into the realms of reflection, renewal and revolutionary change with MAD (Danish for food) and the biennial MAD Symposium, "a not-for-profit organization that aims to spread ideas, forge new relationships, discuss injustices and update – in real time – the global playbook for an ethical, sustainable food culture."[39] The MAD Symposium will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2021 as the restaurant industry and larger food culture reckons with COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter. It is all about the people, everything starts with people, together people can change the world (through food and hospitality).

I love restaurants, bars and breweries, and the people that work and inhabit those places, the whole big, beautiful theatre of hospitality, of serving and service. In the same way that I naturally cultivated a certain empathy and love for my veterans, despite never serving in the military myself, I feel the same about people in the restaurant industry, a place I have also never served. I have found that most restaurant industry people are generous and kind, savvy, organic psychologists and social theorists, students of the human condition and culture. I draw inspiration from this world, from its language, it's model of service, from its art and craft for my own work and practice of individual psychotherapy. I sometimes think of my private practice as a small restaurant with a table for one, where I am owner, chef, front of house and reservationist, bartender, bookkeeper, and dishwasher, perhaps like the Japanese *Midnight Diner*, a favorite pandemic Netflix series binge watch.

CHEERS, THE REPLACEMENTS & THIRD PLACES

"Walk down the streets of any city or village in the world and you will be reminded of the allure of restaurants. Listen to the conversations spilling out onto the sidewalk from bistros and bars with their windows open on a summer night . . . Restaurants give cities their hum. Restaurants are the ventricles through which the lifeblood of a metropolis pulses in and out" (Jeff Gordinier, *Hungry: Eating, Road-Tripping, and Risking It All with the Greatest Chef in the World*, 2019).

Briallen Hopper wrote an essay about the 1980s television sitcom *Cheers*: "And then there's the theme song, 'Where Everybody Knows Your Name,' which is a kind of love song . . . the lyrics are an empathetic invitation addressed directly to the listener, affirming that sometimes just getting through the day takes everything we've got, and telling us to come in and take a load off."[40] After getting through a day at my office, I often drove down the road in East Austin to my friend Jake's place, The Brewer's Table, where I was warmly greeted as "Dr. Mark," a handshake, a hug, we would talk, connect, and drink a couple of lagers, some of their more inventive, served in wine glasses. I recall one spring evening in 2019, I shared that we had a very public suicide in our VA clinic, a veteran shot a killed himself in the waiting area, drinks were poured, glasses raised, words of honor and respect spoken, kindness, humanity and fellowship at my local *Cheers*.

There is also the unromantic but beautiful post-punk ballad about dive bars by The Replacements, "Everybody wants to be special here. They call you by your name loud and clear. Here comes a regular" (*Tim*, 1985). The Replacements are glorious rock 'n' roll for misfits, and I still proudly wear my black high top Converse Chucks in middle-age. I suspect Anthony Bourdain was a fan if not friends with Paul Westerberg and the band. Bourdain said food at its best has "something in common with rock 'n' roll, great rock 'n' roll."[41] Bob Stinson, the founding 'Mats guitarist worked as a line cook through their early records, was kicked out of the band after *Let it Be* (1984), and struggled with substance abuse, as well as mental illness. He died at age 35, likely related to a long history of alcohol and drug abuse. In the documentary *Color Me Impressed: A Film About the Replacements* (2011), George Wendt was convinced that "Here Comes a Regular" was inspired by *Cheers* (1982 – 1993) and his character, Norm.

Restaurants and bars are what Ray Oldenburg (1999) called "third places" or the "great good places" of informal public life. These are places people go in their neighborhoods, communities, and cities distinct from their homes and places of work, for socialization and conversation, warmth and connection, for "regeneration of spirit, or unwinding, or of 'letting one's hair down.'"[42] These are places where one can find banter, laughter, flirting, exchange ideas, or practice the lost art of conversation. These are places where you and can hold a meeting, gather with family and friends, acquaintances or strangers, have a date or simply sit alone amongst others. Restaurants and bars add the pleasures of food and drink, and staff that take care of you and offer their own charms in this community theatre of informal public life. In a world increasing organized through the virtual and screens, restaurants and bars are local, brick and mortar, public social spaces

to spend one's time in community and fellowship with others. Restaurants and bars are central to my vision of the good life.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF AMERICAN DINING & BUDDHIST IMPERMANENCE

In *Burn the Ice: The American Culinary Revolution and Its End* (2019), the James Beard award winning journalist Kevin Alexander (2019) called the past decade, the Golden Age of American dining, a glorious food era defined by the personal, independent, chef-owned, casual fine-dining restaurant.[43] This era was driven by the foodie revolution including the construction of what Tejal Rao called the celebrity "chef-auteur framework"[44]; food television, especially Anthony Bourdain television (2002–2018), my favorite being *Mind of a Chef* (2012–2017), and *Top Chef*, which premiered in 2006 and is still airing seasons and spin-offs; the flora and fauna of food media on the internet including blogs, Yelp (2004) and Eater (2005); and the growth of foodie culture and foodies to the point of caricature, often satirized on *Portlandia* (2011–2018).

Alexander charted the beginnings of this era in Portland, Oregon in 2006. In what now feels like a different time, the time before COVID-19, I made a food trip to the PDX in 2017 and had a spectacular meal at Le Pigeon's small L-shaped chef's counter. Chef Gabriel Rucker's tasting menu was a poetic arc of a meal that began with a beef and octopus tartare and ended with their signature foie gras profiteroles. As someone who enjoys, often prefers dining alone, there was something magical in dining at the edge of this small, open kitchen, of experiencing the front and back of the house simultaneously, in tandem, like chamber music. "To be sure, there is beauty in that interplay, and sharing a meal with friends and family is one of the richest social rituals there is. But when you dine alone, you are free of those structures. That's when magic can happen."[45] I learned in my research that chef Rucker works on his sobriety and recovery daily, exercises most days of the week and is "always practicing the 12th step, which is reaching out."[46]

This Golden Age of restaurants is also implicated in urban renewal and gentrification. According to *The New York Times* economics reporter, Eduardo Porter, "Restaurants have been a key element of America's urban transformation, helping draw the young and highly educated to city centers . . . It has also overhauled many low-income neighborhoods, sometimes forcing longtime residents out of town."[47] This has been the story in East Austin over the past decade. Revisiting business writer and polymath, Jim Collins and his book, *How the Mighty Fall* (2009), one could convincingly argue that the Golden Age of American Dining was characterized by an undisciplined growth and expansion without adequately tending to the sustainability of the restaurant industry, all supported and celebrated by the American foodie revolution, and the fevered pursuit of more and the new next.

Even before COVID-19, Alexander noted in 2019 that this era, the boom and growth of some 100,000 new restaurants in the past decade, was beginning to bust, that it could no longer sustain itself. There was the grind and burn of a financially precarious industry, the rising costs of food and operations including rent and labor costs; the shrinking labor pool, especially for back of the house, entry level cooking jobs (despite the period's

explosion of often predatory culinary schools); and the restaurant industry revelations of the #MeToo movement. According to chef Corey Lee who opened his San Francisco restaurant Benu at the beginning of this Golden Age in 2010 and was awarded three Michelin stars in 2014: "Restaurants are such fragile businesses and something needs to change. This [COVID-19] just exposed our vulnerability, and I really think it was due for a fall, maybe in a different way because there were too many restaurants that they couldn't sustain a healthy business."[48]

The past five years, the most consistent story posted again and again on *Eater Austin* was restaurant shutters and closures. There was also an infamous restaurant review in the *Austin American-Statesman*, charting how Austin's Golden Age of Dining was in decline in 2017: "We've stumbled from chef-driven restaurants to vibe-driven restaurants. Dining out becomes less about a shared appreciation of craft, flavor and community and more a form of effervescent entertainment and stylized spectacle."[49]

Being a regular is also a lesson in Buddhist impermanence, in personally experiencing the fragility and precariousness of the restaurant industry. Two of my favorite Austin restaurants closed, places I frequented for years, Olivia in 2016, and Chicon in 2018. Years of being a regular, a relationship with a place, people, a menu, dissolves and disappears, becomes a memory, a dream. There is also pervasive and recurrent staff turnover at restaurants and bars. According to the National Restaurant Association, for the restaurant and accommodations sectors in 2018, the overall turnover rate was about 75% as compared to about 50% in the private sector.[50] I regularly saw staff leave for better gigs, realize a mismatch and/or leave a toxic work culture; get fired abruptly for some iteration of misconduct or for no legitimate reason; or sometimes, they decided to take a break or leave the restaurant industry entirely. While we are currently on hiatus due to COVID-19, I take modern dance lessons with a dancer and choreographer who worked at Olivia and he continues to intermittently work in the restaurant industry to help pay the bills.

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

"I like to say that if we are not suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, we are suffering from pre-traumatic stress disorder. There is no way to be alive without being conscious of the potential for disaster." (Mark Epstein, "The Trauma of Being Alive," *The New York Times*, 2013).

In March 2020, COVID-19 happened. An accelerating pandemic came to America, all restaurants in Austin, Texas, all restaurants across the country abruptly closed at about the same time. The very essence of a restaurant as a robust place of gathering, of chefs and kitchen staff working in close proximity, using their hands, their discerning sense of touch, smell, taste, and vision in cooking and plating; the choreography, in often small spaces, of waitstaff and customers, of eating and drinking, of plates, silverware, and glassware; the restaurant as a vehicle of the whole big, beautiful theatre of hospitality was flagged as a powerful vehicle of transmitting and spreading the virus. Restaurant owners and investors were confronted with local, state, and federal mandates to close their dining

rooms. They faced difficult, often anguished decisions about their operations and business model, their staff, their rent and landlords, their suppliers, venders and deliveries, their often fragile and finite finances, the whole ecosystem including their customers and the public health of their community.

Rank-and-file restaurant industry workers were laid off, fired, furloughed, pivoted to unemployment benefits if they were eligible, and/or made decisions about working, health and safety, having to consider their access to health care, having to consider their families, all in a context of great uncertainty about the status of the restaurant industry. In April 2020, the Independent Restaurant Association reported that independent restaurants employed 11 million people, laid off 90% of its hourly workforce, 70% of their salaried workforce, and that only one in five restaurant owners were certain they could survive COVID-19.[51] These massive layoffs brought greater attention to restaurant industry wages including the problems of subminimum wage ($2.13) tipped workers income, the pay inequities between front and back of house, and the prominence of undocumented immigrant workers in the industry. According to Esther Tseng in an *Eater* piece posted on May 29, 2020, "Undocumented workers hold the restaurant industry together. Now, they stand to lose the most. The pandemic has left the country's most vulnerable with nowhere to turn."[52] Undocumented restaurant industry workers, most of whom are people of color, are ineligible for unemployment, Federal stimulus relief, SNAP benefits or Medicaid. In a pandemic abyss of closures, job losses and deep uncertainty about the viability of the restaurant industry, restaurant owners faced real-time scrutiny and criticism from others and themselves about their positions, decisions, and actions. The restaurant industry, the hospitality industry was about to be decimated.

My own shelter in place quarantine began in mid-March 2020. Like many people, in those early months, I struggled to process what was happening, often floundered in the mud of days, feeling barely functional, with mixed episodes of depression and anxiety, with intermittent binging of food, alcohol, sleep, and streaming television. My part-time VA gig was secure and slowly pivoted to remote, telemental health work from home in April 2020, and I had to return to the VA clinic in early October 2020. My private practice was significantly impacted by COVID-19 causing a 50% reduction in my revenue. My business has endured drops and spikes, and I had to make decisions about my office lease, which I chose to renew. I experimented with different ways of providing access and care, and I expanded offering significantly reduced fees for people impacted by COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter.

As I noted earlier, with this unexpected time and space, of being home day and night, unable to go to restaurants and bars, I revisited my Bourdain essay notes, conducted research, assembled and sorted piles of material and notes. I found my lead, wrote much more than I anticipated, and found my ending in a poem and Netflix series. In the frenzied social media exchange of COVID-19 posts and articles, a past colleague in Canada introduced me to the Tibetan Buddhist concept of the *bardo*,[53] the in-between place, a gap between worlds, a time and space of potential reckoning, change and transformation, individually, collectively, and culturally. 2020 is a potential bardo. The restaurant industry is residing in the bardo, reckoning with what Buddhist scholar and

ecology activist Janna Macy framed as, the great unraveling of business as usual, and the possibilities and hope of a great turning toward change. According to James Beard award winning celebrity chef, author and advocate, Tom Colicchio, "We need to look at systemic changes, as opposed to just getting ourselves through COVID only."[54]

I also learned from Colicchio about the elaborate food ecosystem, the supply chain for which restaurants are the hubs, the final destination. How 90-95 cents of every dollar of revenue a restaurant generates mostly goes back out into this food and non-food restaurant supply chain, and how COVID-19 is dismantling this network, greatly impacting suppliers, vendors and purveyors, farms and fishers, and a whole spectrum of mostly small, specialized restaurant-adjacent businesses. Chef Gabrielle Hamilton wrote about the trusting and humane long-term relationships she had with many of her suppliers and vendors, most notably a family-owned butchery she used for 20 years. There were also calls to social and economic awareness from independent restaurant advocates, asking us to think now and after COVID-19 about this ecosystem and the difference between spending our money at small, local, independent restaurants versus large, multinational, franchise-based, conglomerate restaurants.[55] Several pop culture savvy restaurant industry people and food writers cited the 1993 sci-fi film, *Demolition Man,* set in 2032. Sandra Bullock says to the recently unfrozen Sylvester Stallone, "Taco Bell was the only restaurant to survive the franchise wars, now all restaurants are Taco Bell."

The COVID-19 news about the meatpacking industry flashbacked to Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2001), his expose on fast food and the meatpacking industry, that drew comparisons to Upton Sinclair's book, *The Jungle*. Sinclair's 1906 novel is an American tragedy about a Lithuanian immigrant family working in the meatpacking district and stockyards of Chicago, and indirectly led to new federal food laws. Schlosser wrote a COVID-19 piece for *The Atlantic* on May 12, 2020, revisiting and expanding his previous work about the meatpacking industry and the current politization of the industry that put workers and consumers health at risk. Channeling Upton Sinclair's commitment to social justice, Schlosser made a moving plea that we take care of the people that feed us: "A minimum wage that's a living wage, at least $15 an hour—and elimination of the subminimum wage for restaurant workers, which can be as low as $2.13 an hour. Health insurance for every single American. A safe workplace and fair compensation for every worker injured, sickened, or sexually harassed on the job."[56] *The Washington Post* reported on November 19, 2020 that pending lawsuits at a Tyson Food pork processing plant in Waterloo, Iowa, alleged that plant supervisors placed bets on how many workers would contract COVID-19, required long work hours of employees, and failed to consistently provide personal protective equipment or social distancing and safety measures.[57]

Returning to the stockyards of Austin, Texas, I was no longer able to go to my local restaurants and bars. My last pre-COVID-19 restaurant meal was on March 7, 2020, a beautifully inventive and delicious duck neck boudin at one of my favorite Austin restaurants, Foreign & Domestic. About a year earlier, this small, independent, chef-owned restaurant instituted a voluntary 3% charge to tabs to generate revenue to pay for health insurance for their full-time staff. "We love our guests, we love our staff, & most

of all, we love hospitality. It's simply hard to be hospitable if you are sick and can't afford a doctor without insurance. Thank you for supporting our teeny-tiny family restaurant. We love you!" Chef Sarah Heard is also a member and actively participates in the Austin chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier, an international organization that was founded with a mission to create a community where women support women in food, beverage and hospitality.

It was a lovely meal at a small table for one on an early March 2020 Friday night before a concert at the University of Texas at Austin McCullough Theatre. The guitarist, Marc Ribot, sat off to the side of the movie screen, and played an expressive live solo guitar score to Charlie Chaplain's 1921 silent film, *The Kid*. The small theatre, full of closely seated people, would in the coming weeks be instructed on social distancing, mask wearing, and shelter-in-place mandates. I wonder what kind of score Marc Ribot, or perhaps the recently lost, Ennio Morricone, would compose, the soundtrack for the real time film of the strange and surreal days of 2020.

I did not fully realize that in the coming days, the restaurant industry and live music would close, shut down, cancel, postpone. The mid-March SXSW Conference and Festivals were cancelled due to COVID-19. On July 1, 2020 I had tickets to see Kraftwerk, the German pioneers of electronic music, their 50th anniversary 3-D tour. Cancelled, refunds processed in as little as 30 days. It was also announced over the summer that the Austin City Limits Music Festival would no longer take place in October 2020. I live in Austin, Texas, the live music capital of the world, another industry decimated by the pandemic.

My fair city is also home to the SIMS Foundation, a nonprofit named after a local musician who committed suicide. Founded in 1995, the SIMS Foundation built a network of community-based providers and programs to offer accessible and affordable mental health and substance abuse recovery services for musicians, music industry professionals and music venue workers. I was a SIMS Foundation provider for many years, it is based on an agreed upon, reduced fee where the client paid a small co-payment based on income and the remainder was subsidized by SIMS. It is a unique and exceptional organization, celebrating its 25th year in 2020. Also in the ATX, inspired by the creativity and suffering of one of our greatest musicians, Daniel Johnston, is The Hi, How Are You Project. Founded in 2018, the Project took the title of Johnston's 1983 self-released cassette tape as a platform to cultivate creative media and music projects to facilitate deeper conversations about mental health.

Riffing on T.S. Elliot, in my life before COVID-19, I measured out my life with coffee spoons, dirty restaurant plates, empty beer, wine and cocktail glasses, live music ticket stubs, and performing arts programs. Before COVID-19, I would go to Salt & Time in East Austin on Thursday evenings after work, a cold Reissdorf Kölsch at the bar, order their offal "odd bits," an ever-changing small plate chalkboard menu item worthy of a cult following, a medium rare hanger steak and beef fat fries. I talked with the bartenders, staff, sometimes the owner and other customers, and often drank another Kölsch or a local Jester King farmhouse ale. After COVID-19, Salt & Time, also a butcher shop and

salumeria pivoted to being a hybrid carryout and small grocery store featuring local produce and products. The bar where I sat most Thursday evenings is now a counter for groceries; the bar stools, tables and chairs put away creating a grocery aisle to accommodate social distancing. Their handmade pimento cheese in a small plastic tub was my COVID-19 comfort food of choice. On entry, there is a hand sanitizer stand with a box of plastic gloves, laminated signage with safety instructions. At this writing, it is unclear if they will return to a traditional restaurant operation, the pivot may be more permanent.

Some Austin restaurants stayed closed, some pivoted to take-out, with "Open For Take Out" signs in their windows designed and donated by a local banner shop. Some restaurants decided to serve front-line healthcare workers, first responders, school children and families, and the local community of restaurant industry workers. For customers, they leaned toward comfort food, family and assemble at home packages and boxes prepared in ghost kitchens following guidelines, principles, and protocols with masks and gloves, food packaged in empty dining rooms, for pick-up or delivery. Restaurants faced new costs related to take-out packaging and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for their employees. We learned about the predatory and profiteering practices of most 3rd party delivery platforms, 20-30% commissions as well as problematic labor practices and COVID-19 safety issues.[58]

With restaurant dining room closures, the contemporary kitchen brigade, the whole hierarchy of owner, chef, back of house, front of house collapsed, and a skeleton crew cooked and make food in a kind Marxist alienated labor, estranged and disconnected from the human and social aspects of restaurant culture. Philosopher chef, Wylie Dufresne of the celebrated wd~50 (2003-2014), now the owner of Du's Donuts and Coffee in Brooklyn, said in a May 2020 interview, that he worries about the potential sterility, the potential soullessness of pandemic hospitality culture for both restaurant industry workers and customers. Approaching 50 years of age, he asked, "At what point is the joy being removed from these places that it's not something that I want to continue doing. I love cooking. I love restaurants. I love doing what I do, but can I love it under these new circumstances? I don't know."[59]

In the early months of COVID-19, Foreign & Domestic pivoted to curbside, contactless take-out food, and also sold beer, wine, bulk staples (including rolls of toilet paper), and swag. According to chef and co-owner Sarah Heard, "'That's been our whole lives, really. The whole restaurant part – greeting people and seeing people and hugging your regulars and taking care of them. It's hard for us to not be hospitable. We just take the bag and put it on the table or drop it in the trunk with no contact."[60] For both the restaurant and the customer, especially the regular, there was something substantively lost in this adaptive culture of pandemic hospitality, in all its "contactlessness."

In this unprecedented pandemic, we lost our neighborhood restaurants and bars as third places to gather, connect, and commune together, to talk and make meaning of what was happening in our community, the country, the world. We were all instructed to shelter in place, to stay home. In the early months of summer, Foreign & Domestic struggled with

reduced take-out sales, the rent was due, and they decided to gently and safely reopen in mid-June 2020. They continued to offer take-out and navigated COVID-19 recommendations and protocols to reimagine hospitality, they reconfigured the small dining room and expanded the outdoor seating, and faced the challenges of rehiring and staffing amidst health concerns, reduced capacity and correspondingly reduced revenue. Chef-owner Sarah Heard illuminated the economic and psychological precarity of trying to operate a restaurant in the final months of 2020: "We have to remind ourselves that we are doing our best, and that if we have to close and bankrupt, that it's not because of anything we did wrong . . . Everything we do revolves around keeping it afloat, so if it were to sink, it would feel like a personal failure no matter how unfair that is."[61]

Foreign & Domestic won several prominent awards at the live streamed 2020 Austin CultureMap Tastemaker Awards on July 23, 2020, including best chefs and best neighborhood restaurant. So well deserved, but in the larger 2020 conversations, the meaning and purpose, politics and history of restaurant awards are being critically interrogated. In response to the restaurant industry being in crisis, the James Beard Foundation announced in August 2020 that they would not be issuing their traditional restaurant and chef awards for 2020 and 2021, taking time to examine their policies, procedures, and their impact on food culture. *The New York Times* food critic, Pete Wells reported that the Foundation reckoned with misconduct allegations of several nominees and "no Black people had won in any of the 23 categories on the [2020] ballot."[62]

San Francisco Chronicle food critic Soleil Ho, a Queer woman of color and outspoken critic of the lack of diversity in the James Beard Foundation Awards, urged that the James Beard Foundation "favor of a more representative model of talking about restaurant culture,"[63] and that their new iteration of awards de-center the chef-auteur framework and consider a broader range of people and settings outside traditional restaurants; consider rescinding past awards for substantiated misconduct; offer more categories for outstanding service for rank-and-file workers; and recognize individual restaurants that create healthy, equitable, and sustainable work environments and cultures.[64]

Regarding the gay food luminaire whose name signifies excellence in American food culture, on October 6, 2020, James Beard award winning writer, John Birdsall published *The Man Who Ate Too Much: The Life of James Beard*. Through the lens of his Twitter moniker, "Pushing back on queer erasure in American food," Birdsall wrote about the shadows of James Beard's story, his psychology and sexuality as a gay White man (1903-1985). According Birdsall, "Three gay guys – [James] Beard, Richard Olney, and Craig Claiborne – would become architects of modern food in America."[65]

I celebrated this past New Year's Eve (2019) at the L'Oca d'Oro chef's counter, a 1980s New York City themed party in Austin, Texas. The restaurant was full of people and energy, the staff dressed in period outfits with a fun and inventive NYC food inspired tasting menu and 80s hip-hop on the sound. I sat at the same seat in late November 2019, for their celebration of the food film, *Big Night* (1996), with live music highlighting the songs of Louis Prima. The salt baked whole branzino was beautiful and delicious. L'Oca

d'Oro, is a notable local restaurant that successfully rooted its raison d'etre in a strong One Fair Wage position, charging 20% on tabs with an explicit statement about generating a living wage and benefits for their entire staff.

The co-owners Adam Orman and chef Fiore Tedesco are active in the small-business advocacy nonprofit Good Work Austin which has focused on paid sick leave; access to health care including affordable mental health care; a coordinated, thoughtful re-opening of restaurants during the pandemic; and active and critical voice in the Austin City Council COVID-19 financial relief resolutions, including acknowledging and addressing Austin's "segregated restaurant community."[66] L'Oca d'Oro laid off their 25 employees and have been through many iterations and pivots documented on their social media. Over the summer they collaborated and focused on local food insecurity making meals for the Austin Independent School District, and in October 2020 they began a program of subscription boxes, prepared meals with small-production wine pairings. According to Orman, "L'Oca d'Oro is not really a restaurant right now so much as a food production facility,"[67] and with this model, they were able to hire back much of their staff.

It would be interesting to research and write about the stories of the 25 employees that were laid off from the restaurant in the early months of the pandemic. What would their stories, their summer of 2020, their own reflections on the restaurant industry in 2020, reveal and illuminate? According to Soleil Ho, "Our insistence on only asking restaurant chefs and owners for their opinions needs to end . . . I want to read more op-eds and features that center on dishwashers, cooks, taqueros and delivery drivers, who by and large represent a much more diverse slice of the food industry."[68]

Many restaurants in Austin permanently closed due to COVID-19. My friend Jake's The Brewer's Table posted their permanent closure on July 9, 2020. In September he posted on social media about the impact of losing his business and his struggles with a severe depression. His friends responded publicly and privately with support, generosity, and care. (As I was finishing this piece, I learned that Jake secured a restaurant/brewery gig in Colorado to begin in early 2021.) Like the men and women that serve in war zones, the men and women that serve in the restaurant industry are people with stories, people with their humanity and resilience, frailty and vulnerability, and they can only take so much. Like the Vietnam War casualty reports, food media all over the country is reporting and making lists of the COVID-19 related restaurant casualties and closures, with headlines "closed permanently" and "closed forever." The Texas Restaurant Association reported in December 2020 that over 10,000 restaurants closed in Texas and that 30% more are likely to close in the next 6 months with current regulations and without any federal relief.[69] Those in the industry, many of whom have devoted their adult lives to this work, and the whole restaurant ecosystem and restaurant culture in our neighborhoods, communities, and cities, will face the reverberations of the restaurant industry's decimation now and in the coming year(s).

Here in Texas, the nonprofit Southern Smoke Foundation, was founded in 2015 by Houston chef Chris Shepherd. It has a Pre-COVID-19 history of providing support and assistance for those in the food and beverage community and created a substantive

National COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund. What moved me about this organization was they also established a unique coalition with the University of Houston Psychology Department to provide free mental health care for Texas based food and beverage workers. (The Southern Smoke website currently notes that there is a waiting list for mental health services.) In late-November 2020, David Chang won celebrity *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* and donated his winnings to Southern Smoke. Friends with Chang, Chris Shepherd, is also notable in his promotion and celebration of immigrant-run restaurants and foodways in Houston, and is a leader in the forward moving conversation about appropriation and culinary justice.[70] Shepard won the James Beard Foundation Best Chef Southwest in 2014.

BLACK LIVES MATTER, RACE MATTERS IN AMERICA

In late-May 2020 there was the murder of George Floyd and the civil unrest, protest, and uprising about the recurrent killing of unarmed Black people and systemic anti-Black racism, what Ibram X. Kendi calls the "American Nightmare."[71] In counterpoint to the American Dream, this is an everyday nightmare animated by experiences of fear, danger, terror, and trauma, Black trauma. COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting people and communities of color due to systemic and structural inequities related to employment, wages and income, housing, education, health care and mental health care, childcare, fresh and healthy food, clean air and water. The restaurant industry both reflects and is implicated in this racist "American Nightmare," there are racist injustices inside and outside restaurants.

Building on the #MeToo movement and the economic crisis of COVID-19, I believe that there is something vital about addressing mental health issues in the current reckoning with systemic racism in the restaurant industry. According to Devita Davison, Executive Director of FoodLab Detroit and food justice advocate and leader, "I don't want people to take this moment and be despaired by this moment. I want them to take this moment and become radicalized by this moment."[72] Revisiting design thinking and the business concepts of Jim Collins, the issue of racism and culinary justice illuminate the hard work of: (a) identifying and naming complex, systemic problems; (b) discovering and articulating core, ethical ideological values that guide and inspire; and (c) making those values tangible and operational through cultural manifestations, practices and goals that all work to reshape and change the restaurant industry. It is about transforming the brutality of the restaurant industry into confronting the brutal facts about the restaurant industry. It is about a somber and humble understanding that recognizes the need for well designed, long-term solutions, and that finding this path forward happens in the realms of openhearted encounters with each other and participating in difficult, sustained, and likely uncomfortable conversations and dialogue. These types of conversations and dialogues are also robust, vibrant, enlivening, and transformative.

According to Claudia Rankine, "The only way to fully bring consciousness to our positionality and assumptions and investments and prejudices and biases it to begin to name and speak about these things. We've been told that there are certain things we shouldn't talk about, and it leads to an unconscious culture . . . The way we become more

agile in these discussions is to begin to have them."[73] Rankine perhaps poetically inhabits a certain lineage with Audre Lorde, the latter wrote in her 1984 essay about the transformation of silence into language and action: "The fact that we are here and that I can speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken."[74]

This is the same storyline and prescription for the crisis and stigma surrounding mental health in the restaurant industry. Anthony Bourdain's suicide, the #MeToo women's movement, COVID-19, and Black Lives Matter all bring mental health issues in the restaurant industry into the light of our consciousness and the possibilities of breaking silences. Here in my fair city, The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health at the University of Texas at Austin, declared "that not only is racism a public health crisis, but it is also a mental health crisis, and it is about time we named it."[75] The majority of my veteran patients at the VA are Black and Latinx.

IMMIGRANTS AND UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS

COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting people of color, especially Black and Latinx, as well as Arab and Asian, in the restaurant industry. The pandemic highlighted the restaurant industry's reliance on an immigrant workforce, many undocumented. "If you've gone out to eat, basically ever, then you have benefitted from the labor of undocumented immigrants . . . They run restaurants. Build restaurants. Clean restaurants Grow and harvest ingredients. Order, prep, cook, and plate those ingredients, then serve, clear, and wash those dishes."[76] Statistics suggest 10% of all restaurant industry workers in America are undocumented immigrants, perhaps up to 40% in urban areas, largely over represented in back of house positions. For undocumented restaurant industry workers in 2020, there was fear, especially in the soon to be previous administration about their status; there was need, and they were largely ineligible for unemployment, relief and food benefits, as well as health care. Many pay taxes on their wages but getting underpaid under the table is also a common practice and reinforces the problematic immigrant-documentation status and labor issues.[77]

Anthony Bourdain was always an advocate for the humanity, respect and dignity of immigrants and undocumented workers and their contributions to the restaurant industry. He described the professional kitchens in NYC as "a haven for foreigners – Ecuadorians, Mexicans, Chinese, Senegalese, Egyptians, Poles. In New York, the main linguistic spice is Spanish."[78] English is often not the primary language of many immigrants and undocumented restaurant industry workers, all contributing to the linguistic ecology of the industry. Food critic, Jonathan Gold largely reviewed and celebrated Los Angeles restaurants run by Asian, African and Latinx immigrants often located in immigrant communities, off the beaten path of acclaimed, largely White restaurant culture. According to Gold, "I am trying to democratize food and trying to get people to live in the entire city of Los Angeles. I'm trying to get people to be less afraid of their neighbors."[79] Gold won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Criticism, the only food writer to win a

Pulitzer, and he died of pancreatic cancer shortly after the death of Anthony Bourdain, in July 2018, he was 57 years old.

What are the stories and the lived experience of immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, in the restaurant industry? According to Anthony Bourdain, “In nearly 30 years of cooking professionally, just about every time I walked into a new kitchen, it was a Mexican guy who looked after me, had my back, showed me what was what, was there – and on the case – when the cooks more like me, with backgrounds like mine – ran away to go skiing or surfing – or simply flaked.”[80] I learned in my conversations with Latinx restaurant industry workers that within the operations of systemic racism and discrimination, in the bottom realms of the restaurant industry, there can also be racial tensions, prejudice, and rivalry between restaurant industry workers that are Black and Brown (especially undocumented). This can be detrimental to their wellbeing and mental health, lead to overextending themselves out of fear of losing their position, and they can be exploited by the restaurant industry perpetuating the racist problems in a broken system.

MICHAEL W. TWITTY & AMERICAN CULINARY HISTORY

Deploying a history of the present methodology, like many American Stories, the story of American agricultural and culinary history is built on the labor, creativity and innovation of Black and Brown people, but their contributions are often unacknowledged, marginalized, rejected, or appropriated. In an episode of the exceptional food series, *Taste the Nation* (2020), Padma Lakshmi told the story of the Gullah Geechee.[81] The Gullah Geechee are descendants of enslaved West Africans from the South Carolina Lowcountry where they have endured as a people, culture, and cuisine since the days of slavery. The episode featured chef, food writer and culinary historian, Michael Twitty, himself a descendent of the Gullah Geechee, who is also gay and Jewish. His writing and activism are creatively informed by these intersectionalities, including his queerness and gay sensibilities, and his engagement with Judaism, Jewish learning and Jewish foodways.[82]

In 2013, Twitty wrote “An Open Letter to Paula Dean,” after her racist conduct was revealed, and then in 2016, he wrote a 3000 plus word open letter to celebrated White, Southern chef, Sean Brock, where he invited him to cook and talk, to have a personal summit about race and Southern food. “[W]e are talking power, access, and moving the conversation beyond triggers like ‘culinary appropriation,’ into discussions of culinary justice, amplification, and social and political responsibility . . . We will not agree on everything—nor should we. I have hard questions for you. You have hard questions for me. We are both sincere. But this I know—we are here at this moment on this planet, sharing this heritage for a reason—and we must not waste the opportunity. Your friend in skillet—your cousin in mind—The Antebellum Chef, Michael W. Twitty.”[83] Twitty’s book *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African-American Culinary History in the Old South* won the 2018 James Beard Media Award for Writing and Best Book of the Year.

Here in Texas, this culinary justice methodology was deployed in the James Beard Nominated *Racist Sandwich* Podcast episode, "Erasing Black Barbecue"[84] by Stephanie Kuo and Soleil Ho. The episode moved beneath the prominent media construction and economic success of White, Central Texas pitmasters cooking prime grade brisket for customers waiting in long lines, back to the more complicated history of race in America as told through food, through the history of barbeque and its roots in enslaved Africans. Through interviews with Black pitmasters and critical food writers, they illuminated the historical conditions and essential contributions of Black men and women to the techniques, craft, and culture of Texas barbeque, and how the White appropriation of barbeque undermined Black people's authority, sovereignty, power, and correspondingly, their own economic viability making and selling barbeque in Texas.

Forward moving pathways are being created and shaped about culinary justice, about "cultural appropriation done right,"[85] about social, political and economic responsibility in American culinary culture. According to Twitty, "there's a way to responsibly borrow and quote from another culture,"[86] and it is about respect and truth. "The cure is to not lie or obfuscate. The cure is to bear witness, to be real, to be truthful. The way to change our fate is to change the names we give and take, to re-arrange our place, to change our deeds, to pray yes, but also give back and to cry out (I thank the Rabbis of antiquity for this formula)."[87]

Twitty is also outspoken about the lack of opportunities in the culinary world for people of color and the industry's impact on Black mental health and wellness. "Food has meant working in historical and cultural spaces that are really challenging to Black mental health and contemporary identity."[88] Fast food restaurants are part of the American Nightmare, the low-wage and poor working conditions domain of many people of color, and also the source of cheap food and poor nutrition for low-income communities, a structural race-and-class-based food oppression,[89] implicated in the very health disparities that are being revealed in this pandemic. There is a pervasive and systemic occupational Jim Crow segregation, an apartheid, where people of color are over represented at the bottom of the restaurant industry, and often, in regard to mobility and access to the more lucrative segments of the industry, including business loans and leases, they face "glass ceilings, low floors and locked doors" (Teofilo Reyes, Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 2015).

Part of the American culinary story is also about the segregation and marginalization of ethnic restaurants and ethnic cuisines. Consider the history and construction of Chinese food in American foodways, especially in relation to the dominant White culture and fine-dining, including the harm narratives about MSG and Chinese Restaurant Syndrome.[90] Americanized Chinese food is a bland, less healthy, "second-rate version of something better, purer."[91] And while this is changing with a new generation of Chinese-American chefs, the dominant perception and expectation of Chinese food in America is that it is "quick and greasy, and shouldn't cost very much."[92] Cooking and food can bring people together, it can be a unique place of understanding people and culture, but food and cooking is also political and it can be a battleground for larger currents of politics and racism, of othering and divisiveness. Due to the politicization of the COVID-19 outbreak,

Chinese and Asian diaspora restaurants in America faced a significant escalation of anti-Asian racism. American anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism has also had a significant negative impact on Middle Eastern restaurants and Arab American foodways.

DIEP TRAN & GOOD GIRL DINETTE

In a person of color's aspiration for ascension into the higher realms of the restaurant industry, Vietnamese-American chef Diep Tran, a Queer woman of color, described the unique and problematic predicament that immigrants and people of color face including culinary racism, ghettoization or fetishization of her/his identity, culture, and food. She/he may also face expectations and criticisms of representation and authenticity, and judgements of catering, compromise, or betrayal from her/his own community. These dynamics and pressures are in contrast to the privileged White male chef hegemony and upward mobility, largely unencumbered by restrictions, constraints and expectations, supported and celebrated for his creative personal expression, (or, often for his mediocrity).[93]

Tran was born into the California Pho 79 restaurant dynasty family, a family of Vietnamese refugees, of boat people.[94] Her mother died at sea on her journey to America, and Tran's grandmother was the force behind the restaurant and its menu. After college, Tran worked in social justice for 10 years, and then, as chef and owner of the Good Girl Dinette, she created a "queercentric, family-friendly, vegan-tolerant"[95] restaurant space in the Highland Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, a working class neighborhood with a deep history of dyke culture, leftist politics, and art, including the Chicano mural movement. She wanted to build on her family's food and cultural traditions, and introduce something new, to express her own Asian-American identity. According to chef Minh Phan, "Diep's food is Diep's food because she's very conscious of what makes her food her food and she does really honor it being Vietnamese and she pulls from Vietnamese dishes in California and she makes it her own."[96] One of her signature dishes was a curry chayote pot pie. As was noted earlier, after almost 10 years, Good Girl Dinette closed in 2018.

JIM CROW & AMERICAN CAPITALISM

There is also the ugly legacy of Jim Crow laws and the continued discrimination and stereotyping of people of color as customers in restaurants all across America. According to Amethyst Ganaway, "It's no surprise that bars, restaurants, and cafes are defined as third places, but they are often spaces where Black people aren't welcomed or don't feel safe."[97] Ganaway goes on to discuss the 1960 sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina, where four young, Black men, college students, entered the F.W. Woolworth Company Store, occupied seats at the segregated, for Whites only lunch counter, and simply asked to be served. It was an act of non-violent protest in response to the 1955 murder of a Black person in Mississippi, the 14-year-old boy, Emmett Till. The lynching of Emmett Till and the acquittal of the murderers galvanized the growing civil rights movement in America. Writing about Black mourning, Claudia Rankine reminded us of Emmett Till and his mother, Mamie Till Mobley, who chose to have an open casket funeral, and that "The

Black Lives Matter movement can be read as an attempt to keep mourning an open dynamic in our culture because black lives exist in a state of precariousness."[98]

On April 15, 2020, Zahir Janmohamed interviewed Devita Davison, Detroit food activist. Davison talked about how we saw more transparently during COVID-19, the operations and race-based inequities of American capitalism, that "the structure of restaurants privileges white owned business."[99] She noted that people of color owned restaurants and food trucks are often undercapitalized, often built on personal, family and friends funding outside traditional banking and investors, thus lacking the financial resources to pivot to another business model, and that many have not prioritized social media presence in their marketing. She also noted that information about COVID-19, public policy, as well as the Paycheck Protection Plan (PPP) were almost exclusively written in English, a systemic failure to understand the linguistic ecology of the restaurant industry. According to Davidson, "When we get through this. I'm judging our impact and our success on how many Black and Brown entrepreneurs' doors were we able to keep open. And then we can start having conversations about how we help them recover and how we help them to become resilient."[100] In late-October 2020, The James Beard Foundation announced a major new initiative, the JBF Food and Beverage Investment Fund for Black and Indigenous Americans.[101]

Regarding access to financial resources, there was the public spectacle of Ruth Chris Steak House and Shake Shack easily accessing millions of dollars in stimulus aid while small, independent restaurants were largely left out of the initial iteration of the deeply flawed Paycheck Protection Plan (PPP). The Trump Administration's Great Economic Revival Industry Groups invited a seat at the table to largely white, male, established celebrity chefs and large, multinational, franchise-based, conglomerate chains. In response, the Independent Restaurant Coalition (IRC) was formed to organize, represent, and advocate for small restaurants and bars as well as the food supply chain. Davita Davidson is an outspoken critic of the IRC, she argued that its construction, organization and efforts are largely lobbying for the ownership class, not the most vulnerable rank-and-file restaurant industry workers, and that owners are using a kind of trickle-down economics rationale for their maintenance of power and financial relief.[102]

TUNDE WEY

Brett Martin won a 2020 James Beard Media Award in journalism for his *GQ* profile of the NOLA-based Nigerian chef, artist, and writer Tunde Wey. Wey provokes and exposes the starker truths of the systemic inequities of American capitalism as related to race, gender, and class in the restaurant industry, including the "spectacle of white liberal foodies."[103] He intentionally and rhetorically uses hyperbole and brings discomfort to the unquestioned and complacent White American narrative of everyone getting along at the table of food, the food culture version of "racial reconciliation fantasies."[104] He critically interrogated Anthony Bourdain's food show travels in Africa as imperial White Americanness. According to Wey, "We don't need good folk telling our stories. We got this."[105]

Wey posted a 10-part essay on Instagram in late March 2020 titled in all caps, "DON'T BAIL OUT THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY." PART 1 began, "We're on the cusp of something ordinary. We're on the cusp of everything remaining the same, except even fewer people will benefit."[106] Rooted in his observations and experiences of Hurricane Katrina and the post-Katrina restaurant industry in New Orleans, Wey problematized the restaurant relief and bailout efforts as privileging the restaurant ownership class versus the rank-and-file restaurant working class, and will thus merely reinforce, reinstate and strengthen existing inequities and problems. His argument is that we should be agnostic toward bailing out the restaurant industry and advocate for wider worker relief, of substantively addressing the social determinants of health and wellbeing of all people in the restaurant industry.[107]

Wey's core ideology and vision of progressive change is the creation of racial equity, of race-based economic equality and the radical transformation of the American economic system. Like Rankine, the pathway to this more radical vison and transformation is honesty and reckoning with truth, confronting the brutal facts, embracing and working with discomfort, and having sustained, difficult conversations. In June of 2020 he argued that the COVID-19 window of opportunity had already closed, but that we can and must find other opportunities in the present and emergent future.[108] We can no longer "deny and/or remain unaware of the ways in which race continues to shape economic outcomes in contemporary society."[109]

Part of the extraordinary opportunity and consciousness raising of this moment in American culinary culture, of moving into the realms of these larger and more difficult conversations, is listening to the voices of culinary justice agitators. Of perhaps remembering the Brazilian educator, philosopher and social justice activist Paulo Freire (1921-1997) and his emphasis on the dialogic, engaging in a progressive practice of people genuinely encountering each other, working together in dialogue, disrupting the culture of silence, and cultivating organic intellectuals, leadership and change agents within oppressed communities.[110] This is the time to give greater attention, support, prominence, and platforms to the topic of culinary justice; to have those difficult and genuine conversations, ideally led by people of color in the restaurant industry (chefs, owners, rank-and-file workers); and to reckon with the ideas and perspectives of food writers, critics, historians, and activists, like Tunde Wey, Michael Twitty and Devita Davison.

For restaurants and bars to become "third places" that practice, promote and advocate for culinary justice in words and actions, including hiring people of color, creating and supporting pathways for their advancement, as well as cultivating greater equity and diversity of ownership, power and leadership in the restaurant industry.[111] For communities and customers to consistently support and celebrate local, person of color owned restaurants, bars, food trucks, and restaurant adjacent small businesses. To transform foodies and foodie culture into the culinary justice movement. Speaking to customers of the restaurant industry, Davison wrote, "Start asking questions, opening up your mouth and ask about the staff and the people . . . 'I love your restaurant. This is great . . . How are you guys treating your staff?' Ask your server, 'How are you? Do you

get paid? Do you have health insurance?"[112] For customers to align with the values of culinary justice in their engagement and patronage restaurants, and also for customers and the community, to find ways to give back to our restaurants and the people that serve and feed us.

MASHAMA BAILEY: BLACK, WHITE AND THE GREY

According to Ibram X. Kendi, "A nightmare is essentially a horror story, but it is not wholly a horror story. Black people [also] experience joy, love, peace, safety."[113] Even, before the murder of George Floyd and the reverberations of its uprising and consciousness raising, the cutting edge of culinary innovation, of food culture, was emerging from Black and Brown chefs, restauranteurs and food writers. In her 2016 article, "The New Agenda of Black Chefs in America,"[114] Therese Nelson drew parallels between the current culinary culture and the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement, with Black chefs reaching back into the past, to recognize, celebrate, and draw inspiration and creativity from the richness of African-American food culture, from Black foodways, including the African and Caribbean diaspora (footnote). In this new generation, there is often an explicit and dynamic social, cultural, and political dimension to the creation of Black chefs' food and the social construction of its presentation, setting, and service, moving food and culinary culture into larger, bigger conversations.

One of those chefs is Mashama Bailey, the James Beard Foundation Best Chef Southeastern award winner in 2019. She is Executive Chef and partner at The Grey in Savannah, Georgia. According to food writer Osayi Endolyn, "When you walk into The Grey you immediately understand this is a place that is evoking the spirt of times past, the restaurant lives in a formally segregated Jim Crow era bus station. What The Grey does is it says we have this past, we have this history, and here's where we're going, it's a forward moving conversation."[115]

After a failed venture as a social worker in NYC, Bailey decided to enroll at the Institute of Culinary Education. During her culinary studies, she was given an assignment to "Find a chef that you admire." Bailey wanted to find someone that looked like her, like her mother, like her grandmothers, a Black female professional chef.[116] In her research, she discovered Edna Lewis, the Grande Dame of Southern cooking, the chef, teacher, and author of *The Taste of Country Cooking* (1976) and *The Pursuit of Flavor* (1988). According to Michael Twitty, Edna Lewis (1916-2006) is "culinary elegance to dance to."[117] Bailey never met Edna Lewis, but came to know her intimately through her food, and she is currently the Vice Chairwoman of the Edna Lewis Foundation. Bailey aspires to make her own way in the world following this historic Black, female chef that looked like her: "[Edna Lewis] was unapologetically herself the entire time."[118]

Bailey spent a decade working in NYC restaurants, the last three years at Prune in the East Village with chef Gabrielle Hamilton, making simple, pure food, in a place she felt at home. "'Gabrielle was the first female chef I worked for. It was the first restaurant that felt like a real community. The energy, the environment, it's where I grew into wanting to be a chef.'"[119] As Executive Chef at The Grey, Bailey found her voice, the language of

her menu and culinary coherence in her identity and history, drawing on the richness of the South, Southern cooking, and African-American food culture, especially the cookbooks and writing of Edna Lewis.

One of the early dishes that emerged from that personal dialectic, was an infusion of her French culinary training into the classic Southern breakfast, beef liver and grits, to a decedent foie gras and grits with a mostarda, red wine gravy. And from her childhood in Savannah, Georgia she created a pallet cleanser in a watermelon and habanero thrill, a Southern summer popsicle. I learned that a dear friend sat at the chef's counter of The Grey with 3 friends in the autumn of 2019. She said they began with a series of lovely and amazing cocktails well paired with appetizers, and then they ordered the whole menu to share. My friend, a seeker of the perfect bite, said the menu and plating offered a spectrum of the homey to the refined, and was beautiful, delicious and filled with perfect bites.

Another forward moving conversation in Bailey's story is her unique partnership with the White businessman, John Morisano. Their co-authored book, *Black, White, and The Grey: The Story Of An Unexpected Friendship And A Beloved Restaurant,* will be published in January 2021. According to the book release from Penguin Random House, "While digging into their lived experiences with race, class, and culture through honest, unflinching discussions . . . they reveal the rawness, vulnerability, and humanity that make their partnership so inspiring."[120] Bailey and Morisano appear to authentically make these values manifest in their business partnership, in the operations and culture of their restaurant, their community, and their contribution to the larger conversation about food, culinary culture and history.

GABRIELLE HAMILTON & THE POWER OF TELLING THE TRUTH

Mashama Bailey hit the previously noted race-based glass ceiling as sous-chef at Prune. But she broke through that ceiling with her skill and person, and the support of Gabriel Hamilton. Hamilton's restaurant (1999-2020) opened well before the Golden Age of America Dining and flourished apart from culinary trendiness. It was also the pathway for this Black, female chef to become an Executive Chef and business partner at a restaurant in Savannah, Georgia, where shortly thereafter, she won a James Beard Chef Award. Hamilton is also the winner of multiple James Beard Awards and she was featured on Season 4 of Anthony Bourdain's *The Mind of a Chef* (2015). I regret that I never dined at Prune, but I purchased the beautiful cookbook while writing this piece.

Prune, was a 30-seat, 30-employee neighborhood restaurant in NYC's East Village that opened in 1999, with an ambition to endure and stay small. Intensely personal and autobiographical, Prune was beautifully built to last for 20 years on its own terms, but shuttered early in the pandemic, in mid-March 2020. Hamilton ended her *New York Times Magazine* essay by looking clearly at the brutal facts of the pandemic's impact on the restaurant industry, and like Wylie Dufresne, noted that the spectrum of pivots and changes that she witnessed and considered, currently did not make sense to her and Prune. She suggested that perhaps the raison d'être of Prune will dissolve, that it may no

longer have a place or purpose in the pandemic and post-pandemic restaurant landscape of NYC.

Hamilton and her wife and co-chef, Ashley Merriman, two adolescent children, and a dog, live in a small rent-controlled apartment in the East Village, where she has resided for over 30 years. Before closing Prune, she made $1,112 per week after taxes.[121] Reflecting in 2020 on the beginnings of Prune, Hamilton wrote, "I wanted a place you could go after work or on your day off if you had only a line cook's paycheck but also a line cook's palate."[122] She expanded to brunch and weekday lunch service which enabled her to buy out all of her original investors and afford health insurance for her staff.

Hamilton and Merriman designed and cultivated a set of principles, a code, the five core values of Prune. According to Hamilton and Merriman, these values dismantled and deprogrammed the traditional kitchen brigade hierarchy and power structures; they were modeled by example and taught constantly and chronically; they were the emotional hum of the restaurant that glittered in the very tangible and every day operations, relationships, and gestures of the restaurant. And, perhaps most importantly, they aspired to change the world. "That's the joke of Prune, that we just pretend to be a restaurant. But we're actually an institute for living."[123]

The five core values of Prune: 1. Be thorough and excellent in everything you do; 2. Be smart and funny; 3. Be disarmingly honest; 4. Work without division [of labor] of any kind; and 5. Practice the idea of servant leadership, to serve is to lead. This is a case study in creating a humane, equitable and sustainable culture and workplace, and according to Hamilton, "I think there's not a single problem in the building or in the world that can't be fixed with these five instruments."[124] I agree.

Hamilton has an MFA in creative writing from the University of Michigan, won a 2012 James Beard Award for Writing and Literature for her memoir, *Blood, Bones & Butter: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef*, and her upcoming, second memoir is about the suicide of her oldest brother. In the *New York Times Magazine* essay about closing her restaurant due to COVID-19, she reflected on the status and future of the restaurant industry: "Everybody's saying that restaurants won't make it back, that we won't survive. I imagine this is partially true: Not all of us will make it, and not all of us will perish . . . But I know few of us will come back as we were. And that doesn't seem to me like a bad thing at all; perhaps it will be a chance for a correction . . . These closures will take out the weakest and most vulnerable. But exactly who among us are the weakest and most vulnerable is not obvious."[125]

Hamilton wrote about how COVID-19 revealed a deeper, perhaps central problem in the restaurant industry (and in the human condition), one that also connects to mental health, the often confusing and obfuscating false fronts and facades, the pretending and being "fluent in fine."[126] But COVID-19 created the crisis and conditions where "The sad testimony gushes out, confirming everything that used to be so convincingly denied."[127] These are the very patterns that drive mental health stigma, the embrace the suck mentality, and the often too late sad testimony that can manifest in untreated mental

health issues, alcohol and substance abuse, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, self-destruction or harm to others.

When asked by Debbie Millman on the July 20, 2020 *Design Matters* podcast episode, about reopening Prune, Hamilton said: "The question for me is why would we and the question I have also for my peers is why should we. We have a remarkable amount of power right now. People are desperate for us to open and I wish so profoundly that we would join together in some sort of collective action and refuse to reopen until we've fixed some major problems that we had prior to the pandemic that the pandemic merely illuminated . . . but people are scared and want to get back to work."[128] Fear can constrict the imagination and the realms of possibility. COVID-19 understandably amplified fear in the restaurant industry. The suffering caused by fear-based thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are often at the root of my work as a psychotherapist, especially in the treatment of trauma and PTSD.

As Tunde Wey argued, the gravity of fear and the status quo, of forces inside and outside the restaurant industry, closed the pandemic window of opportunity for radical change. This also seems to be the fate of Hamilton's plea to the industry to pause and build genuine solidarity, to name, articulate and conceptualize the major problems and to take collective action for systemic change and reform. As I am writing in late-December 2020, questions remain, does the restaurant industry, including the larger ecology, especially the government have the motivation, vison and plan to make substantive change and reform in this broken industry that employs over 11 million people and is a central part of American culture, Americana?

Lynn Steger Strong wrote a short piece for *The Guardian* on May 11, 2020, that cited the Gabrielle Hamilton *New York Times Magazine* essay, titled "Grand illusion: how the pandemic exposed we're all just pretending." She suggested that perhaps the crises of 2020 will make more space for us to be honest and vulnerable with our suffering, our failures, to feel less shame and fear, and also acknowledge that much of our suffering is not our individual faults, but often configured within systemic failures.[129] I believe the restaurant industry must find new opportunities in the realms of truth, of confronting the brutal facts and breaking silences, of speaking, listening, humility and vulnerability, and about having difficult and awkward, uncomfortable and unflinching conversations and dialogue on a regular basis.

As a psychologist and organizational consultant, I would prescribe a kind of collective, long-term, group psychotherapy for the restaurant industry. The average length of a psychoanalysis is about 6 years, and while I am not wholly endorsing that methodology of change, it seems like a realistic appraisal of the time needed to substantively tackle the wicked problems of the restaurant industry, and to lay the foundation for an industry built to last. To design an infrastructure, an architecture of enduring core values about mental health that are mindfully configured within the day-to-day operations and is also a significant part of planning the future of restaurants, bars and breweries. According to 20-year-old NYC chef Flynn McGarry, "At least for me, it has inspired me to not just look at

what the restaurant is going to be in the next six months but rather, how is the restaurant going to run in the next 15 years?"[130]

ANN KIM & FEAR

According to, Korean immigrant, chef and restaurateur, Ann Kim: "We saw the vulnerability of the restaurant industry when COVID-19 hit and we're still seeing that and witnessing that, and many restaurants won't come back. I'm hoping that we will come back, but come back changed and very different from what it used to be, and a lot of that wasn't just financial, a lot of it was cultural, mental, emotional, and that's got to change . . . I do believe it can change, I do believe it's going to be fucking hard, I do believe it's going to take a long time . . . I want to think of this as a new renaissance, as a new opportunity."[131] Kim, the once actress and aspiring Jimmy John's franchise owner, is the chef-owner of Pizzeria Lola, Hello Pizza, Young Joni, and soon to open amid the pandemic, Sooki & Mimi. She is the James Beard Foundation Best Chef Midwest award winner in 2019. Her latest endeavor was inspired by a trip to Valle de Guadalupe, Mexico where the handmade heirloom blue-corn tortillas made her weep, and presented a personal opportunity for appropriation done right, "an exercise in respect, not acquisition."[132] Kim lives and works in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the city where George Floyd was murdered by a White police officer.

In her acceptance speech at the James Beard Foundation Awards in May 2019, she spoke with great emotion and passion: "My journey has not been easy, it has not been linear, and it has not been traditional, but here I stand, I stand before you because 10 years ago I said 'fuck fear.'"[133] Kim deepened her reflections on fear in 2020: "It doesn't mean that I'm not scared. But what it does mean is that I acknowledge my fear, but I don't make decisions rooted in fear. Especially during this time when things feel so uncertain and scary and people are living in fear, it is important to kind of turn the narrative around and lean into it and to say that we can come out of this on the other side stronger and better for it. And that's sort of how I try to live my life.'"[134] This is the way. Kim's discerning wisdom on fear and naming the "cultural, mental, emotional" realms beneath the financial crisis in the restaurant industry, brings us back to the topic of mental health in the restaurant industry and the finale of this piece.

KAT KINSMAN, SUICIDE & ANTHONY BOURDAIN

Perhaps the most important advocate, organizer and voice on the topic of mental health in the restaurant industry is Kat Kinsman, food writer, editor and talker. Her passion about the industry and her own suffering with the afflictions of anxiety and ADHD generated an empathic and compassionate connection with restaurant industry workers, and she often found herself having off the record conversations about mental health. According to Kinsman "In 2016, on January 1st, I started a website called Chefs With Issues because I was so tired of seeing chefs die."[135] The website is a resource rich and dynamic platform that also includes a robust and supportive FB Discussion Group, all with the activist mission to destigmatize and promote mental health awareness in the restaurant industry. That same year, speaking at Rene Redzepi's MAD Symposium (MAD5, Tomorrows Kitchen, 2016), Kinsman framed the issue: "I love chefs and I love the people who chose

to make their living in food and you feed people and you take care of them . . . but we're not taking care of you, you're not taking care of you, and you're not taking care of each other either, and you're too afraid to ask anyone to do that for you, and it's killing you and it's killing this profession that we all love and its killing people."[136]

One of the early projects of Chefs With Issues[137] was an online survey of about 2000 restaurant industry workers in 2016. The data revealed: 84% suffered from depression; 72% suffered from anxiety; 50% dealt with substance abuse issues; 75% used and abused alcohol to cope; and, about 96% thought the above noted issues had everything to do with their work in the restaurant industry. And addressing the barriers to talking and seeking help: 70% didn't want to be thought of as weak; and 55% didn't want to be thought of as crazy. In the realms of prescription drugs, I suspect there is potential for the abuse of opioids, stimulants like Adderall and benzodiazepines like Xanax.

Membership to the Chefs With Issues Facebook Group more than doubled after the suicide of Anthony Bourdain in June 2018. According to Kinsman, "We have to talk about Anthony Bourdain. As I see it, you either have to deal with the slightly uncomfortable situation of having a line cook cry in front of you, or you can cry at their funeral. I'm sorry to make it sound that dire, but it is."[138] Kinsman said we all have to learn to become someone who is informed, sensitive, and easy to talk to about these issues, to create a culture in the restaurant industry where we can make mental health a safe and omnipresent topic because, "We as a society suck at talking about mental health, talking about pain, talking about our feelings, talking about all kinds of stuff because we're really afraid of being awkward, of making it awkward."[139] Kinsman added the word "awkward" to our psychological vocabulary for the felt experience of these necessary conversations about mental health in the restaurant industry.

As I noted at the beginning of this piece, I am familiar with the landscape of suicide as well as suicide prevention. Working at the VA, I am especially familiar with people being ambivalent and conflicted about seeking help, each having their own journey toward seeking help, many of whom are inconsistent with engaging in treatment, some drop-out prematurely, while some return when they are ready or are in crisis. One of the prominent crises that brings people to treatment is suicidal thoughts, plans and attempts. According to the 2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, the number of Veteran suicides has exceeded 6,300 per year since 2008, with an average of 16 to 18 veteran suicides per day from 2008 to 2018.[140] I have had direct experiences reckoning with these statistics.

In a 2019 article for Giving Kitchen, Martha Polk[141] summarized the United States suicide data for the food service industry noting that for currently employed adults in 2018, 3.5% experienced suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months, while the rate for the food service industry was 5.7%, but likely underreported due to embrace the suck, pay your dues culture. The food service industry ranked between 13th and 19th for suicides by occupation, but from 2000 to 2016 there was a significant increase in suicide rates for women in the food service industry from 6.1% to 9.4%. Maham Javaid provided some centuries-old history in her article about suicides in the restaurant industry. She told the

story of Francois Vatel, who in 1671, after 12 sleepless nights prepping a meal for the Sun King, Louis XIV and 3000 people, he stabbed himself to death when he was told the fish he planned to prepare would not arrive in time.[142] And returning to the present, in August of 2020, Patrice Bernadel, a Black pastry chef in Montreal committed suicide. His brother posted on Facebook, "It appears that the economic, social and psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have destabilized his life to the point of driving him into a deep depression, preventing him from seeing the light at the end of the tunnel."[143]

The data on suicide in America more broadly rises to the level of a public health crisis, and is largely committed by White men. The CDC cited data for 2018 that recorded about 50,000 deaths by intentional self-harm (suicide).[144] The causes and conditions are complex, but include factors related to mental health and the abuse of alcohol and substances (including prescription drugs), but also psychosocial, economic and health stressors and inequities. Regarding these stressors and inequities, in recent years there has been a spike in suicides among the White working class. And returning to Black Lives Matter and the murder of George Floyd, "Black men are 10 times more likely to be homicide victims than White men, but the latter are two-and-half times more likely to kill themselves."[145] As a psychologist, regularly assessing suicidal and homicidal ideation, plan or intent is part of the practice of psychotherapy.

According to psychiatrist and writer Kay Redfield Jamison, "Each way to suicide is its own: intensely private, unknowable, and terrible. Suicide will have seemed to its perpetrator the last and best of bad possibilities, and any attempt by the living to chart this final terrain of a life can be only a sketch, maddeningly incomplete."[146] The pantheon, my Rothko Chapel of (all White) personally significant men who committed suicide include: Kurt Cobain, Elliot Smith, David Foster Wallace (I have a signed copy of *Infinite Jest*), Robin Williams, Anthony Bourdain, and David Berman, who hung himself in his Brooklyn apartment in August 2019. Berman was the same age as myself, and his achingly beautiful and bitter Purple Mountains record released in July 2019, haunts me/us. I would also include Philip Seymour Hoffman, who died of an accidental drug overdose, rooted in a long history of alcohol and substance abuse.

After Bourdain's suicide in June of 2018, many a glass was raised at restaurants and bars around the world, and there was for a time, seemingly substantive conversations about mental health in the restaurant industry. There was a flurry of articles, reflections, profiles of Bourdain, all punctuated by suicide crisis resources in bold, italicized font. But that opening and energy dissolves and fades, as we return to the jagged frenzies of our everyday lives, for this as the poet Marie Howe wrote, is "what the living do."[147]

Two of his closest friends, Jose Andres and Eric Ripert, created Anthony Bourdain Day on his birthday, June 25, to remember and celebrate his person and legacy. Both men are epic figures in the culinary world, Andres for his founding and relentless work with World Central Kitchen, and Ripert for his Buddhist and mindfulness informed kitchen and restaurant culture at the three Michelin starred Le Bernardin in NYC. Film Crit Hulk, offered sage and substantive advice in his piece, "Anthony Bourdain, Suicide, and Grace." He wrote that we should create access and conditions for people who are

suffering to get into long-term therapy and treatment; to increase our ability to talk about suicide, like Kinsman advice, to become someone who is informed, sensitive, and easy to talk to about suicide and mental health; and to cultivate a practice of reaching out and checking in with people on the regular, that moves beneath the niceties of polite greetings and exchanges.[148]

Anthony Bourdain was a White, 61-year-old divorced father of a teenage daughter. He met his girlfriend Asia Argento on the set of *Parts Unknown*, the episode,[149] which I recently rewatched, was tender and sweet. Argento is an Italian actress and director, an activist in the #MeToo movement, a woman who was sexually assaulted by Harvey Weinstein. Months before his death in February of 2018, Bourdain posted on Instagram a black and white photo in Hong Kong, his head gently resting on Argento's shoulder, with the caption "Shelter from the Storm."[150]

He was a recovering drug addict, with a Blue belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and a tattoo on his arm in ancient Greek, "I am certain of nothing." His mother was Jewish and an editor at the *New York Times*, his father French and a music executive in the classical music industry. He dropped out of Vassar College attended the Culinary Institute of America and worked over 20 years in restaurant kitchens before an unexpected mid-career turn to food writing and becoming a food media personality and celebrity. He revolutionized food and travel television, used food and cooking to explore culture, history, politics, economics, and the lives of everyday people in America and around the world. He promoted, mentored and supported many chefs, he was known to many younger chefs as "Uncle Tony." He was also a crime novelist, collaborated on several graphic novels, and wrote a moving scene about the restaurant industry featuring Emeril Lagasse on the television series, *Treme* (2010-2013). He was open to personal reflection, change and being impacted by others: "He was the restaurant industry's *enfant terrible*, and then its conscience."[151]

He was the White male "moral weathervane of the food world with a huge platform, bigger than anyone else in the culinary community, and he did not hesitate to call out bad actors or to point out ridiculousness or to elevate people who he thought were being insufficiently appreciated."[152] He supported immigrants and undocumented restaurant industry workers and women. He had an extended dialogue with *New Yorker* food writer Helen Rosner about feminism and several months before his suicide, said to her at an NYC party, "Remember when you asked me if I was a feminist, and I was afraid to say yes? Write this down: I'm a fuckin' feminist."[153] He along with other White food writers of his generation like Jonathan Gold and Ruth Reichel, laid the pathway for third wave food writers and critics of color like Soleil Ho, Tejal Rao and Tien Nguyen who write and talk about the intersectionalities of food, race, class and gender, and also incisively interrogate the sacred cows of the culinary world including Bourdain himself, Michelin star restaurants, Chez Panisse (in 2019), and the James Beard Foundation.

As someone interested in the psychology of men and masculinity, Bourdain also provided a progressive iteration of heterosexual masculinity, part Stooges/Iggy Pop with notes of self-deprecation and dick jokes, but also empathy and humility, vulnerability and genuine

curiosity. His White, heterosexual masculinity, was not configured through the subordination and sexualization of women. His television depicted a man displaying respect, dignity and listening, often sitting at a table among women in conversation and dialogue about their food and cooking, about their lives and circumstances. He also treated men of color with respect, dignity and listening and he was an outspoken LGBT ally.[154] He took responsibility for *Kitchen Confidential* during the early revelations of the #MeToo movement in the restaurant industry. Bourdain wrote on December 12, 2017, in regard to the misogyny and homophobia in *Kitchen Confidential*: "To the extent which my work in *Kitchen Confidential* celebrated or prolonged a culture that allowed the kind of grotesque behaviors we're hearing about all too frequently is something I think about daily, with real remorse,"[155] and he also at that time, began to give away the book royalties to "various, deserving people."[156] His show and masculinity were often and uniquely, about friendship. "The very best Bourdain television, however relaxing or perilous, was often about friendship – Bourdain and his crew, Bourdain and his guests, Bourdain and his hosts,"[157] perhaps the most funny and beautiful, his friendship with Eric Ripert.

Ripert, perhaps his best friend, and the one who discovered his body in the bathroom of a French hotel room, reportedly told Bourdain's mother, "Tony had been in a dark mood these past couple days."[158] His friend, Andrew Zimmern noted that they shared a sense of wanting to "get off this crazy roller coaster,"[159] off the pressures, expectations and life of their television programs and celebrity. Zimmern just did not see his friend turning to suicide as a solution: "I have such a hard time reconciling the beautiful and brutal honesty that I knew with him as a friend, with the private pain and agony he was enduring."[160] In response to a 2017 piece "Fiction Confidential: Is the real Anthony Bourdain lurking in his early novels?" Bourdain himself reached out to the author, Maria Bustillos to tell her how much he liked the piece. According to Bustillos, "But read the books [his early novels] and a far more complicated portrait emerges: that of reflective and deeply self-critical man, a melancholic figure strikingly at odds with the debonair, self-assured TV star . . . There's a bedrock disappointment and sadness that undergirds all Bourdain's work."[161]

POETRY & THE FLYWHEEL EFFECT

And like the final stanza of T.S. Eliot's poem, "Little Gidding," after all these pages of exploration, we arrive where we started, "at the source of the longest river, the voice of the hidden waterfall,"[162] the suffering and afflictions of mental health issues in the restaurant industry. And in closing, perhaps we can be inspired to bring Bourdain's power of the truth methodology to bear on mental health in the restaurant industry, in the same direct and unflinching way he did for so many other wicked problems.

One of the more important discoveries I made over the past couple years was that even when pathways to mental health services were made accessible and affordable, many restaurant industry workers did not take advantage of them, or if they did, dropped out prematurely, ghosted, or just did not commit to the process of substantively addressing their suffering and issues. The life, hours and schedule of working in the restaurant

industry make it very easy to displace the importance of seeking help, to surrender to the gravity of the embrace the suck mentality and the status quo. It often takes time, patience and persistence to find the right provider and treatment, and to engage with that treatment, treatment that can't offer quick solutions, but takes time to have a meaningful impact and effect.

There is a Rilke poem that I use to describe psychotherapy at its best. The narrator realizes standing before an ancient piece of sculpture, that this inanimate object is more alive than she/he is, and in that realization, is the final line of the poem, "for here there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life."[163] What I began to understand and have great empathy for, is that it can be very challenging to do the work of psychotherapy or alcohol and substance abuse treatment AND work in the restaurant industry, because the former will dismantle and deconstruct the embrace the suck mentality that often and precariously holds it all together. The work of psychotherapy or alcohol and substance abuse treatment is a process of reckoning with yourself and the industry that more likely than not, is greatly contributing to your suffering. The work of psychotherapy is also about self-compassion, hope and resilience, constructive change and finding happiness and joy.

Tackling the wicked problem of mental health in the restaurant industry is not just about creating affordable access, but changing the culture in ways that collaborate with restaurant industry workers to create the best conditions for the practice of healthy stress management and wellness and if needed, create pathways to mental health care and alcohol and substance abuse treatment AND the support and time for that treatment process. I am not a therapy evangelist. I've learned that many restaurant industry workers are not hip to traditional mental health services, but I found that there can be great energy and ideas when these topics are raised and discussed, outside the box thinking, drawing on with wisdom and experience of restaurant industry workers themselves and the people and organizations in the communities in which they and their restaurants reside.

There are many ways and forms that one can intentionally and mindfully take better care of themselves (but important to consider professional help). Many psychotherapists and psychiatrists devote a portion of their caseload for sliding scale and reduced fee services, one just needs to ask. I will also note that in my field, licensed psychologists can accept barter[164] as a form of payment for services as long as it is not exploitive or contraindicated, or creates a complicated multiple relationship. Many years ago, I worked with a pastry chef with whom we negotiated a very low fee and he offered a loaf of his magical sourdough bread once a month. Handmade bread is one of the great pleasures of life. I recall him telling me after the second or third loaf that I could freeze the portion I didn't use, to which I responded, "that won't be necessary."

In those early years of my professional life working intensively in PTSD, I learned about "compassion fatigue as secondary traumatic stress disorder." Compassion fatigue is about the cost of caring, about exposure and empathy, and about wanting to relieve the suffering of traumatized patients. Treating trauma over time, our compassion erodes. According to Charles Figley (1995), "They [professionals that treat the traumatized] talk

about episodes of sadness and depression, sleeplessness, general anxiety, and other forms of suffering that they eventually link to trauma work."[165] Mental health providers, perhaps like restaurant industry workers, are often uncomfortable asking for help for themselves, prefer to inhabit the role of helping and serving others. Prevention models for compassion fatigue are rooted in the cultivation of healthy, flexible, empathic organizations and teams, community and social support, meaningful connections and relationships, self-awareness and keystone habits of self-care. I was in psychotherapy myself for about 10 years, the last two years, twice a week. In 2009, I was fortunate to attend a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in Mind-Body Medicine 7-Day Professional Training Retreat with Jon Kabat-Zinn and Saki Santorelli at the Omega Institute in rural Rhinebeck, New York. That retreat laid the foundation for a personal mindfulness meditation practice, ongoing study and the organic infusion of these ideas and practices into my clinical work.

In an August 30, 2020 podcast conversation with David Chang and Bill Simmons, the artist David Choe, talked about his friend Anthony Bourdain: "With Tony, every fucking person that he came across, they were like, 'He's Uncle Tony, man,' he takes care of people, he makes sure his crew, his crew loves him, they're like family, and he makes sure everyone is okay, all of the time, but at what cost, at what cost to him, who can he go to, who can the most interesting man on the planet go to for help . . . everyone was like, 'Dude you're the man,' where the fuck does Tony go to ask for help, he couldn't ask for help."[166] In his relationship to Uncle Tony, David Chang hypothesized that because of the intensity of his own struggles over the course of their friendship, Bourdain perhaps felt he had to be strong, that he couldn't seem weak, "Alpha dog Tony."[167] This stigma about asking for help and vulnerability, distorted ideas about strength and weakness need to change.

Like compassion fatigue, I would suggest that there is a kind of *restaurant industry fatigue*, with a sequalae of stress, mental health symptoms, and vulnerabilities to alcohol and substance abuse, that restaurant industry workers will eventually link to their work in the industry. COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter both amplify and exacerbate these issues, but these crises and reckonings also illuminate pathways for change. Prevention models for restaurant industry fatigue are rooted in the design of hospitality models that can hold and support difficult conversations and dialogue about culinary justice, and prioritizes the care of restaurant industry workers, care that is not just rhetorical, but made manifest through daily practices and operations, options and access (like wages, paid time off, and healthcare), as well as the cultivation of long-term, incremental solutions for the mental health and well-being of restaurant industry workers.

In talking about Bourdain's suicide and asking for help, David Choe said in relation to his Korean-American, heterosexual masculinity: "And I feel like a fucking fraud and a fucking pussy if I put my hand up and go, 'Hey, can someone help me out' . . . am I allowed to cry to my friend, am I allowed to say 'Dude, I'm not doing good right now' and . . ."[168] Choe paused in his talking and you can feel his sadness and grief in the brief audio silence. In the realms of the personal, when was the last time you were really honest with someone about having a hard time, about your suffering, that you broke

down, asked for help, let someone take care of you, or when was the last time you provided that generous and compassionate gift to another person? NNAMDI, the son of Nigerian immigrants, sang on his 2020 record, “There’s no need to pretend. You’re okay if you’re not. It’s okay if you’re not okay” (“It’s OK,” *BRAT*, 2020). In the realms of larger conversations piece about suicide, mental health and substance abuse in the restaurant industry (one year after Bourdain’s suicide), Andrew Zimmern said, “Everywhere I go, people are talking about solutions to this. We’ve got a lot of work left to do, and I want to underscore than, but I’ve also never seen an industry pivot faster to solutions and action rather than just continuing to talk about the problem.”[169]

We need to consistently tend to the “flywheel effect,”[170] to build and turn a flywheel about mental health and culinary justice in the restaurant industry, a consistent cumulative process of ideas and actions that “ensure that the flywheel continues to turn long into the future,” and generates change mobilized by care, optimism and hope, equity and restorative justice.

Claudia Rankine ends her book about race and Whiteness in America with a kind of poem and invitation to talk more. She places an emphasis on conversations and dialogue, as a long game strategy and as a pathway that calls us forward. In the final line of her book, she wrote, “Tell me something, one thing, the thing, tell me that thing.”[171] And I do the same, tell me more, tell me all you can, talk amongst yourselves in your restaurants and bars, in your communities about how to take better care of the people that work in the restaurant industry. Educate yourself, ask for help, check in on people on the regular, build community and coalitions, invite and support a diversity of voices and solutions. Bring the same spirit of creativity and innovation processes for food and drink to the current crises and reckonings to make “actual change – a bone-deep shift”[172] in the restaurant industry that will shape and inform its future trajectory. Customers and the communities also need to educate themselves about their restaurants and food trucks, bars, and breweries, and in conversation and dialogue, deepen support and find ways to give back.

And, like the regulars at the *Midnight Diner*, I offer a deep bow of respect in the Japanese tradition, and say these words of gratitude to all restaurant industry workers: “Thank you for the food, thank you for the meal, and thank you for the kindness.” May 2021 be a time of real recognition, renewal and reimagination for the restaurant industry.

Music: While researching and writing this piece I listened to a lot of The Replacements, especially *Tim* and *Let it Be*, but also *For Sale: Live at Maxwell's 1986*, *Dead Man's Pop* and the Deluxe reissue of *Pleased to Meet Me*. I started reading Bob Mehr's *Trouble Boys: The True Story of the Replacements*, and learned that Paul Westerberg's father was a WWII veteran, an alcoholic, whose particular war zone duty "had been to walk among corpses of fallen soldiers, collecting dog tags and personal items and prying wedding rings off bloated fingers to send to their wives and families back home." A live concert photograph of the band in 1981 hangs beside my writing desk. As I prefer to write to instrumental music, I made an epic Blue Note Records playlist, my soundtrack for 2020, about 180 hours of jazz, or what the American trumpeter, Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, prefers to call "creative improvised music." Black food writer and historian, Michael Twitty described the contributions of African-Americans to American culinary culture as "the edible scripture of the Black aesthetic, the culinary answer to jazz," as "edible jazz."

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About the Author

Mark A. Adams is a working creative, a psychologist in Austin, Texas where he has a small private practice and works part-time at the Austin VA Outpatient Clinic. He completed his Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology at The University of Texas at Austin in 2003. His clinical specialties and interests include trauma and PTSD, the psychology of men and masculinity, Buddhist psychology and mindful self-compassion perspectives on human suffering and relieving that suffering. He primarily provides individual psychotherapy, but also does consulting and group work. His professional life draws inspiration and influence from other disciplines and forms including literature, art, music, design, food, and popular culture. An illustrative fascination in 2020 was the art and life of Abstract Expressionist painter, Agnes Martin (1912-2004), who was afflicted with schizophrenia. This monograph reflects his interest and perspective on mental health in the restaurant industry, and perhaps is the foundation for a more prominent writing life.

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