

Topic of Interest: Commensality

In my podcast for El Paso Food Voices, I hope to explore the communal aspects of food—how eating is a social activity that brings people together, transforming the mundane into a communal, fulfilling, and reflective experience. I seek to answer the question of how food teaches us intrapersonal values, thus transcending people’s differences and facilitating a deeper understanding of personal relationships. I am interested in discussing not only how food-making and communal eating impacts relationships, but how relationships influence cooking and shape shared eating experiences. In order to focus on the social aspects of eating, I hope to explore how hospitality and generosity are central to communal eating.

In interviewing my chosen candidate for the El Paso Food Voices podcast, I hope to bridge their personal experience of feeding others to the power that food has to unite people. Thus, my focus will not merely be on food, but on how hospitality and the act of eating with others is an integral part of humanity. The humanities will be integral for researching my chosen topic in that I will explore how the act of eating together has long been foundational and beneficial for human connections. By considering how hospitality and communal eating has been present throughout history, I hope to convey that food sheds light on the human experience through fellowship and conviviality. I believe that my topic will contribute to postcolonial digital humanities by emphasizing the unifying power of communal eating—food has the power to bring diverse individuals together.

My podcast will represent El Paso by featuring someone from the city’s Polish community, a cultural community that may not be widely associated with El Paso. My chosen candidates for the podcast, Jarek Aniszewski, collaborates with his wife, Nancy, to host friends

for dinner twice a week. The Aniszewskis never ask their guests to contribute to the meal, and once someone is invited, they will never need an invitation again; they can just show up for dinner on the days that the Aniszewskis cook for others. By sharing food with a continually growing personal community, the Aniszewskis share their lives and facilitate human connections. Their continually growing guest list is diverse, thus demonstrating how their hospitality connects people of different cultures, ages, classes, and genders.

Through my podcast, I will seek to answer the question of how feeding people specifically communicates care for others. What lessons does cooking teach us about connecting to people and facilitating community? In exploring the reciprocal relationship between food and human connection, I hope to discuss how a person's cooking can educate others on their cultural identity. How has El Paso shaped the way Jarek cooks and hosts others? What has his culture taught him about hospitality? By focusing on the social aspects of eating, I will seek to convey the power that food has to build relationships and communicate belonging. By framing Jarek's story within my research on communal eating, I will focus on how food is at the heart of building personal communities—this sharing of food can facilitate conversations between diverse people, thus strengthening the interpersonal (and intrapersonal) aspects of the human experience.