

Culinary Identity

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I had always felt confident with my Mexican-American identity until I became conscious of the conflicting opinions and diet trends regarding Mexican food. The varied ideas of so many led me to reflect on my identity once again. I became aware of just how much food was and is tied to Mexican culture. Having grown up in Boyle Heights near East Los Angeles I thought I knew what Mexican food was. Aside from that, my mom and her family had emigrated from Southeast Mexico, so our traditions included dishes from that region. When I married my husband (who is from a small town near Mexico City), I began to doubt my “culinary identity.” His idea of Mexican food always had something super spicy in it. My mother and grandmother had never cooked with chile! I found myself confused as to how to add jalapeño, serrano and habanero peppers to our meals. If that wasn’t enough, reading about all the ways to prevent disease by altering one’s diet created more conflict. The trendy Mexican vegan Instagram accounts always eliminated fried foods, wheat, meat, and cheese.

I found that the conflicting ideas created an uncertainty about my identity. Then I realized that my background and generational challenges about healthy living were my identity. Sometimes I still find myself feeling a bit embarrassed for not adding manteca to my tamales. For the most part I understand that my “culinary identity” has formed from my family’s traditions, my husband’s traditions, and my own desire to live a healthy life. The photos in this essay show the variety of recipes that I have tried in the midst of this identify conflict. Among the dishes are some trendy vegan dishes, traditional cuisine from Southeast Mexico and culinary delights from the State of Mexico.



Chilaquiles veganos



Chocolate mexicano con leche de almendra



Molletes



Pan de muerto



Pollo pibil y frijoles negros con cebolla morada curtida



Taco de camarón asado con salsa y crema