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To cite this article: Tisha Dejmanee (19 Aug 2024): Fantasies of food work and digital entrepreneurialism: postfeminist time panic on food blogs, *Feminist Media Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/14680777.2024.2392109](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2024.2392109)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2024.2392109>



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Published online: 19 Aug 2024.



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Fantasies of food work and digital entrepreneurialism: postfeminist time panic on food blogs

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ABSTRACT

In the postfeminist context, discourses of time panic and time scarcity are used to generate a culture of anxiety that justifies gender traditionalism. Food blogs offer unique insights into the ways that these postfeminist discourses of temporality and labour are negotiated in the daily, lived experiences of individual women. I draw on a sample of 19 Saveur Award-nominated food blogs to explore how they respond to concepts of time panic and time scarcity through discussions and depictions of women's work, retreatism, and postfeminist subjectivity. I perform a thematic analysis in conjunction with an architectural analysis of food blogs' database narratives to discuss how postfeminist time scarcity—and its attendant anxieties—are rejected through fantasised depictions of domesticity as a creative pursuit and digital entrepreneurialism as an empowering endeavour. While the reading of such fantasised representations is ultimately ambivalent, particularly given the diversity of ways an audience may respond to these positionalities, I find that food blogs tend to reinforce the focus on the individual's resilience, resourcefulness, and responsibility to make correct choices and resolve postfeminist contradictions, particularly through the affective management of food work.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 July 2023
Revised 22 July 2024
Accepted 9 August 2024

KEYWORDS

Postfeminism; food blogs; temporality; digital labour; database narrative

Cultural narratives around gender, labour and “women's time” have long been intertwined and politically inflected, with the postfeminist context giving rise to dominant discourses of time panic and time scarcity that are used to generate a culture of anxiety for postfeminist subjects (Stephanie Genz 2010; Elizabeth Nathanson 2013). This study focuses on food blogs as cultural artefacts that further these understandings of postfeminist temporality and labour and build on histories of how gendered ideologies are embedded within food media.

Food blogs can be understood as romanticizing gender traditionalism through their glamorous portrayals of food work and domestic life as aspirational, pleasurable, and innately feminine pursuits. They are highly skewed towards female bloggers and readers (Emily Matchar 2013) and several scholars have interpreted the performance of food blogging as an enactment of postfeminist ideologies and femininities (Tisha Dejmanee

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2016; Alane L Presswood 2020; Alexandra Rodney, Sarah Cappeliez, Merin Oleschuk and Josee Johnston 2017; Paula M Salvio 2012). Rodney et al. (2017) note the ways that food blogs engage in the romanticization of women's food work, while Salvio notes that they perpetuate gendered traditionalism by linking cooking with "erotic love, popularity, happy families, and social harmony" (2012, 33). In addition to these performances of stylized femininity and gender traditionalism, food blogs offer insights into how post-feminist discourses, and their attendant contradictions, are negotiated in the everyday, lived experiences of individual subjects.

I draw on a sample of 19 Saveur Award-nominated food blogs to examine how food blogs engage and reject postfeminist discourses of time panic through the presentation of two overlapping fantasies: the first, where embracing the creative potential of food work leads to temporal abundance and the second, where digital technologies produce the conditions for postfeminist subjects to successfully enact work-life balance. I perform a thematic analysis in conjunction with an analysis of food blogs' "database narrative" to explore how discourses of postfeminist time scarcity are engaged within food bloggers' performances of everyday domestic life. Simultaneously analysing the form and content of food blogs offers a way to read food blogs beyond the stylized rhetorics of traditional femininity that are central to the logics of the genre. The database narrative demonstrates the multiple temporalities engaged within food blogging, while also speaking to the professionalization and commercialization of food blog content.

This analysis reveals that while food blogs regularly forward fantasised depictions of gendered traditionalism, these representations of postfeminist domesticity are equally reliant on the fantasy that digital entrepreneurialism is a viable way to reconcile the oppositional demands of postfeminist careerism and intensive mothering in a precarious labour market. While the reading of such fantasised representations is ultimately ambivalent, particularly given the diversity of ways an audience may respond to these positionalities, food blogs tend to reinforce the focus on the individual's resilience, resourcefulness, and responsibility to make correct choices and resolve postfeminist contradictions. It becomes apparent that the rejection of postfeminist temporal anxiety is accomplished primarily through the affective management of food work and how this labour is re-interpreted as creative and personally fulfilling, while the pioneering spirit that is attributed to women's digital entrepreneurialism suggests a novel way for women to "have it all" but in reality can be realised only by systematically obfuscating and downplaying the multiple labours involved in this precarious work.

Postfeminist time panic and time scarcity

Postfeminism—a media sensibility and antifeminist ideology popularized in media and commercial culture from the 1990s to the early 2000s—presents select tenets of liberal feminism as having been "achieved" and, subsequently, suggests that feminism as a politics and social movement is now redundant (Rosalind Gill 2007; Angela McRobbie 2009; Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra 2007). Postfeminist discourse operates insidiously, sowing doubts about the desirability and attainability of "feminist" goals such as joining the workforce while suggesting that traditionally "feminine" goals and characteristics can be empowering. This discursive gaslighting, which is amplified through commercial mainstream media, yields contradictions and anxieties that seem

to be best resolved by postfeminist subjects' willingness to embrace traditional gender roles and to assert that their "choice" to embrace traditionalism renders it empowering and thus feminist. This dynamic is illustrated through an examination of temporality—which Nathanson argues is "one of the most crucial dimensions in the representation of postfeminist femininity" (2013, 4)—specifically the ways that postfeminist "time scarcity" and "time panic" are deployed as disciplinary mechanisms that encourage women's willing return to the home and the work of domestic and reproductive labour.

A foundational way in which time panic disciplines postfeminist subjects is in the portrayal of "female life milestones" as a compulsory trajectory for the postfeminist subject. Diane Negra (2009) describes how female life milestones are increasingly celebrated and made hypervisible in postfeminist media through lavish rituals, such as the Sweet 16, engagement parties, weddings, and baby showers. Similarly, Dayna Chatman (2015) draws on public media coverage of Beyoncé's first pregnancy to point out postfeminism's emphasis—specifically interpellating Black women, in this case—on making the "right" choices and progressing through female life milestones in the "correct" order. The effect of these ritualized celebrations is an imagined postfeminist subjectivity that is manufactured through a production line of obligatory, correctly sequenced lifestyle choices revolving around marriage, motherhood, and gender traditionalism. Urgency is further applied to these life milestones through the cultural contempt of ageing women and the looming threat of women's biological clock, which warn that failure to progress through the female life milestones in a satisfactory manner will result in "temporally unmapped" subjects (Negra 2009) who lack "a harmonious inner wholeness or balance" (Genz 2010, 98).

A climate of time scarcity also emerges from postfeminism's concurrent focus on careerism and intensive mothering as important yet incompatible routes to empowerment for the postfeminist subject. Careerism—which is represented in postfeminist media by an abundance of privileged and well-educated women who have achieved power, status, and financial independence through their professions—results in the glamourised overrepresentation of women as doctors, lawyers, and magazine editors in media, belying the statistical reality that the majority of women continue to work in poorly paid jobs in the service sector (Susan J Douglas 2010). Nevertheless, the myth of careerism continues to have great cultural resonance and Anita Harris has found that "unlike previous generations of women, young women today expect a life of paid work in the form of a career that is personally fulfilling" (Anita Harris 2004, 41).

Concurrent to postfeminist careerism is a fetishization of the innate virtues of motherhood as the sole route to fulfilment for women, which Susan J Douglas and Meredith W Michaels (2004) have dubbed the "mommy myth" and Sharon Hays terms "intensive mothering" whereby "good" motherhood involves subscribing to the notion that "children are innocent and priceless ... their rearing should be carried out primarily by individual mothers and ... should be centred on children's needs, with methods that are informed by experts, labor-intensive, and costly" (Sharon Hays 1996, 21). The mommy myth and intensive mothering compel and celebrate motherhood for postfeminist subjects while simultaneously demanding inordinate investments in time, money, and emotional resources by individual women in order to be performed correctly. The result is that opting out of paid public sphere work—a "choice" that is only viable for privileged

women—is often presented as a prerequisite for intensive mothering and is justified due to the significance and professionalism ascribed to postfeminist motherhood.

Time scarcity thus generates a pervasive climate of anxiety and the notion that in the face of competing and contradictory demands, postfeminist subjects can choose to opt out of paid work to liberate themselves from time panic. The ways in which motherhood is reified as natural and essential for realising full womanhood through the mommy myth means that women's escape from time panic almost always skews towards gender traditionalism—rather than the rejection of marriage and motherhood—with the notion that this traditionalism is the postfeminist subject's "choice" suggesting that it can be interpreted as a form of empowerment. That is, as with all postfeminist contradictions, subjects are encouraged to individually manage and resolve the opposing demands of gendered discourse—and to seek self-empowerment through their "choices" – rather than to collectively challenge the gender-based structural inequalities inherent to these postfeminist conditions.

These tenets of postfeminist work-life balance and time scarcity have acquired further force since the COVID-19 global pandemic. Historically, in the wake of social crises and traumas, such as 9/11 and the pandemic, tendencies towards retreatism and domestic femininity have intensified (Katie Gentile 2011; Negra 2009; Rocio Palomeque Recio 2022). As Recio writes, during the lockdowns wrought by covid-19, "the home acquired a heightened meaning of 'safe haven' both factually -shielded against contagion—and symbolically—protecting the viability of the social body" (2022, 668), facilitating media representations of "an intensification of postfeminist motherhood and domesticity" (2022, 658). Additionally, the pandemic's imperative for white collar professionals to work from home created conditions for "work-life balance to emerge as a fallacious ideal" (Jessica Maddox and Brian Creech 2022, 175) and "exacerbated traditionally gendered divisions of domestic labor in heteronormative marriages" (Kim Allen and Kirsty Finn 2023, 185). While food blogs predate the pandemic, and have long engaged in fantasies of domestic pleasure, particularly through refashioning domestic temporalities (Dejmanee 2016) this analysis explores post-covid expressions of food blogs that appear to even more resolutely rebadge the precarity and often undercompensated nature of digital entrepreneurialism as "'savvy,' 'can-do' and 'glamorous' entrepreneurial labour" (Allen and Finn 2023, 14).

Food blogs and the romanticization of digital entrepreneurialism

Food blogs are digital media texts that combine recipes and food photography with personal narratives and reflections (Tisha Dejmanee 2023), rising in popularity as a digital genre in 2010–2011 and comprising the largest sub-category within the popular lifestyle blogosphere. As food bloggers portray the apparently innate and enduring fulfillment derived from devoting their personal energies to domesticity, they romanticize a "new style of home-focused, sustainability-minded living [that] seems to offer an answer to the opt-out question for creative, educated women" (Matchar 2013, 161). That is, food blogs reinforce the postfeminist myth of "retreatism" where postfeminist subjects attain self-realisation through "romance, de-aging, a makeover, by giving up paid work, or by 'coming home'" (Negra 2009, 5).

Food bloggers counter historical feminist arguments that housework is empty and monotonous (e.g., Simone De Beauvoir 1949) through assertions that cooking is a transformative, creative passion. Additionally, food bloggers distinguish cooking from menial, obligatory labour in service to the nuclear family by emphasising its personally empowering and pleasurable qualities. In this fantasy, postfeminist subjects who devote themselves fully and willingly to the self-actualising potential of domesticity and food work—which is rhetorically and symbolically distinguished from labour—are rewarded with an apparent *abundance* of time as they both escape the time bind presented by postfeminist work-life crisis and reinterpret reproductive labour as “not-work” but, rather, a creative passion.

However, this fantasy of domestic pleasure is also dependent upon the current cultural fetishization of passionate work and digital entrepreneurialism. Digital technologies have been celebrated for heralding new possibilities for flexible working conditions and entrepreneurialism (Gina Neff, Elizabeth Wissinger and Sharon Zukin 2005). There has been a tendency to interpret the ambivalent possibilities of digital labour—and its characteristic collapse between private and public, labour and leisure (Tiziana Terranova 2012)—in an unequivocally positive way. This is especially true for girls and young women who are hailed as entrepreneurial subjects (Sarah Banet-Weiser 2012; Amy; Amy S Dobson 2015). The cultural fantasy that digital technologies can bridge the postfeminist work-life time crisis by cultivating individual women’s “passions” emerges through the figure of the mompreneur, the colloquial term that combines the identity of mom and entrepreneur. As Gillian Anderson and Joseph Moore write, mompreneurialism promotes “seductive stories of women who reconcile the ‘new reality’ of neoliberal economies with their mothering largely through the pursuit of self-employment and entrepreneurial work” (Gillian Anderson and Joseph G Moore 2014, 95), presenting these autonomous working conditions as a hip and effortless way to “have it all.”

However, alluring discourses of mompreneurialism fail to address the fact that the majority of women labour under increasingly precarious and tedious working conditions. Julie Wilson and Emily Yochim offer the alternative term “mamapreneurialism” to highlight the precarity and ongoing labour of mompreneurs, and to critique the ways that time-shifting capacities of digital tools often render digital entrepreneurial labour an obligatory “fourth shift” for mothers (Julie A Wilson and Emily C Yochim 2017). Specific to female lifestyle bloggers, Brooke Duffy uses the term “aspirational labour” to describe the “(mostly) uncompensated, independent work that is propelled by the much-venerated ideal of getting paid to do what you love” (2017, 6).

Food blogs engage both the notion of women’s domestic labour as postfeminist choice, as well as the romanticisation of digital entrepreneurial labour as a viable way for postfeminist subjects to manage the fundamental incompatibilities of “work-life” demands in an era of time scarcity. Despite their engagement with these dominant cultural fantasies, food blogs should not be simply dismissed as amplifying mainstream, popular culture postfeminist fantasies. Rather, the value of food blogs lies in the ways they “document the ambivalence with which postfeminist discourse is at once invoked and challenged through lived, mundane experiences and how these contradictory discourses are enfolded in everyday life” (Dejmanee 2023, 8). This potential is heightened by the genre’s tendency to resonate generationally and

culturally with a demographic that came of age during the height of postfeminist popular culture, and who were in their 20s and 30s during the “heyday” of food blogging around 2010–2011. As a result, while individual food blogs are undeniably the site of privileged and stylized representations of postfeminist femininity, the food blogosphere nevertheless creates a valuable, networked site for women to simultaneously engage, reproduce, and challenge postfeminist discourses in everyday life (Dejmanee 2023). These nuanced reflections on postfeminist discourse as lived experience become apparent in the current study of fantasies of temporal abundance are generated in food bloggers’ depictions of domestic food work and digital entrepreneurialism.

Methods

This project draws on a sample of *Saveur* Blog Award finalists in the category of “Most Inspired Weeknight Dinners” from the years 2016–2019. The *Saveur* Blog Awards are selected by a committee from *Saveur* magazine, an elite tastemaker within mediated food culture. The Blog Awards are considered prestigious within the blogosphere (Dejmanee 2023) although they do not necessarily confer any direct financial benefits to bloggers. Thus, while blog finalists may not necessarily be representative of food bloggers as a whole, within the hierarchical visibility of the food blogosphere they can be understood as influential in setting and reproducing the conventions of the genre. It is also worth noting that deriving a sample from *Saveur* focusses on the temporalities and sensibilities of the new middle class “that enjoys culinary taste but does so on a budget” (Elizabeth Nathanson 2009, 323), and this replicates the food blogosphere’s focus on aspirational, middle-class lifestyle and their attendant discourses (Dejmanee 2023). The award category, “Most Inspired Weeknight Dinners,” was chosen to yield a purposive sample of food blogs most aligned with postfeminist time scarcity and balancing paid public sphere and reproductive labours. For instance, one description of this category reads: “After a long day of work, it’s not always easy to face your kitchen and whip up dinner. But these 6 bloggers are giving us the inspiration and motivation we need to get excited about cooking every night” (Saveur 2018).

After removing duplicate blogs, blogs that had been deleted, one blog authored by a male blogger, and one blog embroiled in a racist controversy (to which I did not wish to contribute hits in the course of research) there were 18 food blogs in the sample. Demographically, three blogs were authored by heterosexual couples, one by a pair of female friends, and the remaining 13 by individual women. The blogs authored by heterosexual couples were retained in the sample as they maintained a distinct delineation of labour where narratives were told from the female partner’s perspective, while male partners assisted with website maintenance and photography. Bloggers who disclosed their racial or ethnic heritage described themselves as Iranian (Mahroo Amiri 2016), Tuscan (Julia Scarpaleggia n.d.), Chinese-Indonesian (Marvellina n.d.), Latin-American (Adrianna Adarme n.d.), Pakistani-American (Izzah Cheema n.d.), Chinese (Maggie Zhu n.d.), Cuban-American (Jamie n.d.) and Mexican-American (Isabel Orozco-Moore n.d.). Even though these racial demographics suggest diversity, it is important to note that the food blogosphere remains understood as hegemonically white and predominantly interpellates heteronormative female subjectivity (Dejmanee 2023).

To explore the representation of gender, time, and labour in this sample, I began with a thematic analysis of the blogs' "About" page, which conveys biographical and professional information about the blogger and foregrounds their self-descriptions of the work and labour involved in food work and food blogging. Applying Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's (2006) 6-stage method of thematic analysis, I performed an inductive analysis of the content (primarily text-based) that was published on the blogs' About pages to generate initial thematic codes from the data. In defining and refining data, I focused particularly on themes that were pertinent to the research space of gender, labour, and time.

However, as a digital genre, it is important to not only focus on the discourse and rhetoric presented on food blogs but to also actively take into account how meaning is constructed through the digital cultures and platform vernacular (Martin Gibbs, James Meese, Michael Arnold and Marcus Carter 2015) of the food blogosphere. This exercise is particularly useful in the context of the food blogosphere, where performances of authenticity and intimacy are integral to the strategic goals of the food blog as a brand and, when read at face value, tend to uncritically perpetuate postfeminist discourses. For this reason, I pair the above thematic analysis with an analysis of digital architecture, specifically, the *database narrative* (Marsha Kinder 2002) and its attendant temporalities that are made visible through the home page design and intersecting menu systems. Kinder theorises *database narrative* as "narratives whose structure exposes or thematizes the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories, and that are crucial to language" (2002, 6)—to explore the ways that the design of the home page and the overlapping menu systems structure site content, and their associated temporalities and visible labour. With the concept of database narrative, Kinder refuses Lev Manovich's (2000) influential but contested notions that database distinguishes new media from older media forms, particularly cinema, and that database and narrative are mutually exclusive. Kinder notes how database narratives were always already present in cinema, pointing out "the distinctive interactive potential of earlier narrative forms" (2002, 6). Narrative is a particularly meaningful way to analyse the content of food blogs, given blogging's close association with both the intimacy of diary entries (Jessalynn Jessalyn Keller 2016) as well as the linear autobiographical format, yet the narrative of food blogs is inevitably shaped by the modular database organisation and storage of blog posts. Given the detailed analysis required to attend to site architecture, this close reading of database narrative was applied to two randomly selected food blogs from the sample – *Isabel Eats* and *In Alexandra's Kitchen*.

This analysis considers the ethical guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (Aline S Franzke, Anja Bechmann, Michael Zimmer, Charles Ess and the Association of Internet Researchers 2020) particularly in regard to the use and reproduction of online content. Food blogs are publicly available texts that, in the current sample, are professionalised brands that constitute the livelihood of their creators. Given that success for professional food bloggers entails having their work widely circulated, and the relatively non-controversial topics examined in this project, I leave content from these food blogs un-paraphrased so that it can be attributed to the blogger, even if an academic audience is likely not the primary imagined audience for their work. This attribution practice is important given the widespread practice of stealing and appropriating original creative content within the food blogosphere.

Thematic analysis of food blogging, domestic and professional labour

Thematic analysis yielded three overarching themes: 1) food work is creative, sensual, and personally pleasurable; 2) food work/food blogging is easy and fun; 3) food work restores innate femininity.

Food work is creative, sensual, and personally pleasurable

Food bloggers liberally use the word “love” in their descriptions of food work and recipes, for instance, in describing a food blog as a “love affair with cardamom & roses, pistachio & saffron rice” (Amiri 2016). Food bloggers also emphasise the pleasures of eating and the “sensuality of food” (Karen Tedesco n.d.), a point underlined by blogger Sylvia who posts a didactic meditation on how spending hours in the kitchen cooking a Sunday slow roast is “nourishing on a soul level” (Sylvia Fontaine n.d.). This framing of food work as a route to personal, creative self-actualisation follows the rhetoric of postfeminist arguments that traditional femininity and gendered labour are empowering because they are undertaken as an individual choice that yields personal pleasures. However, the validity of such arguments also requires bloggers to deny the realities of gendered domestic labour as a “second shift” in which women return from paid labour to complete an additional shift of unpaid domestic labour (Arlie R Hochschild 1989). To distinguish food work from labour, bloggers emphasise their passionate involvement in this creative pastime and the personal pleasures that arise from food and food work.

This notion is further conveyed through the common use of a makeover narrative to describe a major lifestyle shift wherein bloggers reject careerism and recover a sense of personal passion and fulfillment through food blogging. Adriana writes: “I first started this blog when I was working a job that left [sic] to be desired in the creativity department. After a few years of plugging away, I was able to leave and now I do [food blogging] full-time. YAY!” (Adarme n.d.). While Jamie writes that she was “climbing the corporate ladder in the healthcare industry. After a few career detours, I finally decided to take the leap and bring my entrepreneurial dreams to life with A Sassy Spoon in 2016!” (Jamie n.d.). With this theme, food bloggers advance the fantasy of retreatism, drawing a stark contrast between the tedium and joylessness of paid public sphere labour and the innate pleasures of food work. The apparent rewards of this fantasy are narrated through temporality and its seeming abundance when women devote themselves to domesticity and the preparation of hours’ long Sunday roasts. However, in order to support this fantasy, bloggers must also practice emotional management and focus on the pleasures of cooking and eating while denying the possibility that food work continues to be obligatory and tedious gendered labour.

Food work/food blogging is easy and fun

The food blogosphere overwhelmingly draws on the terminology of simple, easy, rustic, and effortless to describe food work, promising to divulge to readers “how easy it is to cook with wholesome ingredients in your kitchen to create delicious dishes” (Zhu n.d.). On the one hand, such rhetoric seems to acknowledge the spectre of time scarcity, assuring

readers that these recipes have value as feasible and economical guidelines for navigating food work in the context of time-poor daily life. On the other hand, the repetitive description of food work as fun and effortless involves countering time scarcity through the systematic denial of the multiple processes involved in food work. This includes planning, shopping, food prep, and cleaning, all of which are obfuscated in the food blogosphere's portrayal of domestic food work.

This denial is also evident in the ways that food blogging is downplayed as spontaneous, whimsical, and innate. For instance, Natalie and Holly write that their blog materialized “on a long evening walk by a quiet creek . . . as 2 friends found themselves with a common desire to share recipes and hospitality ideas” (Holly Erickson and Natalie Mortimer n.d.). The exaggerated romanticism of this setting and the comfortable intimacy of conversation between friends conjures up notions of food blogs as natural and born of everyday simple pleasures, rather than a profession where success entails long hours of work and multiple forms of skilled labour. Similarly, Izzah writes: “I started Tea for Turmeric on a whim while my 6-month-old daughter was napping . . . Since then, with the help of a small team of amazing people, it’s grown to millions of views a year” (Cheema n.d.). This description situates food blogging in the realm of early motherhood, heightening its alignment to “natural” femininity and drawing on the metaphor of an infant’s nap to exaggerate the seeming ease with which pursuing passionate, gendered labour can evolve into a successful blog with “millions of views a year.” These descriptions of food work—and, by extension, food blogging—are presented as natural and effortless in ways that seem to couple this work to an innate, joyful femininity that is recovered when women submit to domestic food work.

Food work restores innate femininity

Food bloggers present food work as vital to re-aligning food bloggers with an innate and virtuous femininity, often presented through highlighting the matrilineal bonds wrought by food work. Numerous bloggers recount fond memories of learning how to cook and spending time in the kitchen with female relatives, a theme that seems particularly prevalent for bloggers who explicitly invoke their cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. For instance, Persian blogger Mahroo writes: “I discovered my passion for cooking at a very young age thanks to my grandma, Ashi Joon, my foodie mom & my pastry chef aunt” (Amiri 2016), while Jamie writes: “growing up, I loved watching Mami make Cuban food from scratch for the whole family using her favorite measurement of choice—un poquito (translation: a little bit)” (Jamie n.d.). Such references reinvigorate food work as the practice of commemorating and reviving family traditions and cultural heritage. Food blogs’ focus on “natural” seasonal foods, in addition to the nostalgic and emotionally charged bonds forged with mothers, grandmothers, and aunts in the kitchen reify notions that food work is innate and integral to femininity. The focus on matrilineage further suggests that cooking is passed down as though it was a biological characteristic rather than a learned skill. This theme of food work as feminised labour that maintains intangible bonds is also expanded to reference friendships, community, and even environmental stewardship and global citizenship. This is demonstrated by blogger Maggie who writes: “Learning and sharing Chinese food became a way to connect me with my roots and the rest of the world” (Zhu n.d.). This theme can be linked to the food blogosphere’s support

of a retreatist fantasy in which women's return to the home—and specifically the kitchen—restores a sense of balance and wholeness. In turn, this presentation of food work foregrounds the intangible and invaluable: childhood memories, honouring the memories of beloved female ancestors, and recovering one's sense of ethnic identity.

Together, these three themes overlap to reinforce postfeminist fantasies of retreatism, framing food work as pleasurable and personally enriching—especially in contrast to paid public sphere labour—and restoring balance through realigning time-poor subjects with sacred connections and innate feminine virtues. In this fantasy, balance is reflected through the temporal abundance that subjects seemingly acquire through returning home: as they embrace the value of food work as traditional feminine labour, they find calm and balance in the long hours they spend in the kitchen or, inversely, find that food work becomes effortless and fun. This fantasy is also extended through the presentation of food blogging as a spontaneous and passion-driven activity (again, carefully distinguished from the drudgeries of “work”) that appears to effortlessly transform into a successful digital brand. However, it is clear that the reliance on the language of “passionate work” – where affective and passionate investments in work are pursued as personally transformative endeavours—often works to charge individuals with responsibility for justifying the precarity and the erosion of workplace security and benefits in the neoliberal work force. As Renyi Hong argues, “passion is increasingly mobilized as a shield, a means of attenuating the psychic drain of economic uncertainty and income scarcity” (2022, 5). A similar rhetorical strategy can be seen in the ways that the pleasures of cooking and the joys of domestic work must be narrated in unequivocal and hyperbolic terms by food bloggers. The fantasies of temporal abundance in food work and food blogging that are widely circulated by the blogosphere demonstrate the affective need for a meaningful response to postfeminist time panic and its attendant anxieties. However, it is also apparent that the maintenance of such fantasies is only possible through postfeminist subjects' careful and constant affective management as well as the systematic obfuscation of the extensive amounts of time and labour expended on their food work and food blogging.

Temporality, labour, and database narrative

Database narratives highlight the creative possibilities for recreating women's autobiographical narratives in non-linear ways and reconfiguring domestic routines in non-cyclical ways. In foregrounding the polysemic and non-linear temporalities configured from the database structure, database narratives challenge Zizi Papacharissi's foundational definition of blogs as websites producing “regular or daily posts, arranged in reverse chronological order and archived” (2006, 21), a description that not only emphasised linear chronology and content currency, but drew on these qualities as *the* defining characteristics of the medium. Additionally, database narratives foreground interactivity—and the contribution of the audience to meaning-making—in a manner that equally acknowledges the history of interactivity and exchange in non-digital recipes (Susan J Leonardi 1989). Database narratives become salient through food blogs' home page design and the blogs' overlapping menu systems, as architecture that generates database narrative through specific organisational logics and offers multiple content navigation paths—and possibilities for reading the narrative—to audiences. I apply this analysis to

a close reading of two blogs from the sample: *Isabel Eats*, by Isabel Orozco-Moore which is known for publishing Mexican recipes and desserts, and *Alexandra's Kitchen* by Alexandra Stafford, which is known for no-knead bread recipes.

The contemporary trend across the food blogosphere is for long scrolling on the home page layout, a design which seamlessly takes the reader through sections that intersperse recipes with the food blog's promotional and paratextual content such as the blogger's biographical information, weekly newsletters and e-resources which are key marketing components for food bloggers. Long scrolling favours a non-chronological engagement with food blog posts, offering multiple, simultaneous pathways for navigating the extensive amount of content in the database. There is still a tendency to emphasise currency and relevance of food blog content—for example, at the time of researching these blogs in early December, *Isabel Eats* highlighted seasonal trending posts, such as “16 Mexican Christmas Recipes” (Isabel Orozco-Moore 2022). However, current posts are offered alongside alternative organisational priorities including most popular, best rated, and foundational blog content. These concurrent pathways disrupt a linear chronology, for even though food bloggers often include content that acknowledges female life milestones—with references to weddings, pregnancies, and childbirth—such content is flattened by the database and interspersed with algorithmically-suggested or curated content that may be iterative or randomly intertwine narrative events, disrupting the prescriptive linearity of post-feminist temporality.

The modularity of this content, and the generative possibilities for telling and re-telling narratives, can be transformative in reconciling the cyclical temporalities that have long been simplistically associated with women and understood to govern domestic routines. For instance, the repetitive nature of domestic food work was decried by de Beauvoir and other early feminist theorists as a futile task that “makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present” (1949, 451). However, the seemingly self-evident cyclicity of women's time has been used to associate women with “nature,” often by crudely mapping menstruation with seasons and women's bodies. Moreover, women's “natural” cyclical temporality is often read against the supposedly masculine, linear time of industrial life, thereby supporting binary distinctions between masculine/feminine and their association with the public/private spheres. Nathanson outlines the need to both “critique how the association of femininity with these modes of time is a historical construct, rather than a universal or essential claim” (2013, 12) and, citing Rita Felski, to appreciate that “repetition need not be viewed as a deadening, uncreative rhythm” (in Nathanson 2013, 14) but as seeding the possibilities for innovation and change.

Database narratives provide a framework for re-imagining these possibilities for cyclical time. Food blogs offer nods to cyclicity through scheduling content around the multitude of holidays marked annually in the United States; through weekly or monthly updates; and, through attending closely to seasonal produce and recipes. For example, *Isabel Eats* has regular columns titled “Tuesday Things” or “February: Monthly Wrap Up” while *Alexandra's Kitchen* hosts a category titled “Seasonal Cooking.” However, the archival practices inherent to food blogging offer a tangible rebuke to De Beauvoir's notion that domestic work amounts to “making nothing” as the digitisation of this content provides visibility and value outside of the intimacy of the family dinner table. The digital archive stands as a visual and material representation of how food blog brands grow over

time, post by post and season by season, and the economic profitability of such work. While the food work depicted in the blogosphere is of course stylised, and it is possible to navigate the content in a strictly linear or cyclical way, the design and algorithmic presentation of database content means that the database narrative is most likely to produce accounts of women's domesticity and autobiographies whose temporalities are parallel, recursive, and disjointed. In turn, these encounters challenge connections between women's cyclical time and domesticity, and their assumed diametric opposition to "productive" and masculine linear time.

While database narratives imbue feminist potentialities through their juxtaposition of oppositional temporalities, they also provide possibilities for a productive separation of content that works to highlight the professionalism of food bloggers and their brands. Long scrolling draws attention to the manifold, intersecting menu systems used to categorise recipe posts connected, for instance, by meal type, ingredient, or cooking type. Additionally, intersecting menu systems map different layers of information on a food blog, some of which acknowledge that the blog is a professional endeavour. In contrast to the reverse chronological format, long scrolling is used on both *Isabel Eats* and *Alexandra's Kitchen* to feature information on mainstream press work, cookbook releases, and promotional activities on their home pages. Orozco-Moore removes personal details from her recipe posts—which are quite formulaic and targeted towards providing helpful recipe information including tips and substitutions as well as storing and reheating instructions—and offers a separate menu tab titled "life" which includes content on her wedding day and her first pregnancy. These posts allow Orozco-Moore to present shared intimacies, the important "relational labour" (Nancy K Baym 2015) which builds connections with her audience, as an information stream that runs parallel to her professional food work. Similarly, Stafford describes herself as a mother of four, but rarely features her family or children in more recent recipe posts. Instead, her food blog highlights her professional expertise with content on her experiences at culinary school and in restaurant and catering kitchens, and including a tab publicising her cookbook, with endorsements from celebrity foodie tastemakers including Dorie Greenspan and Jim Lahey (Alexandra Stafford n.d.). The home page also includes a "shop" tab with affiliate links to luxurious home goods, and both *Isabel Eats* and *Alexandra's Kitchen* incorporate banner ads, emphasising the profit-generating potential of food blogs which was far less explicit—and historically viewed as somewhat tacky to incorporate—in earlier iterations of the food blogosphere. These design choices make explicit the professionalism of food blogs in ways that allow food bloggers to openly publicise and recognise their food work as a creative profession and successful endeavour. This marks a change from the way references to professional blogging were previously obscured under the pretence of amateur domesticity, which was the case when food blogging was presented as a collection of reverse chronological, diary-like posts.

It is important to note that the above database narrative analysis is inherently contextual. In addition to being driven by audience interactivity to create meaning, design choices across the food blogosphere are dynamic, shaped by commercial imperatives as well as changing media ecologies. For instance, the widespread use of accompanying social media platforms such as Instagram, which are used to provide more regular, personal updates about the lives of food bloggers, allows such content to be removed from food blogs themselves. With this caveat, I argue that the current long scrolling layout

and menu systems generate database narratives which transform the inevitability of postfeminist time panic. This transformation takes place through complicating the cyclical time that has often been used to essentialise women by coupling them to their bodies and to domestic routine; providing multiple avenues for the rhythms of women's time to be re-negotiated and to view the cyclicity of reproductive labour as a foundation for growth rather than enforced stasis; and by disrupting the assumed linear trajectory of female life milestones. At the same time, it is worth noting that in rebuking essentialist and prescriptive notions of women's time, food blogs intensify fantasies of digital entrepreneurialism and the romanticisation of precarious freelance labour as a way to overcome postfeminist time scarcity.

Conclusion

Food blogs provide insights into the ways that dominant discourses of postfeminist temporality are variously interpreted and engaged within the everyday routines and lived experiences of individual postfeminist subjects. Rhetorically, food bloggers reject the anxieties generated by time scarcity through a fantasy of self-fulfilment through domestic work, although maintaining this fantasy entails strict affective management in the presentation of food work as a meaningful creative passion that is fun and easy. The rewards of traditionally gendered work—and its supposed pathway to innate femininity—are often represented through an abundance of time, which on food blogs is suggested through luxuriating in elaborate food work and presenting an endless array of lavish digital meals. Moreover, the presentation of food blogs as database narratives facilitates alternative fantasies for rejecting time panic, inviting playful and interactive reconstructions of quotidian accounts and linear chronologies in ways that underline the subjectivity of—and alternative possibilities for—women's time.

On the other hand, this analysis reveals the tendency to systematically downplay the labours involved in both food work and food blogging, lending weight to fantasies that digital entrepreneurialism and creative, passionate work are a feasible way to circumvent postfeminist time scarcity. Such portrayals evade the criticisms of passionate work forwarded by numerous scholars that creative digital entrepreneurial labour is often precarious, rarely fails to compensate workers for the time and skill expended on the work, and can be exploitative (Renyi Hong 2022; Brooke E Duffy 2017; Angela McRobbie 2016).

While taking into account the above limitations, it is important to note that the pleasures and meaning derived by audiences from these texts are not necessarily uncritical. While the following notion is better explored through an audience analysis, it is highly plausible that within the aspirational culture of the food blogosphere that such performances are intended to be read as fantasy, and that these fantasies are an important response to the strictures of postfeminist discourse. Food blog audiences are likely able to discern the extensive behind-the-scenes labour and stylised qualities of food blogs. Alternatively, audiences might feasibly draw pleasure from revelling in the fantasy of these constructions (or, inversely, these fantasies might fuel the numerous anti-fan communities around the food blogosphere, which gleefully point out the artifice in such constructions). Food blogs may also equip audiences to manage the anxieties of postfeminist time scarcity, both through providing quick, inspirational and searchable recipe ideas, and through providing an intimate, networked community within which to explore

the hardships of such discourses. However, what remains unchallenged is the postfeminist prerogative that women must individually strive to manage their time *in addition to* their emotions and interpretations of gendered labour in response to unsatisfactory structural working conditions.

Postfeminist food media has long engaged with temporal contradictions, including the simultaneous logics of efficiency and nostalgia for an imagined former era of temporal abundance for domestic work (Nathanson 2009). However, food blogs offer aspirational middle- and upper-class responses to postfeminist time panic that increasingly posit individual responsibility and choice as the key to overcoming limiting postfeminist discourses. This perception of individual choice—and the privileges inherent to being able to make such choices—is exacerbated by the competitive context of digital entrepreneurialism in which the food blogger's lifestyle is commercialised. While food blogs have not originated these postfeminist narratives, they continue to provide affective tenor to and a wide circulation of these fantasies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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