

Guilty Pleasure

Women's Perception of Health,
Body Image, and Femininity

IRENE CHUNG



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To my family



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Introduction

Eating for some is pure pleasure. For me, it is often laced with guilt. Don't get me wrong, I love food . . . sharing food is my love language. However, sometimes, I feel guilty when I indulge in a flaky pistachio croissant. Then I feel ashamed of my guilt—a double punishment.

After moving to Providence, Rhode Island, I began hosting weekly dinners for my girlfriends. Each gathering has been a celebration acknowledging our survival of another tough week of graduate school. While I regularly cook simple meals for myself, these occasions have been opportunities to enjoy food together . . . and also to explore our vulnerabilities.

Each week I design and print the dinner menu, light candles, and turn on my home-cooking playlist. One night, I made Alison Roman's one-pot lemony date chicken; another night, I followed my mom's beef stew recipe. For fun, I baked pizza with a big heap of mozzarella cheese, prosciutto, and arugula. The more dinners I host at my home, the more I love them.

One night, after a few glasses of wine, a conversation about our relationships with food

and body image came up. One friend shared that she used to go through cycles of binge-eating and dieting; another shared her insecurities about her body after watching Victoria's Secret runway shows.

Like these women, I share a complicated history with body image and dieting. Yet, I've hesitated to share my story with my own friends. I worry they might look at me differently if I were to tell them that I used to be a health-obsessed perfectionist.

My friends' openness still led me to reflect on my past pursuit of the ideal body figure. Coming from Taiwan, where society often prizes women for their small, slight figures, I began to wonder how cultural background affects how women perceive their bodies and approach their own health. While I had heard of the idea of guilty pleasures before, I realized I wanted to research this topic, which was both personal and systemic. My research demonstrated what my friends and I already knew from our lived experience: women's psyches and bodies are impossibly burdened by the marketing of unrealistic beauty standards and by capitalist expectations of productivity, as they negotiate the complex social, cultural, and financial systems they exist within.



Because guilt is a robust, personal feeling, carrying so many stories within it, I set out to interview local women (all of them identified as cis-gendered females using she/her pronouns) in the wine and food industries, which tend to supply products that women experience as both pleasurable and guilt-inducing, and in the wellness industries, which tend to operate as remedying, even virtuous, alternatives to the former. Each speaker offered her unique perspective on guilty pleasures—what they are, what the concept means, and why anyone would even feel guilty about pleasure to begin with. Some feel guilty about having treats because those items are expensive; others because these delights were forbidden during childhood; and some because they are afraid of gaining weight and not fitting standards of female beauty.

Rarely did a woman tell me she did not feel guilty at all.

This book is structured in three chapters: In Chapter One, I share my experiences with body image and eating during adolescence. Chapter Two provides scientific and social research about why guilty pleasures are predominantly gendered, and what factors may activate feelings of guilt in women especially. Chapter Three includes my interviews with women regarding their guilty pleasures and personal experiences with eating, cooking, and body image.

I hope this book will speak to you, empower you, and remind you to be more gentle with your body. Sometimes we don't give ourselves the credit to indulge. But in the end, is credit necessary to enjoy that decadent piece of chocolate cake?





Chapter 1



An Author's Confession

The inspiration for writing this book stems from the summer of 2022 when I returned to my hometown Taipei. I had just finished my studies at Boston University. One afternoon, accompanied by my black-and-white British Shorthair cat, I sifted through my drawers and unearthed numerous letters and old diaries from my middle school days.

The handwritten pages transported me back to my 13-year-old self, navigating the challenges of puberty and bodily change. Seated on the floor, I cautiously flipped through the journals, bracing myself as I reread memories I had long avoided. I began reflecting on my evolving relationship with myself and my health over the years.

Growing up in Taipei, my parents, who were busy working full time, enrolled me in various after-school activities during my elementary school years. From tennis and swimming to badminton, I was quite athletic and my appetite outpaced

my peers'. I vividly recall my mom purchasing a loaf of matcha red bean toast for me after school, and effortlessly polishing off the entire package before dinner. I regularly consumed whole milk, had more than three meals a day, and had a particular fondness for Lay's chips. I enjoyed the freedom of eating when hungry and choosing whatever appealed to my taste buds.

I cherished several dining traditions during childhood. Every Wednesday, my mom and I would go on a special "date" after her return from work. Our go-to spot for these occasions was Amo's, a warm family-style Italian restaurant in our neighborhood. My choice would be the squid-ink pasta, relishing the moment when the black sauce covered my mouth and teeth, while my mom opted for the garlicky clam pesto on spaghetti. Following our entrees, each of us indulged in a bowl of tiramisu. The subtle hint of rum from the sponge cake marked my initial taste of adulthood.



On weekends, my aunt treated me to Mister Donut, a beloved American chain that had gained popularity in Asia. As she enjoyed a cup of lemon black tea, I would unapologetically order my all-time favorites—one chocolate-glazed mochi donut and one crème brûlée-filled donut. These treats were irresistibly sweet, and my aunt often had to prevent me from devouring both simultaneously.

By the time I was 12, my unintentional leanness was the result of a rapid growth spurt. In many Taipei schools, routine health checkups typically commence with BMI measurements. The nurse would publicly announce each student's weight and height in front of the entire class. Throughout elementary and high school, I consistently stood out as the tall girl, measuring around 165 cm, whereas the average height for girls ranged from 140 cm to 150 cm. It became apparent that I was maturing earlier than my peers; my mom even bought me my first bra at the age of

10, which was also when I started my period. Despite these distinctions, I never perceived my uniqueness as a problem.



Following my elementary school graduation, my family embarked on a two-week trip to San Francisco and Los Angeles, where I indulged in generously portioned barbecues and decadent desserts day after day. If I gained some weight and developed more “feminine” body features, I wasn’t particularly concerned about it. That is, until one day when everything shifted. At 13 during my first year of middle school, while innocently enjoying my bread during lunch, a thoughtless boy remarked, “Bread is probably what’s making you fat.”

That one naive comment altered my view of my body even today. Suddenly, things I had previously paid little mind to became the focal point of my thoughts: “Maybe I should give up bread,” or “I should wear a sports bra to conceal my chest,” and “Why do I have to go through periods while other girls don’t?” These thoughts fueled my determination to change my developing body.

I began running, a pastime I had once disliked. Initially, I started with a few laps around the track and then progressed to half-marathon training with my triathlete aunt. By my second year in middle school, I joined the track team and focused on long-distance training. Every day after school, around 5 p.m., I jogged for an hour in my neighborhood. Returning home, I barely consumed anything for dinner. My restrictive behaviors caught my mom’s attention, but my stubbornness hindered her from intervening. This led to conflicts, and she would quietly shed tears. Our cherished Wednesday mother-daughter date nights ceased to exist, as I even refused to eat two scoops of rice at that point.



My body felt frail, yet my mind remained resilient. During that period, I was resolute in pursuing specific goals, whether excelling academically or securing the first chair violinist position in the orchestra. I dedicated all my energy to achieving these aspirations. To maintain a semblance of control over my intense self-imposed pressures, my private journals served as a source of adrenaline and reassurance, affirming that I was "on track." Within those pages, I meticulously recorded my grades, exercise duration, and weight. I even celebrated the absence of my menstrual cycle, as it made me feel more like my peers. Looking back, it's painful to reflect on the way I compromised my body under the guise of pursuing health.

After a two-year internal struggle, the switch finally flipped from self-starvation to embracing life. This transformation occurred during my orchestra tour around Taiwan in the summer before 8th grade. Surrounded by friends, I began

to perceive food as a social nourishment rather than an adversary. During this trip, I indulged in various treats previously deemed "off-limits" in my obsessive health regimen, including fried sticky tofu, pancakes, ice cream, and mochi ice cream, all the decadent specialties across the island.

As the summer ended and my period finally returned, I gradually rediscovered my way back to life and healing. My friends found me more approachable and easygoing as I socialized more and focused less on my appearance. I quit training for half marathons and started working out with a trainer to build back lost muscle. My mom also felt less stressed and restricted in cooking family dinners as my love for food came back.

By the time I entered high school as a tenth grader, I was almost “normal” again. I joined the dance club, and between practices, we filled the time sharing gossip and beauty tips. My perfectionist tendencies returned, this time with the pressure to not only be among the top students in my 1,000-student class but also to be one of the most attractive. After three years in a close-knit girls’ school, I know I was only one of many teenage girls whose thoughts spiraled around weight loss and dieting.

Since I came to the United States for college, my relationship with food and my body has grown more flexible, but it is still a work in progress. Writing this book and interviewing so many women have functioned as a long conversation with myself. While I feel a sense of relief from discovering that the businesswomen I interviewed have gone through similar

struggles, I sometimes also feel triggered by and challenged to listen to the recordings when they fall too close to home.

Although I have probably departed from my old self, who worked out obsessively and calculated every calorie, new factors affect my view of my body nowadays. Whether it is going through a breakup, hearing comments about my body, or watching the slender figures in a television show, I sometimes still feel guilty about my diet. Therefore, this book investigates my constant feelings of guilt around food and how the pleasure I derive from it interacts with that guilt.







Chapter 2



Everything you need to know about
guilty pleasures but were afraid to ask

Guilt and pleasure are seemingly opposite emotions; however, when putting them next to each other, the narrative changes. Guilt refers to the feeling of remorse or the belief you have done something wrong, and it is usually associated with a specific action. Pleasure is a state of happiness and enjoyment. Put together, guilty pleasure is a pleasure that induces minor guilt. It is perhaps an enjoyment one doesn't want others to find out about.

To understand guilt in the context of guilty pleasure, let's first examine the difference between shame and guilt, which are often used interchangeably. Shame is the feeling that you are bad or inadequate as a person. It is related to ourselves, often to other people's opinions, and is not necessarily about a specific behavior or event.

However, in my own experience, guilty pleasure, such as eating some cake after a meal, does not

mean that I have done something wrong, or that I am inadequate. I feel guilty because I feel like I "should not" be eating sweets. But where does that voice of telling me what I should and should not do come from? Responding to this internal conflict, Dr. Kristin Neff, associate professor of educational psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, said in a New York Times interview that "when you feel guilty, but haven't harmed anyone, then you're just in the realm of perfectionism or criticism."¹

As a self-described perfectionist who is critical of my behaviors, the concept of guilty pleasure acts as a self-regulatory mechanism. While guilty pleasures can include a wide range of activities, from watching low-brow television shows and finishing a whole pint of ice cream to gossiping, this chapter will focus solely on guilt-associated pleasures when it comes to the subject of food consumption among women.



**Life's
Better
Shredded**

To tackle why women may feel guilty about their food consumption, I started my research around the evolution of female beauty standards and why women are socialized to stay in a certain shape. In *Fearing The Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, author Sabrina Strings views this issue through images of female bodies from historical, cultural, and social perspectives, particularly the racialized roots of anti-fatness. She introduces arguments from Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, and Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, to highlight why healthcare, or maintaining a healthy body, is not just an individual matter.

According to Bourdieu, "Elites constantly work to differentiate themselves from the lower classes. In so doing, they often distinguish themselves by cultivating tastes, diets, and physical appearances that are in opposition to those of the subordinate groups. These 'social distinctions' serve to naturalize and normalize

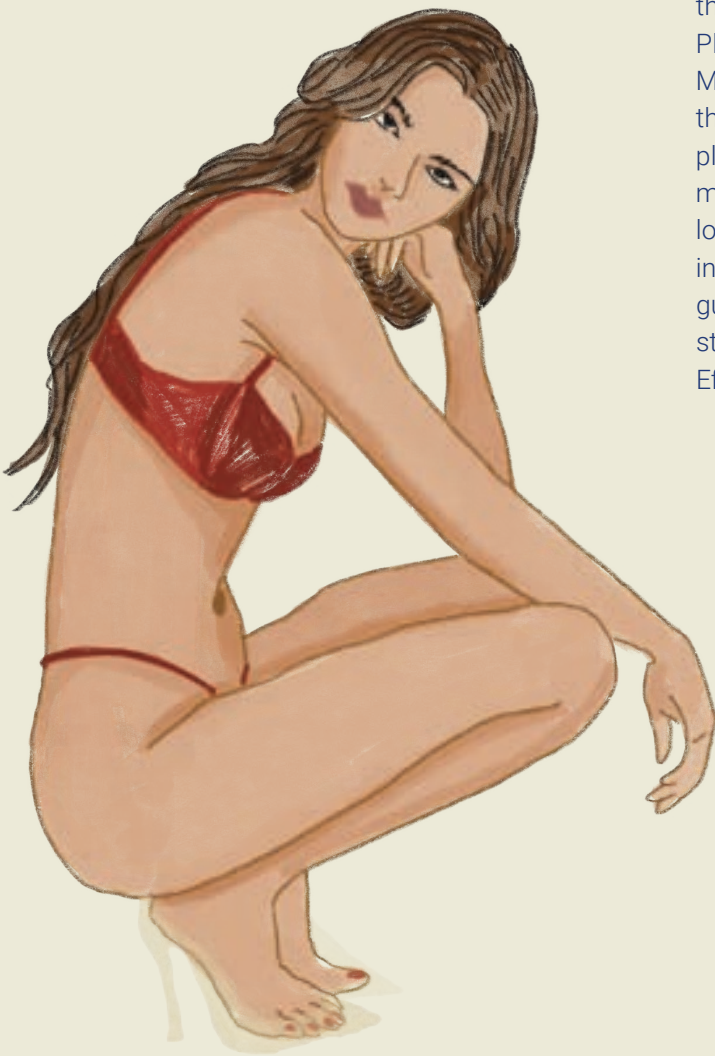
social hierarchies."² The aesthetic value system of the High Renaissance, according to Strings, associated pointed noses and fine lips with more refined facial beauty, which resulted in the degradation of the African face and body.³ The maintenance of "ideal bodies" therefore implies a higher social hierarchy that individuals may try to pursue.



Guilt free.
Unless you steal one.

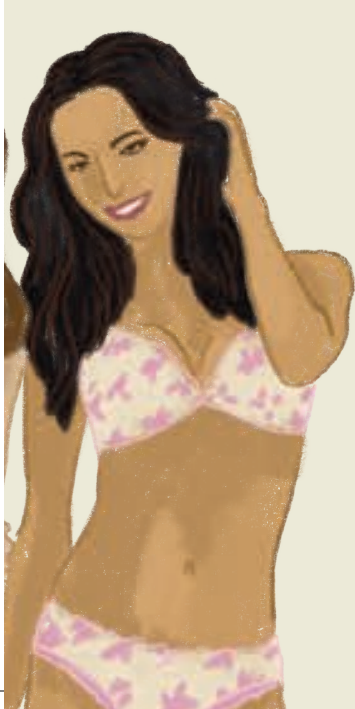
In comparison, String mentioned that Michel Foucault's concept of the biopolitics of health management includes "disciplinary practices that one must perform to be considered a healthy and therefore good citizen" in an industrialized society. In reality, medical practice is treated as an imperative for dominant groups, to the exclusion of poor, racially Othered groups.⁴ This approach helps to maintain social, specifically racialized and gendered, hierarchies.⁵

To further investigate whether the concept of guilty pleasure is predominantly gendered, I dug into marketing strategies associated with it.⁶ In the paper, "Men Hate It, Women Love It: Guilty Pleasure Advertising Messages," researchers Matthew Lancellotti and Sunil Thomas found that advertisements emphasizing the guilty pleasure induced by a product affect women and men differently. Particularly, such messaging lowered the likelihood of purchase in men, yet increased that likelihood in women.⁷ Additionally, guilt and pleasure affect each other. In another study "When Guilt Begets Pleasure: The Positive Effect of a Negative Emotion," the authors found



that in some cases, guilt can not only drive behavioral changes but also enhance pleasurable experiences.⁸ Advertisers and markets would seize the opportunity by emphasizing the guilty aspect of pleasurable products and services.

The above study shows the psychological strategy behind marketing campaigns. To better understand the current marketing landscape, I approached Roberta Clarke, an adjunct professor of healthcare marketing at Brandeis University, to discuss women's susceptibility to marketing around food and health products. She pointed out that social media nowadays plays a crucial role in food marketing strategies. "While social media makes information more accessible to Gen Z eaters and millennial parents who are accustomed to finding news and health advice there, it also easily spreads misinformation," Clarke said.⁹ "For example, reports show that the food, beverage, and dietary supplement industries paid dozens of 'influencer registered dietitians' to help sell products and deliver industry-friendly messages without sufficient proof."¹⁰



Nutrition Facts

Serving Size

Amount Per Serving

Calories

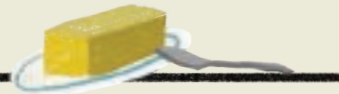
Total Fat

Sodium

Total Carbohydrate

Sugars

Protein



In addition to food marketing, food labels play a crucial role in influencing consumers' psychology, behavior, metabolic rates, and even hormone levels. On that subject, I talked with Rachel Herz, a neuroscientist and the author of *Why You Eat What You Eat*.

She brought up findings from research conducted by Alia Crum, a psychology professor at Columbia University. Her study used milkshakes to explore how food labels affect participants' mindsets and the hunger hormone, ghrelin. She separated identical 380-calorie milkshakes into two categories. Half of the batch was labeled "620-calorie indulgent shake," while the other half was labeled "140-calorie sensible shake." Surprisingly, those who consumed the "indulgent shake" experienced faster metabolisms and steeper declines in ghrelin level, which typically drops after eating, compared to those who consumed the "healthy shake."¹¹ Herz explained that various studies have examined the perception of fullness, revealing that individuals who believe a food item is more caloric or decadent tend to report feeling fuller and more satiated, potentially leading to consuming less in subsequent meals. The implications extend to the impact of food labeling on metabolism and weight management.¹²

To understand the reliability of labels, I reached out to Kris Cambra, the Assistant Dean of BioMedical Communications at Brown University. She recognized the challenge of misinformation in healthcare and food marketing, as the public often "misinterprets correlations as causations."

"For example, the superfood industry often overstates scientific findings, relying on small studies that may lack validity," Cambra said. "These products walk the fine line between making appealing claims and avoiding FDA scrutiny, and they might not always deliver promised benefits." Furthermore, she pointed out the gender differences in healthcare consumer behaviors. For example, women tend to pay more attention to and purchase health products for themselves or their families. Therefore, Brown University strategically collaborates with *Rhode Island Monthly*, a magazine with a predominantly female readership, to target women making health decisions for their families. While male-oriented supplements focus on strength and virility, Cambra attributes women's higher susceptibility in healthcare marketing to their role in bearing family health responsibilities.¹³



With the increasing use of Ozempic, a drug originally designed to treat Type-2 diabetes, topics around weight loss and body image have resurfaced. With the high cost of Ozempic and other similar weight-loss drugs, being “thin” is no longer just a matter of genetics and metabolism but of moral choice because only richer people, who are not necessarily obese, can afford the medications. Under this circumstance, what does it mean to be thin and fat?¹⁴ Additionally, As Ozempic users often experience less food noise, or constant thoughts about eating, marketing strategies that describe food as “irresistible” and “addictive” become less effective. In response, the food industry is exploring ways to adapt. For example, advertisements might instead focus on the joy and comfort consumers gain

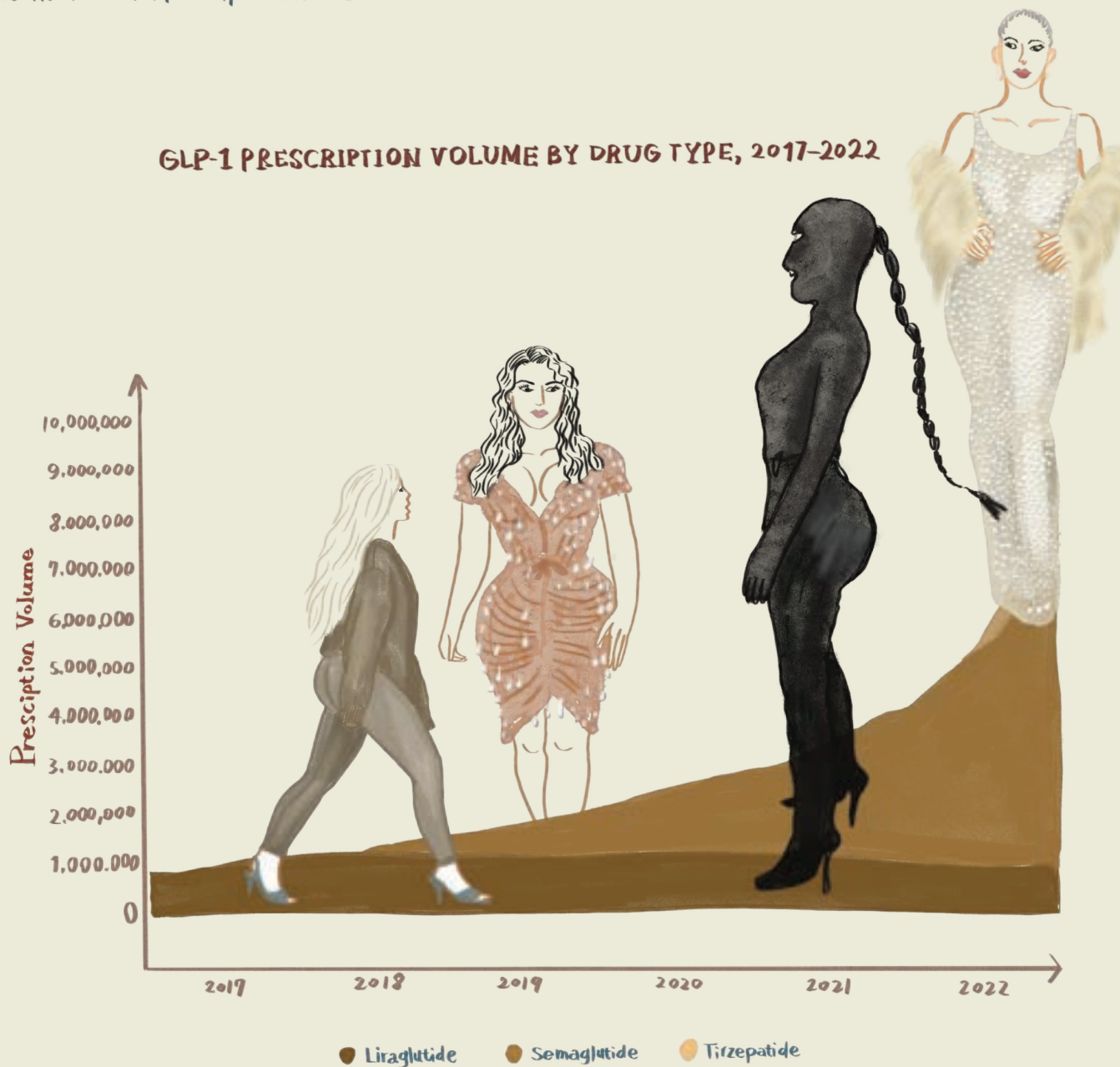
from processed food products, instead of their addictive nature in the past.¹⁵

Despite their rising popularity, anti-obesity drugs will not address the root causes of obesity, where healthy lifestyles, including consuming nutritious food, working out regularly, and getting routine medical checkups, are inaccessible to most people. But what does health even mean? As a young woman who feels the pressure to stay as healthy as possible to be deemed “desirable,” I find myself internalizing the pressure and feeling guilty whenever I exceed my self-imposed weight goals. To further understand women’s relationship with guilty pleasure, I chatted with 15 women and included our interviews in the following chapter.

Ozempic® Is the Most Prescribed GLP-1

National spending for semaglutide, the peptide name for brand drugs like Ozempic® and Wegovy®, totaled \$10.7B in 2021, the fourth highest across drug classes. Between Q1 2020 and Q4 2022, prescription volumes for GLP-1 medications have increased 300%. Since its approval in Q4 2017, Ozempic® (semaglutide) has grown to account for 65.4% of all GLP-1 prescription volume.

GLP-1 PRESCRIPTION VOLUME BY DRUG TYPE, 2017-2022



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Chapter 3



Conversations with Women in
Boston, Massachusetts & Providence, Rhode Island

In the last chapter, I interviewed 15 women in the food, wine, and wellness industry. Most of them were located in Providence, and some in the greater Rhode Island and Boston area.

I reached out to them early in September 2023. Most of the women were intrigued by the idea of “guilty pleasure” and had their own relationships with the subject, while a small percentage of my interviewees were unfamiliar with the term. Every interview was recorded under informed consent.



I appreciate their sincere responses during the interviews. However, it is also worth noting that their responses vary based on their cultural, socioeconomic, and regional backgrounds. Therefore, this collection of interviews is region-specific, particularly reflecting the experiences of women who are currently residing in the New England area, particularly in Providence and Boston.



Vineyard Road

146

Green Line Apothecary



East Side Cheese & Provisions



95

Angelo's



Kin Southern Table & Bar



PVDonuts



Black Leaf

44

Providence

6



Ellie's

Arcadian Fields Organic Farm



ROAM LOUD



Aura's Chocolate Bar

Boston

Tatte Bakery & Cafe



Sheryl Julian's House

3A

3



Plant City



495

The Heal Room



Leah Winship

Wine professional at Vineyard Road & Bubble Bath, Boston, MA

The first time I met Leah Winship, a local sommelier and wine seller, was at her Gala Dali dinner party, hosted by her and her family at her apartment in Providence, Rhode Island. I brought a shiny-looking sparkling wine wrapped in a paper bag, while other guests of hers stored their bottles in coolers. Despite my limited knowledge of wine, her friends in the industry were intrigued by my guilty pleasure project. One man, Arik Colbath, told me “It’s a party with people who love food and wine so much. It’s pure pleasure. Never guilty about it.”

A few weeks after the dinner party, I met up with Leah again at Ellie’s in Providence. Still recovering slightly from our Saturday nights, we had a delightful conversation about Leah’s guilty pleasure over some London Fog lattes and a warm almond croissant.

“I think when your entire career is the concept of guilty pleasure, it is hard to feel guilty about it anymore,” Leah said while sipping tea.

In the world of wine, where refined tastes and sophisticated palates often reign supreme, Leah unapologetically embraces guilty pleasures. Despite being teased about it, Leah likes a particular wine that is often the subject of derision.

“It’s nerdy things, but Rombauer is one of the wines that, as a sommelier, I should hate, and like, my friends make fun of it,” Leah said. “It’s guilty because I shouldn’t like this ‘trashy’ wine.”



For those immersed in the world of wine, maintaining a healthy relationship with alcohol is a delicate dance. Leah reflects on her increased consumption of wine since entering the industry and the constant need for self-control, in which moderation and purposeful consumption are key.

"I don't drink just to drink. I study with food or

with a friend," Leah paused. "I probably drink three nights a week."

Leah also shed light on the evolving practices and creative adaptations in response to changing climates, especially for a new generation of winemakers in renowned regions like Champagne and Burgundy.

"In Champagne, fewer winemakers are adding sugar while producing Champagne to balance the acidity now because of warming temperatures," Leah said.

Wine, often considered an art form, is explored as a dynamic expression of taste, culture, and societal shifts. Leah links the world of wine to fashion, asserting that both industries are inextricably linked to broader socio-political trends.

"I think it's definitely like art, the way winemakers use their senses," Leah said.

Drawing parallels to the ever-changing landscape of fashion, Leah highlights the constant evolution in the wine industry; new producers, climates, and laws contribute to an ever-shifting tapestry of flavors and styles that shape how people drink.



Angie DiMeo

Owner of East Side Cheese & Provisions, Providence, RI

Three months into the operation of East Side Cheese & Provisions, I met with their co-founder Angie DiMeo on a weekday afternoon. She was a petite woman in tight jeans, running around the shop to help her customers find the best cheese for their needs.

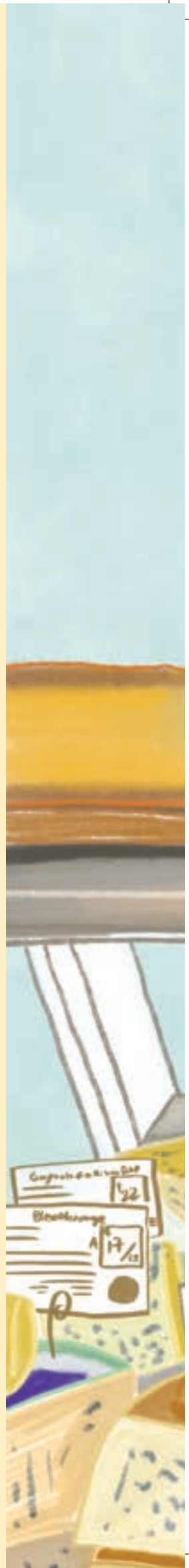
She expressed her joy in helping customers, but she also told me that she had heard several unexpected comments.

One noteworthy comment revolves around remarks on her body, with people expressing surprise that someone working in a cheese shop can maintain a slender figure. Interestingly, these comments meant as compliments, often come from older women struggling to reconcile a

slim physique with a shop filled with tempting, calorie-laden delights.

Another recurring theme is the shop being perceived as “dangerous.” Customers frequently employ this term to describe the irresistible allure of its decadent offerings, including the dangerously delicious triple-trim brie loaded with indulgent fats. The daily refrain of “it’s so dangerous in here” resonates, emphasizing the irresistible appeal of the shop’s offerings, from sumptuous chocolates to candies and nuts.

“Dangerous’ makes it sound like you shouldn’t have too much or even avoid it because you might lose control,” Angie remarked. “But for me, it’s about quantity and balance.”





Our conversation navigates the evolving landscape of plant-based and lactose-free options in the cheese industry. While recognizing the increasing demand for plant-based alternatives, Angie emphasizes the importance of endorsing products they believe in, prioritizing factors such as animal welfare, production practices, and taste.

Exploring Angie's dietary environment growing up, Angie reveals that her mom, restricted by dieting, used to try SlimFast to attain an "attractive" physique. This image instilled a notion that carbs and fat were "bad" at a young age.

"Now I don't like labeling food as good or bad. I think there's just food that gives you quicker energy while others provide more sustainable energy," Angie said. "The language of 'this food makes me fat' is problematic because it shows that society still appraises thinness."



Angie concludes with insights into guilty pleasures, admitting to an indulgence in sweets, particularly Ben and Jerry's ice cream. The guilt stems from the awareness of overconsumption, tying back to the recurring theme of moderation.

"I don't deny myself. However, the guilt sneaks in when I overeat sweets at the end of the day because it affects my sleep quality," Angie said.

Now entrenched in the cheese industry and connected with enthusiasts and professionals, Angie shares the joy derived from treating oneself to various experiences, highlighting a shift towards holistic well-being beyond societal norms. She acknowledges that life holds bigger pursuits than focusing solely on the body and denying our desires.



Amber Jackson

Owner of Black Leaf Tea & Culture Shop, Providence, RI



Amber Jackson is the owner of Black Leaf Tea & Culture Shop. Before our meeting, she was catching up on schoolwork for her second Master's degree in gastronomy at Boston University. Balancing roles as a businesswoman and graduate student, Amber emphasized the importance of granting herself grace when it comes to her dietary choices.

Amber's guilty pleasure lies in the simple delight of a pizza paired with wine, or Chantilly cake from Whole Foods. For her, guilt only creeps in when she encounters external opinions questioning the appropriateness of her indulgence.

"Do I feel guilty about eating it? No. But the notion of 'you don't need sweet things' made me feel guilty," she said. "I will have the Chantilly cake whenever I want and will work out the day after if I feel like it."

As a native of the South Side of Chicago, Sunday dinners at her grandmother's house were a tradition, featuring greens, hearty meat, and macaroni and cheese. Growing up in a single-parent home, Amber learned to be independent early. She disagrees with the stereotype of the kitchen being a feminine space; she believes that "anyone should learn to feed themselves."



Transitioning from a high-performance D1 athlete to a self-described NARP (a non-athletic regular person) was challenging for Amber. After she let go of her daily workout routine, Amber found herself adjusting to a more sedentary lifestyle and also growing more conscious about her health.

Amber believes in making wellness accessible to all, while also acknowledging that a healthy lifestyle is not affordable for everyone.

"Gym membership is expensive. Pilates, which is a huge thing now, and protein powders are not cheap if you use them consistently," Amber said. "So I wanted to create tea, especially loose-leaf tea that could be seen as a little pretentious, that makes people feel familiar and accessible."

Combined with research and experiments, Amber created tea recipes that are both palatable and nutritional. Her blends—like 'glow,' a flavor blended with turmeric, ginger, lemon peel, and black pepper—are carefully curated, and are not just flavorful, but also have nutrient bioavailability.

Freedom
Decaffeinated strawberry-flavored black tea, dehydrated strawberries, hibiscus, holy basil



Faux
Roasted chicory root, Roasted dandelion root



Sunday Morning
Chamomile, Orange peel, Lemongrass, Spearmint



"Turmeric is oftentimes used for anti-inflammation, but the curcumin in it isn't readily used by the body," Amber said. "So we added black pepper to the blend to make curcumin absorbable."

As an entrepreneur who navigates the complexities of her own life, Amber encourages others to honor their pleasures because life is all about balance.

"We've been through too much as people in the past three years, why are we denying ourselves what we want?" Amber asked. "I think we all are allowed to express things we find joy in."

Chai-town

Roasted cacao nibs,
Assam black tea,
Cardamom, Ginger
Cloves, Black pepper



CoCo Bae
Keemun snail black tea,
Roasted cacao nibs,
Coconut flakes



Tzurit Or

Owner of Tatte Bakery & Cafe, Boston, MA

Tzurit Or is the founder of Tatte Bakery & Cafe, which serves Moroccan and Jewish baked goods and dishes. The restaurant was celebrating its 16th anniversary when I caught up with Tzurit. During our call, she told me about her philosophy of life and her immigrant journey to the United States.

"Tatte was never started as a business venture or a means to generate profit," Tzurit said. She was inundated with messages about the cafe's anniversary. "I established Tatte when I was still an immigrant in this country. I was homesick, and Tatte gave me a sense of home."

Tzurit attributes the cafe's success to its mission:

"Bring people together around great food and pastries while providing a deep sense of comfort and belonging."

Before Tatte, Tzurit spent twelve years working as a film producer. She believes that the resilience and strength honed during her filmmaking career have been instrumental in navigating the business.

"I couldn't have managed Tatte without my background in film production," Tzurit said. "Filmmaking is more challenging and difficult than running Tatte because oftentimes it's unattainable."





Many of Tatte's recipes are inspired by Tzurit's childhood spent baking and cooking with her mother on a kibbutz, which is a communal settlement in Israel. The cheesecake and birthday cake use yeasted dough, which is a technique she learned from her time there. Both are particularly beloved by Tatte's patrons and Tzurit's daughter.

"After school, I'd help my mom in the kibbutz kitchen, learning how to cook and bake," she said. "My brother and I would sneak bites of cheesecake crumbs, so my mom had to hide it

from us. And the same situation happened when I was making the cheesecake at Tatte, too."

Raised in Israel, Tzurit emphasizes the ethos of freshness and cooking from scratch ingrained in her upbringing. Rather than characterizing baking and cooking as "passions," she views them as essential components of everyday life back home.



"When I first came to the United States and was given a box of pancakes, I had no idea what to do with it because I hadn't seen food in a box before," Tzurit recalled. "Everything back home is made from scratch."

Addressing guilty pleasures, Tzurit finds immense joy in food beyond desserts. A baguette with salt and butter is her indulgence. Reflecting on the notion of guilt associated with food, Tzurit recounted a conversation with her daughter about the concept of YOLO (you only live once), which shifted her perspective.

"The way I see guilty pleasure is how you view life and what matters to you," Tzurit shared. "If you eat something, you should just focus on the joy and appreciate that moment in life."





An illustration of a kitchen shelf. The shelf is green and has three vases on it. The top vase is orange with green leaves and a brown handle. The middle vase is yellow with blue flowers and green leaves. The bottom vase is orange with blue flowers and green leaves. Below the shelf is a white dish rack with blue dishes and a white cloth. The background is a light green wall.

Sheryl Julian

Former longtime *Boston Globe* food editor,
now frequent contributor

Sheryl Julian is a food journalist and former food editor for the *Boston Globe*. She chatted with me over Zoom from her house in Watertown, Massachusetts. During our conversation, she talked about her approaches to cooking and eating, and, of course, her guilty pleasures.



"Freezer cookies are my guilty pleasure. I make a lot of cookies, and they go into the freezer," Sheryl said. "Sometimes my husband and I would have a glass of wine and those cookies at night. It's a guilty pleasure. We tend to be careful about what we eat for our waistlines and our hearts."

In addition to freezer cookies, the combination of champagne and salted popcorn is also her weekly guilty pleasure. It is a tradition she started during the lockdown when she would have guests over and serve freshly popped Bob's Red Mill popcorn, tossed with fine olive oil and sea salt.

"I feel like it's a guilty pleasure because people think champagne needs something like oysters and foie gras, things that are sort of a higher calling than popcorn," Julian shared.

However, as a food lover, she said food is never something that needs to be felt guilty or ashamed about. Guilty pleasure is "something that makes you giggle."

Sheryl said she is working on a chocolate mousse recipe after trying four different restaurants with varying levels of fanciness in Paris. It's been around for 60 or 80 years and it won't go away.

"All the old recipes use raw eggs beaten into chocolate. And you can't do that in today's kitchen because the eggs need to come up to temperature. So I'm trying to figure out a way where I can make a very dense, rich chocolate mousse."

During the pandemic, Sheryl found herself with loads of time to thoroughly test cookbooks and refine old recipes. For example, she shared her oatmeal cookies that are crunchy and chewy, based on her preference. She talked about going through several experiments and finally discovering the secret: using melted butter.

When asked whether she ever substituted ingredients with healthier alternatives, she answered, "Never."



"I feel like everything is good in moderation. I don't substitute fat or butter because I want it to have a classic taste," she said. "And I don't like to go around saying that some ingredients are bad for your health. Wellness people who do that should not be doing it. They should make it a preference instead of dissing a whole category."

Cooking and sharing food seem to be an integral part of Sheryl's household. She shared that she used to make the four-serving roast chicken every Friday and finished almost the entire bird with her husband. She gained 25 pounds, which prompted her to join Weight Watchers and learn about nutrition and portions. At those group meetings, Sheryl was surprised at how few people knew about nutrition and cooking and how hungry people were for shortcuts at the supermarkets.

"It was the first time I knew frozen rice existed. So later on, I wrote a story about how to cook rice because honestly, nobody knew."

Since her experience with Weight Watchers, Sheryl has learned a lot about portion size and nutrition and started to exercise. At the end of our conversation, she emphasized her philosophy, "Eat whatever you like."

"You have to treat food with dignity and shouldn't feel bad about it. If you eat something you like too frequently, it will also not be a pleasure anymore."



Kim Anderson

Owner of Plant City, Providence, RI

I talked to Kim Anderson, the founder of the local vegan restaurant chain Plant City, over the phone on a Monday morning before Thanksgiving. She was energetic at 8 a.m., telling me that she and her daughter just had a conversation about body shape and bikinis.

"The beauty standards are always changing between generations. As someone who wanted to shrink my glute size, my daughter was showing me the curvy figures of Kim Kardashian."







As a businesswoman who is planning to expand Plant City to other countries, Kim said she has a hired cook at home because she does not usually have the energy to do it herself after a busy day.

"Our cook makes us sugar-free, oil-free meals, but they are delicious, and I don't feel guilty anymore if I am having a little chocolate as a treat. Plant City uses salt, oil, and sugar because if the food is too clean people won't eat it. It's a misconception that all plant-based food is healthy. It's not always the case. Healthier, maybe," she said.

Despite having a plant-based diet, Kim said she does not pay attention to dietary trends, including products like superfoods.

"It's really about bathing the cells of your body in delicious healthy food and eating the rainbow. Dark blackberries and blueberries and the reds of strawberries and raspberries and tomatoes and purples of eggplants and grapes," she said passionately.



Plant City's petite marketplace carefully curates a range of organic, plant-based essentials—vegan cheese, pasta sauce, pancake mix, crackers, granola bars, and tempting ice cream—all staples in Kim's family's pantry. Notably, she emphasizes that these items are palm oil-free, a conscious step to combat deforestation in the Amazon and Indonesia driven by the demand for inexpensive palm oil.

Acknowledging the perception that health-focused choices often come with a higher price, Kim addresses the challenge of keeping prices low due to the marketplace's scale. Nevertheless, she firmly contends that a plant-based lifestyle can be

both budget-friendly and accessible to everyone. Kim recommends the cookbook *Plant-Based on a Budget*, emphasizing that creating enjoyable, easy, and affordable plant-based meals is entirely doable.

When asked about her final thoughts on guilty pleasure, Kim stressed that we should look at food as "fuel for the engine of the only bodies we have."

"We have to treat our bodies with respect; you shouldn't feed it with sugar every day, but you also should not feel guilty about having sugar. I try to live by the theory of radical kindness because kindness has to start with ourselves."

Christina Procaccianti

Cofounder of Green Line Apothecary, Providence, RI



On a Tuesday morning, I came to Green Line Apothecary, an independently-owned healthcare company on North Main Street. Christina Procaccianti, the cofounder of the pharmacy, walked out from behind the counter in a white coat. She said pharmacists emerge as the “gatekeepers,” donning white coats that belie the blue-collar nature of their demanding role in the world of healthcare.

As owner of the pharmacy, Christina recognized the need to infuse positivity into what can be an emotionally charged environment. Her innovative approach includes a soda fountain and ice cream station, encouraging indulgence with a twist of wholesomeness by providing allergy-friendly options. “Everything in moderation” is her mantra, advocating for a balanced approach to healthcare that goes beyond prescriptions.





Taking inspiration from European apothecaries, Christina admires a holistic view of medicine. She stocks a diverse range of medications, including herbal and homeopathic remedies, believing that a middle ground exists between traditional and alternative therapies.

As a pro-preventative medicine pharmacist, Christina acknowledged her departure from mainstream pharmacy practices, especially homeopathy which still lacks sufficient clinical trials. However, coming from personal experience and expertise, she was prompted to seek safer, more natural alternative medications since she became a mother.

“Do we have to use Tylenol every time you’ve got an ache or a pain? Do you need to jump to an opioid? Have you tried everything for your anxiety before you use benzodiazepine? The medicine works if you need it, but we can also explore alternatives or things like massage, chiropractic, and reflexology,” Christina said.

Turning the spotlight on nutrition, she critiques the superfood industry, asserting that it often capitalizes on consumer ignorance. Christina advocates for education, urging individuals to scrutinize product ingredients and explore cost-effective alternatives.

“When you look at products like green powder, the ingredients are the same across different brands but combined in different ways. Educate yourself, and figure out what’s really in the product,” she said.

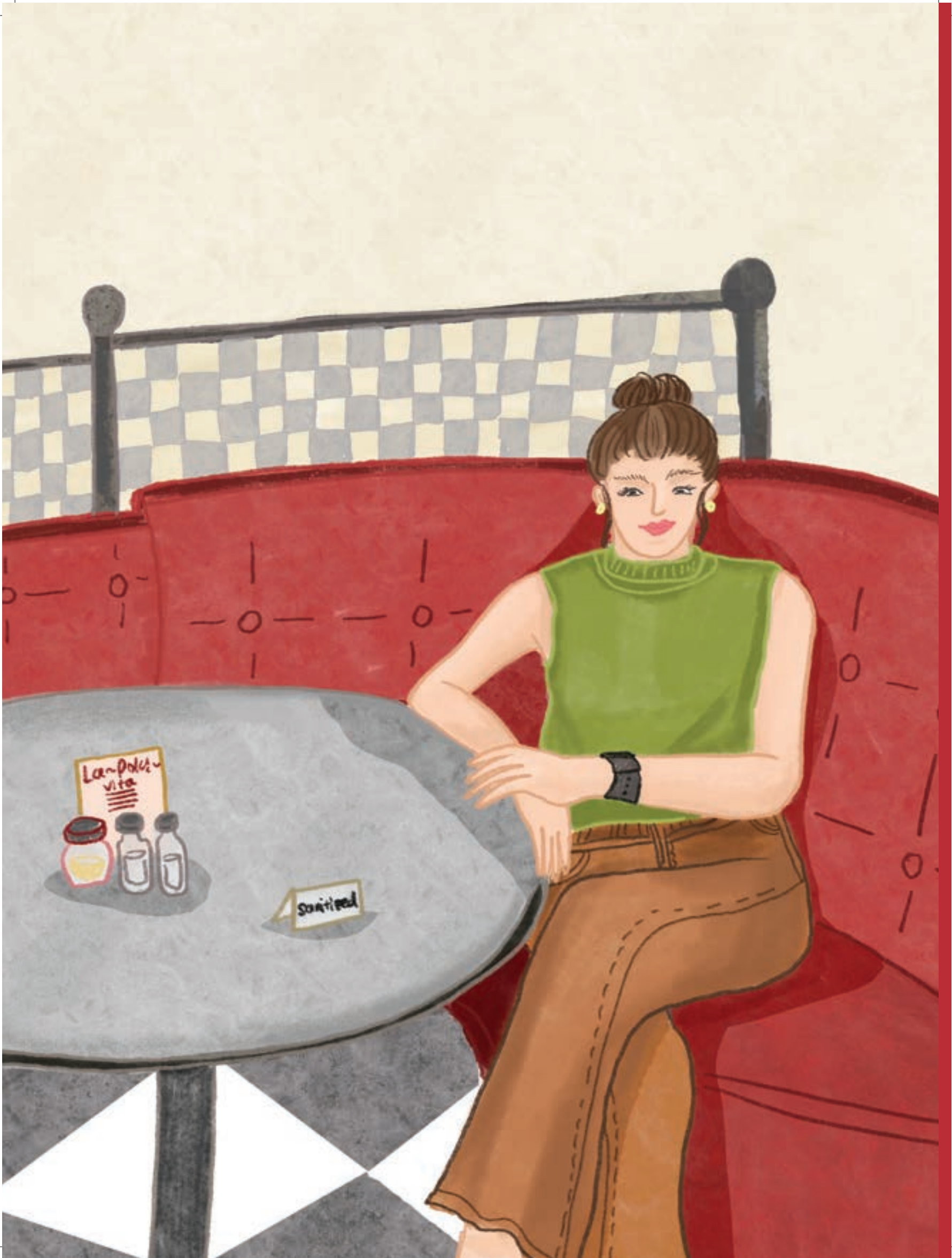


Addressing specific medications, Christina expressed concern about the misuse of Ozempic for weight loss, leading to shortages for those who genuinely need it. She also highlighted the societal pressures that drive the overprescribing of amphetamines in women without attention deficit disorders, driven by a desire for increased productivity.

"I think one of the primary reasons women take Ozempic and amphetamine stems from societal pressures as a woman not only has to look perfect but be perfect at all times," Christina said.

Looking ahead, Christina anticipates a potential surge in weight loss drugs, raising concerns about societal reliance and a diminished focus on healthy lifestyles. She fears a future where quick fixes overshadow mindful eating, perpetuating a cycle of unhealthy habits.





Jamie Antignano

Fourth-generation owner of Angelo's Restaurant, Providence, RI

Jamie Antignano, the current owner of the century-old family restaurant Angelo's in Federal Hill, sat down with me on a Friday afternoon. Dressed in a stylish beige turtleneck knit vest and chestnut-brown trousers, she moved around the restaurant, greeting customers like family.

Before taking over the family business, Jamie's career began as an Allocation Analyst at TJX, a multinational off-price fashion business in Boston. Reflecting on her past, she described the uptight and health-conscious lifestyle she maintained during her corporate tenure, where she felt that appearance played a crucial role in career advancement.

The transition from the fashion industry to the restaurant business marked a pivotal shift

in her life. Running the century-old family establishment for six years, she detailed a transformative journey that initially involved commuting from Boston, waking up at 4 a.m. for a two-hour boxing session, and operating the restaurant seven days a week. This demanding routine persisted for nearly two years until burnout prompted her to reassess her approach to work and well-being.

As a self-described Type A perfectionist, Jamie acknowledged the journey of relinquishing control over certain aspects of her life, and a noteworthy example of this transformation is her relationship with food.

"I used to live in our company's salad bar and meal-prepped a lot when I was in Boston."

When asked about her current guilty pleasure, Jamie smiled.

"I am so into melted cheese, so I would say our eight-layered lasagna is my guilty pleasure. It's something that I feel like I shouldn't be eating, but I will do it anyway," Jamie said. "Plus we make it from scratch, so I would feel less guilty about it."



Breakfast: 8:00 a.m.



Lunch: 2ish p.m.



Dinner: 10-11 p.m.



Since she took over Angelo's, food evolved from a functional necessity into a rich representation of Italian heritage, history, culinary expertise, and food science. An illustrative example of this perspective is evident in the iconic meatball french fries at Angelo's, which originated during the Great Depression. Jamie explained that, at that time, people couldn't afford abundant food, and this innovative combination became a sustaining option. Similarly, she pointed to the prevalence of potatoes during the Irish immigration, emphasizing their affordability and widespread use.

"There is so much more history rooted in our dishes than just a bowl of pasta," she said.

Jamie also shared her views on consuming superfood products, noting that advertising tactics often target women, influencing their perceptions of body image and wellness. She highlighted the impact of social media on young women, who may strive to emulate the images portrayed.

"I think the advertisements associated with these health products affect the way women view their bodies and make more health-conscious decisions accordingly, like ordering a salad," Jamie said. "I am always going to try to be healthy in terms of living a long life, but I am not going to skip out on the bread on the table."



DAILY MENU
SALAD
SPRING BEAN SALAD
SNAIL SALAD
MOZZARELLA STICKS
CALAMARI
SHARP PROMONE
PANE TOLLS
FRENCH FRIES
FRIED PEPPERS

DAILY MENU
SPAGHETTI OR ZITI
CAVATELLI
HOMEMADE
CHOCIO PAVIOLI
AGLIO E OLIO
LASAGNA
VEGGIE LASAGNA
RATED MACARONI
PESTO CHICKEN

Ang



On a fall Monday afternoon, I came to Aura's Chocolate Bar in Cranston, Rhode Island. The founder Aura Fajardo was busy in the kitchen, tempering chocolates and placing them into decorative molds for the upcoming Halloween festivities. Her kitchen was organized, filled with boxes of orders from Venezuela, lists of inventories on the wall, and all kinds of labels she had designed by herself.

Aura shared that her chocolate creations are a harmonious blend of her Venezuelan heritage and the diverse flavors of Rhode Island. Committed to sustainability, she sources local ingredients such as coffee, spices, and alcohol, drawing inspiration from farmers' markets to craft unique flavor combinations like lavender and honey.

Aura's culinary journey spans from childhood exposure to diverse cuisines to becoming an artisanal expert in chocolate. Before coming to the United States, she spent a few months in Germany and Spain. Her time abroad exposed her to simple yet delicious cuisine and developed her chocolate fixation.

"When I went back home, I started trying Venezuelan chocolate. There's something special about the Venezuelan chocolate—it's almost like you can taste the sea salt and plantain leaves," Aura said.

Aura Fajardo

Owner of Aura's Chocolate Bar, Cranston, RI



Before establishing her chocolatier business in Cranston, Aura lived in Venezuela until the age of 24. Originally drawn to pursue a master's degree in graphic design in Providence, Aura's trajectory unexpectedly shifted after marriage and childbirth, leading her to discover a profound love for the world of baking and pastry. Following an internship at a chocolate shop in Massachusetts, she decided to embark on her entrepreneurial journey, establishing her own business in Rhode Island.

While society often considers chocolate a guilty pleasure, Aura admitted to grappling with weight-related struggles in the past. Despite her role in creating these "guilty pleasures" for herself and her clients, she has found peace with the paradox.

"I've been chubby all my life, and around twenty years ago, I decided to just let go. If I am having a bad day, I will eat the chocolate and just exercise tomorrow if I feel like it. Yes, I did gain 40 pounds, but it's all happiness," Aura revealed.



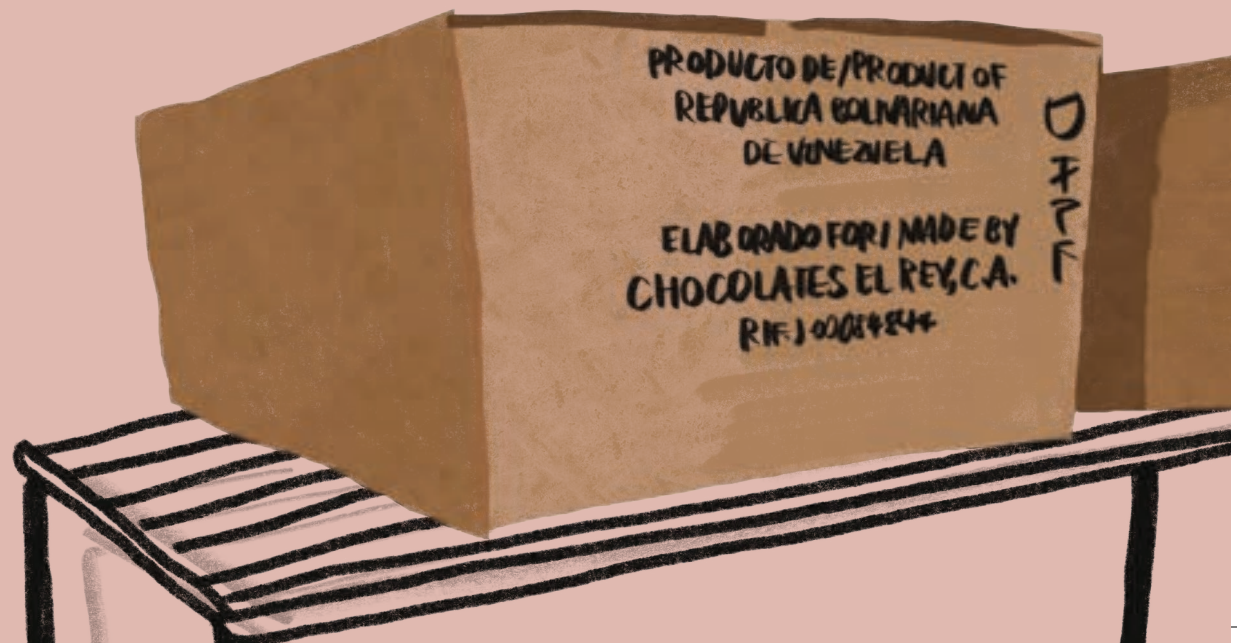


Reflecting on her time at Johnson & Wales University, Aura noticed the female-dominated landscape of pastry arts and experienced the strong camaraderie among women pursuing culinary dreams. Inspired by her close friend Lauren Wingate, who opened Wingate's Cake Design in Westport, Massachusetts, Aura decided to start her own business.

"Women in the program bonded through our shared love for food. Every day we spent long hours in the

kitchen lab and went back home feeling exhausted, but we still woke up the next day cooking together. We still are each other's therapists today," Aura shared.

As a business owner, Aura recognizes the diversity of women's preferences and body image perceptions. While she personally no longer harbors guilty pleasures, she aims to provide options for those who do.





Diana Kushner

Documentary filmmaker and owner of Arcadian Fields Organic Farm, Hope Valley, RI

I met Diana Kushner on a Monday at her Arcadian Fields Organic Farm in Hope Valley, Rhode Island. While her husband, Stephen, worked on the ongoing renovation of their house, we talked beneath an orange-leafed tree before going on a farm tour and indulging in fresh produce taste tests.

"I snack all the time just walking around the farm," she said.

In the realm of guilty pleasures, Diana found the concept alien.

"Food has always been something nice, so I guess I am fortunate for not feeling guilty about it. Sometimes I weigh a few more pounds than I want to, but it's not a big deal."

For Diana, guilt comes in when she realizes she is more privileged than others but can't offer help to the people in need.

"I sometimes realize I spend more on a chocolate bar than someone has for their whole day. It's a moment of guilt, but it's also a chance to inspire change," Diana shared.

Reflecting on her culinary upbringing, a diverse tapestry of flavors emerged. Her father excelled in Indian and Chinese cuisines, while her mother mastered Italian, French, and American dishes. The routine of preparing her sandwich since first grade instilled a sense of self-sufficiency. Family dining traditions, featuring shared meals with a variety of elements—meat, vegetables, salad, and dessert—continually shaped her appreciation for food.

"Living on a farm, things are different because there is so much seasonality. Now, lunch seems so dismal because we have all these amazing vegetables and I am thinking about which to have for dinner. And I get excited when I think about it."

The rhythms of farm life and seasonal changes influence Diana's dietary choices, from spring seedlings to the abundance of ripe summer vegetables. Her freezers, surprisingly, are fully stocked with bags of cranberries, raspberries, and blueberries from her previous summer's harvest. Provided with abundant food options, Diana told me that she almost became a vegetarian because of ethical and climate concerns.

Diana's transition to farming originated from a passion for addressing water pollution, uncovering layers of agricultural chemicals seeping into water sources. Besides farming, Diana and her husband Stephen Smith are also documentary filmmakers. Their most recent film *Beneath the Polar Sun*, which can be streamed on PBS, documents their research expedition in exploring the Last Ice Area in an Arctic passage 500 nautical miles from the North Pole.

"Sea ice is important. Sea ice is white, and white

reflects the sun. So you have this huge area up there, and 40 percent of the heating on this planet has come from ice and snow and the Arctic region, and no one knows about it. The sea level is rising, and the melting sea ice is the driver of it," Diana said.

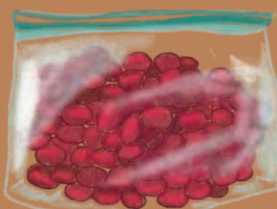
For Diana, education was the key motivator for her while both producing the documentary and running a farm. Diana is fascinated by the idea of picking your produce and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). CSA is a movement in which community individuals support a farm operation, turning farmlands into community farms where farmers and consumers share the benefits and risks of food production.

"That's my vision of the future of agriculture for me. People pick up their food and learn. People become more connected in a way that they would never have before. And people would have a deeper appreciation for the vegetables."

Diana's Seasonal Diet

Breakfast

for breakfast,
Diana always has oatmeal topped with
fresh ginger & organic raisins, plus
seasonal fruit



She freezes the berries harvested in the
spring in big ziplogs for the winter.



Her recent go-to lunch is lentil sandwich
— toasted whole grain bread, some lentils,
pepper jam, cheese, lettuce, and tomatoes.

Lunch

"Dessert" Salad

escarole + radicchio + chopped apple +
fennel, toasted walnut + feta



Dinner

Roasted seasonal Veggies



Toyin Omisore

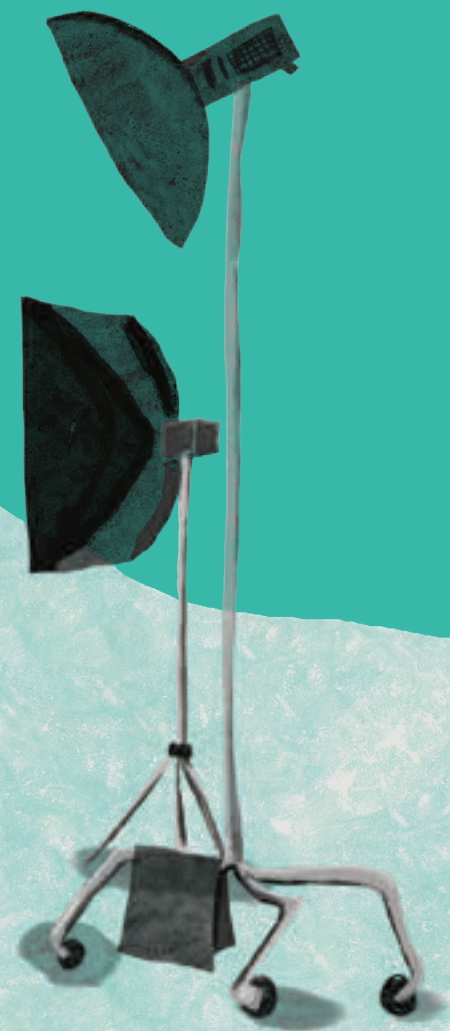
Founder of ROAM LOUD

Toyin Omisore is the owner of ROAM LOUD, a women's activewear and athleisure brand. I met her at a local coffee shop in downtown Providence. In between her meetings, we discussed her business journey and experiences with body image as a former athlete, and now the face of her brand.



Growing up, Toyin had a mix of home-cooked meals and takeouts. Being slender, she observed societal attitudes toward body size, especially through her sister's experiences.

"I was always slimmer compared to my sister, so I learned about size and food through watching her," she said. "For example, when I was eating junk food, no one would comment. But when she had it, people would tell her to go easy on it."



In terms of her diet evolution, Toyin initially paid little attention, consuming fast food regularly. However, as she started to work out, she began religiously calculating nutritional values to gain muscle.

"In the past, my goal was to gain weight and look curvier, but even then I still wasn't happy with how I looked," Toyin said. "Being Black and slender, I didn't feel physically attractive."

Over the past few years, her approach to fitness has become more holistic. She incorporates multiple exercises like kettle workouts, cycling, hiking, and yoga for overall well-being, as Toyin is learning that healing "her relationship with her body is a lifelong journey."



"You are always going to have an issue with your body, so you have to figure out how to balance this," Toyin said. "When I catch myself feeling guilty for my indulgences, I will have a conversation with myself."

Working in the sports fashion industry, Toyin acknowledged the pressure to maintain a certain image while representing her brand.

"When the brand first took off, I was really busy and didn't have time to work out as much. There was also a constant thought in my head telling me to start working out because I am running a fitness brand," Toyin recalled.



For her brand, Toyin expressed a commitment to inclusivity. She described the challenges of catering to diverse body frames and shared her vision of featuring products on models of different sizes and shapes.

"I use everyday women to be my models because I am making clothes for real bodies," Toyin said.

Regarding the Western consumer culture, Toyin critiqued the marketing of products based on women's insecurities. In her brand's advertising, she focuses on positive themes such as community, empowerment, and feeling good rather than

highlighting insecurities associated with body image.

"For example, for our high-waist leggings, we mentioned a tummy control feature. But when I am advertising, I focus on the "feeling good" part rather than the insecurities associated with body image," Toyin said.

Looking ahead, Toyin envisions a broader impact for ROAM LOUD, aspiring to build a community and ecosystem. She sees tremendous potential for growth and aims to create an inclusive online space for ROAM LOUD enthusiasts.



Ellen Gracyalny

Owner of Gracie's & Ellie's, Providence, RI

Ellen Gracyalny is the owner of Gracie's, a fine dining restaurant, and Ellie's, their sister cafe. I met her inside the kitchen of Gracie's on a Thursday night. She's petite with a clean, stylish bob, shiny mulberry-colored manicure, and a structured turtleneck. If restaurants are a kind of orchestra, Ellen is very much a maestro conductor—she manages dozens of chefs and waiters and keeps her eye on all the dishes served.

As a woman chef, Ellen said she needs to taste new menus quite frequently because their menus change seasonally. To stay healthy and feel her best, she said she usually just has "one bite and passes it to other people" when provided with the full portion of the dishes during the tasting process.

"This decision is just mainly coming from my health, I just don't feel good after eating the whole portion."



Growing up, Ellen said her parents were busy working, so her childhood diet was made up of mostly processed foods, such as mac and cheese, Sloppy Joe, or canned vegetables. However, she always liked to learn cooking. Especially when she lived on her own during her time at Northeastern University, she found joy in cooking for her roommates and finding inspiration from fundamental cookbooks, by authors like Martha Stewart and Julia Child.

For a high-end restaurant like Gracie's, Ellen said the idea of "healthy" is usually put behind during the recipe development process because customers come there for special occasions. Instead, Gracie's and Ellie's focus on highlighting seasonal produce and "use different techniques to let them shine."

As health and indulgence are oftentimes on opposite sides of the spectrum, I wonder how a high-end restaurant that focuses on culinary excellence deals with the increasing prevalence of food restrictions and allergies as well as customers who prioritize a healthy lifestyle.

Ellen shared my frustration with the overwhelming amount of information online advising what diet is good or bad for people, while back in the day, food allergy and restrictions were not a concern.

"I've never put myself on a diet in my life, I think it's just about moderation — exercise in a way that pleases you and has the right amount of indulgence," Ellen said.

Despite her busy lifestyle managing two restaurants, Ellen told me that she prioritizes her employees' health and wellbeing and provides resources to help them reach a work-life balance.

"At Ellie's, we have lots of women in leadership roles. We make the positions strictly 40–50 hours per week, and they don't have to overwork and take things home," Ellen said. "It's very important to have your own life outside of work, taking care of yourself."





Julia Broome

Owner of Kin Southern Table & Bar, Providence, RI



Julia Broome is the owner of Kin Southern Table & Bar in Downtown Providence. On a sunny autumn afternoon, she walked out of the kitchen and sat with me on the patio for a quick conversation about her guilty pleasures.

"It could be a bowl of Lucky Charms, or chocolate-dipped strawberries from Godiva. I used to buy a box of those at the mall after school. They're guilty pleasures because my mom would ask why I am spending so much money on them," she said.

Aside from financial concerns, Julia said health is also a factor when thinking about guilty pleasures.

"I think trying to eat healthier has always been on the forefront of my mind," Julia said. "It's a cultural thing, too, because a lot of Black Americans are more susceptible to hypertension and diabetes."



In terms of the restaurant's specialties, Julia admitted that the menu is not the most vegan-friendly because soul food in the past was made from scraps, the fattiest parts of the meat.

"I think for us, soul food started as the complete opposite of guilty pleasure," she said. "Back in the early 1800s of American history, most Black people were enslaved, and we were given scraps of meat that our masters didn't want to eat. So guilty pleasure for us was a good cut of meat or things that were expensive. So that's why I think money is tied to indulgence."

Raised in a culinary environment shaped by the fusion of soul food, Julia's roots stretch from Virginia to Upstate New York. Late-night cravings and guilty pleasures inspire Julia's recipes, whether it's the simplicity of potato salad or the heartiness of mac and cheese; each menu item reflects a connection to her cultural heritage and communal experiences.



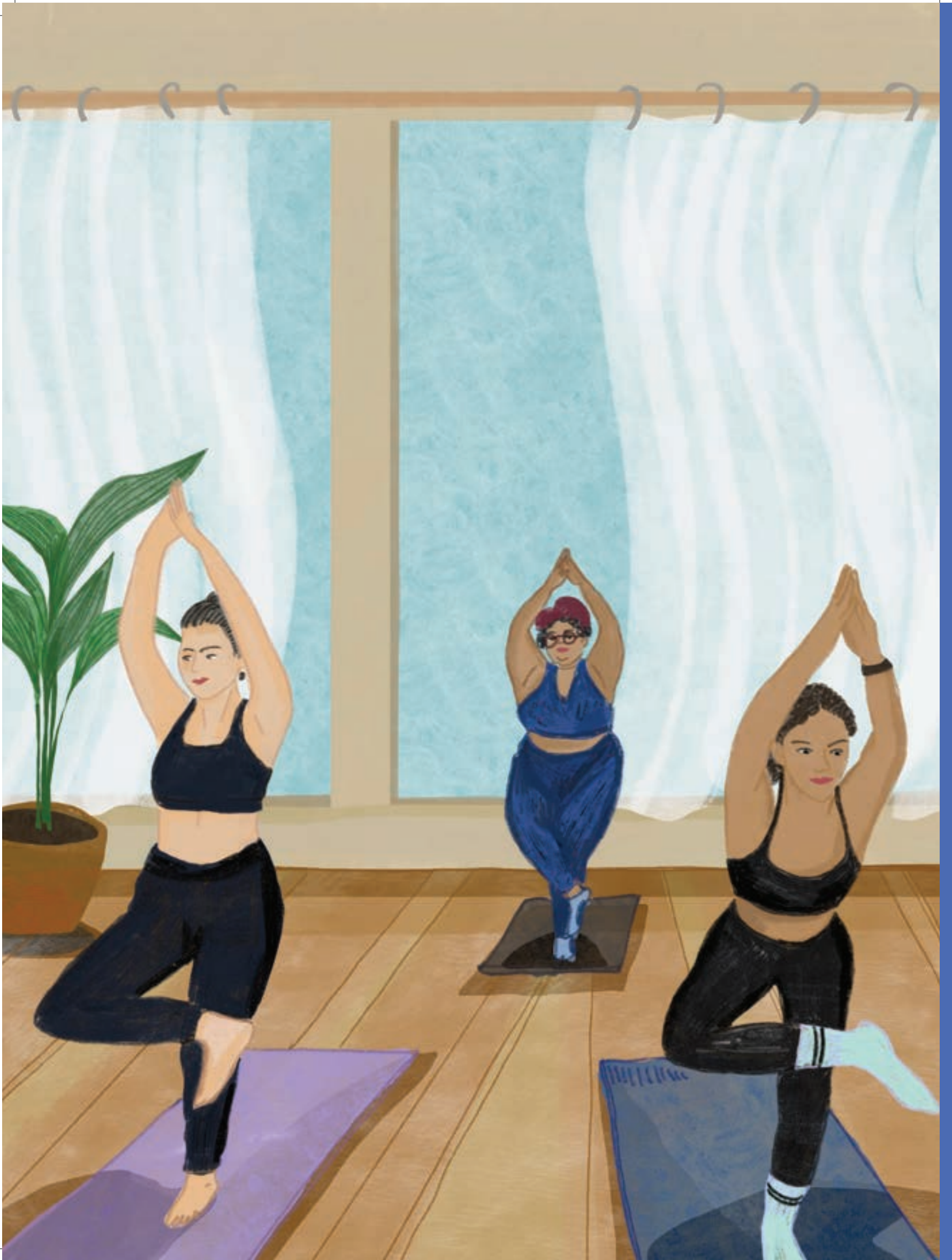
When asked about Julia's opinion on whether a kitchen is often deemed a feminine space in her culture and now at her restaurant, Julia said she cares less about her staff's genders, but more about whether they know and respect soul food.

"Soul food requires a lot of preparation. For example, it takes three or four hours to make our collard greens because it's a very tough, combative vegetable."

At the end of our conversation, Julia mentioned that the invisible societal pressure of telling women what to eat comes from colonialism.

"Although people nowadays are more open to non-proportionate bodies, which is how most of the Black people were built, beauty standards are always changing," Julia said. "I am just trying to be me, trying to be the healthiest version of myself."





Jasmin Acevedo

Wellbeing educator & trauma-informed yoga facilitator,
Founder and former owner of Four2Five Wellness, East Providence, RI

On November 2nd, 2023, Jasmin Acevedo, the founder and former owner of Four2Five Yoga and Wellness Studio and now a yoga instructor at The Heal Room, showed me around the studio space and shared how her approach to health has changed over time.

When asked about societal pressure to maintain a certain body image, Jasmin candidly shared her struggles with perceived inadequacies, fueled by unrealistic standards in the media and familial influences, where her father was a bodybuilder. Through yoga and a holistic approach to well-being, she has evolved from “looking a certain way,” to “feeling a certain way.”

"When I was a kid I always thought I was fat and compared myself to the women in magazines. And sometimes my mom and my aunt would complain about their bodies, too, which influenced the way I viewed myself," Jasmin reflected.



Growing up in a Dominican household, Jasmin's culinary heritage played a significant role in her dietary habits. Traditional dishes, such as white rice and beans with chicken, salad, and fried plantains, shaped her early relationship with food. She switched to a vegan diet during college, inspired by her awareness of animal welfare and climate impact. Yet, the strict vegan lifestyle proved unsustainable, leading her to a more balanced approach that includes chicken and seafood nowadays. Her current dietary choices blend ethical considerations, scientific knowledge, and a desire for cultural connection.

"When I was little, my favorite food that my grandma would make was Moro, which is a mixture of rice and beans. And she made meatballs with salad and avocado. Now I don't eat red meat anymore, but I still love eating my rice and beans," Jasmin smiled.

Armed with a nursing degree and a minor in nutrition, Jasmin entered the wellness industry with a focus on holistic well-being and root-cause healing. While she was a nurse, Jasmin also observed systemic issues in women's health, like guilt, shame, lack of self-love, and trauma. Her advocacy for women's health extends beyond individual wellness to structural changes, emphasizing the need for education and community support.

"As humans, we are more likely to do what our peers are doing, so it's important to teach people at a younger age about how to process emotions, eat better, and live with purpose," Jasmin said.

In the end, Jasmin acknowledged the luxury associated with a healthy lifestyle, such as yoga classes and nutritious food. However, she said meditation is one of the easiest and most affordable ways for people to stay grounded and take care of themselves.



Lori Kettelle

Cofounder of PVDonuts, Providence, RI



On a bustling Thursday morning at the recently inaugurated PVDonuts shop on Wickenden Street in Providence, customers lined up eagerly for the “Friday the 13th” special, a chocolate donut filled with a generous heaping of jam, topped with a whimsical knife made out of dough.

I found a table. A few minutes later, Lori Kettelle, the owner, wiped her hands on her apron as she walked out of the kitchen. She greeted me with a warm smile with a hint of exhaustion.

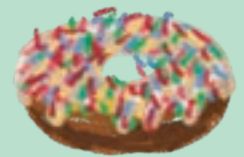
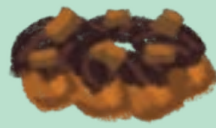
“My day started at 1 am, and I got here at 2 o’clock to set up the kitchen. We open at 8 am, and today we have a ‘Friday the 13th’ special so we have to make an extra 150 donuts. It’s been my routine for seven years,” she said.

We delved into topics ranging from Lori’s childhood indulgences to her experiences as a pastry chef.

“Growing up, my dad would always buy those Entemann’s coffee cakes, and I think that coffee cake is my guilty pleasure to this day,” she said. “We own another bakery called The Oak Bakeshop, and we make coffee cakes there based on that nostalgia. Wherever there’s a small piece on the side, I would just go for it.”

Lori acknowledged the pressure to maintain a certain physique as a female pastry chef. Whether contending with comments suggesting, “It doesn’t look like you eat all that,” or the subconscious pressure to stay in shape, the challenge with body image persists over the years.

“When we first opened, we sold out quickly. It might sound ridiculous, but my initial concern was not wanting people to think I ate all the donuts,” Lori said.



Lori agreed that it's more expensive to live a healthy lifestyle. Since PVDonuts started, Lori followed a healthier lifestyle to feel her best; she joined a gym and ate more quality protein instead of high-sugar cereals. For her, health is a long-term process.

As the owner of a popular donut shop, Lori said she still tries to strike the balance between productivity and rest.

"On my days off, there would be times I feel like I should be doing something or working. I will work extra long hours before the vacation to make up for it. It's an ingrained idea that you must keep going," she said.

At the end of our conversation, Lori emphasized that she wants to make PVDonuts a space where customers feel comfortable to treat themselves for any reason.

"A treat is a treat; you deserve it," she said. "There's like a stigma behind it that you should feel guilty for eating a donut. I don't want anyone who comes into the shop to feel like they'll be judged or shamed in any way."



DONUTS

TREAT YOURSELF

Glazed	\$0.45	Frosted	\$1.95
Filled		Custard	\$2.50
Old Fashioned		Fruiters	\$1.95
Donut Bites		Twists	\$1.95
Cake		Cinnamon Buns	\$1.95
Vanilla		Sticks	\$1.95
		Specials	\$2.00

DRINKS

TREAT YOURSELF

Drip	\$1.00	Hot Tea	\$1.00
Cold Brew	\$1.50	Hot Tea	\$1.00
Blended Cold Brew	\$2.00	Special	\$2.00
Hot Tea	\$1.25		
Iced Tea	\$1.25		

Acknowledgments

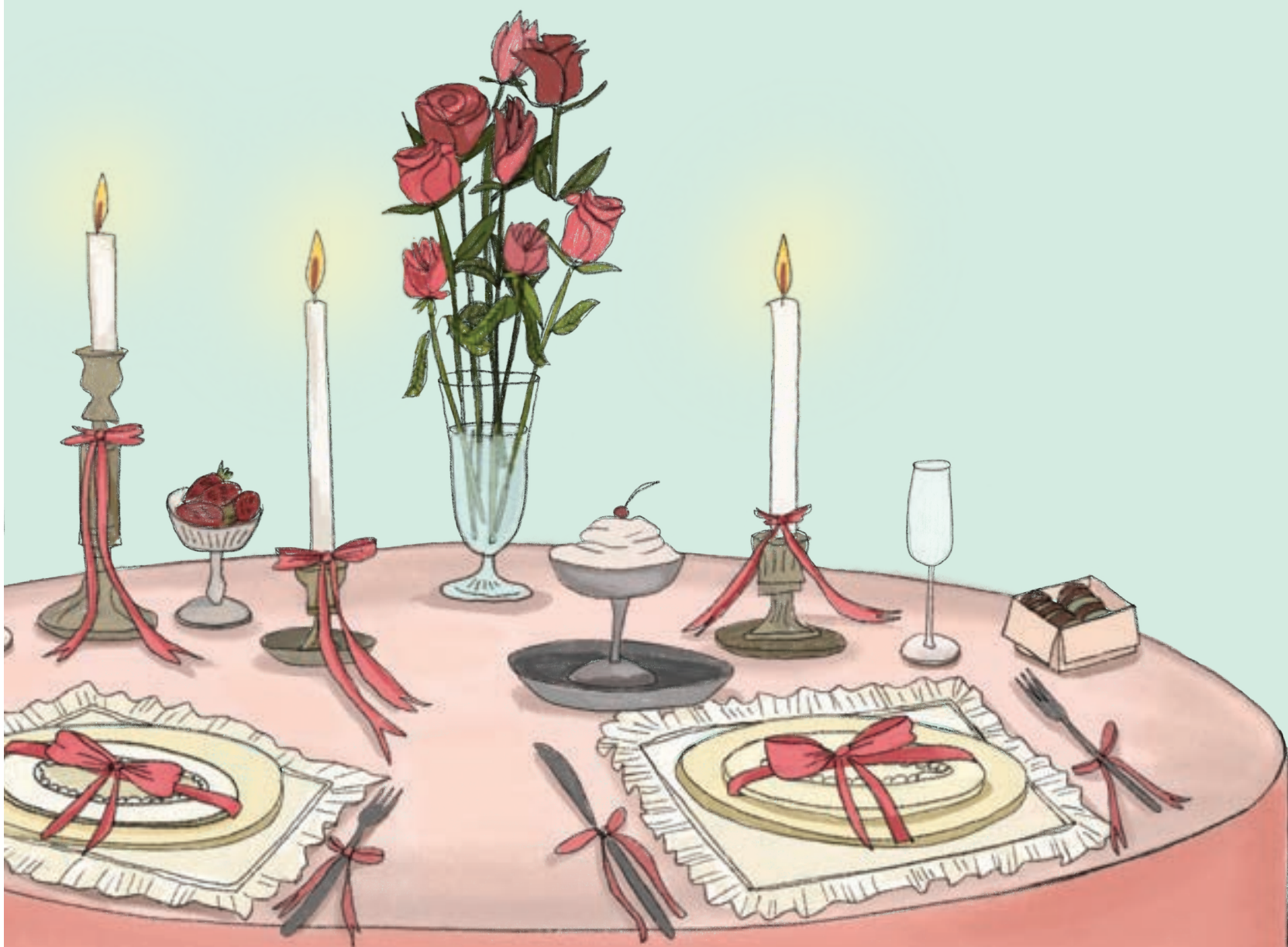
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Endnotes

- 1 Quoted in Higgs, Micaela Marini. "Guilty' Pleasures? No Such Thing." *The New York Times*, 2 July 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/07/01/smarter-living/guilty-pleasures-no-such-thing.html.
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