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Cooking with Couples: A Grounded Theory Study on the Relational Aspects Found in the Cooking Interactions of Couples

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Cooking with Couples: A Grounded Theory Study on the Relational Aspects Found in
the Cooking Interactions of Couples

by

Nicole R. Gordon

A Dissertation Presented to the
College of Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University

2019

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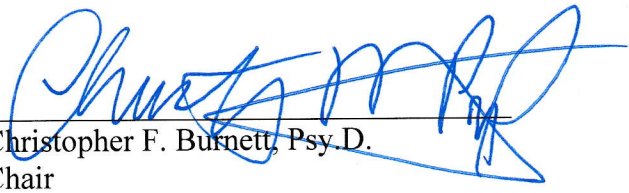
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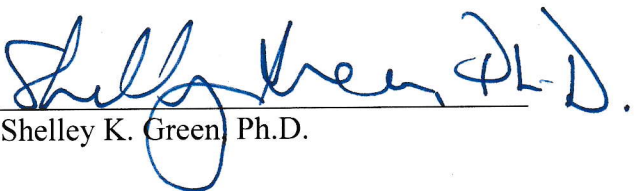
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This dissertation was submitted by Nicole R. Gordon under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Philosophy in the Department of Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University.

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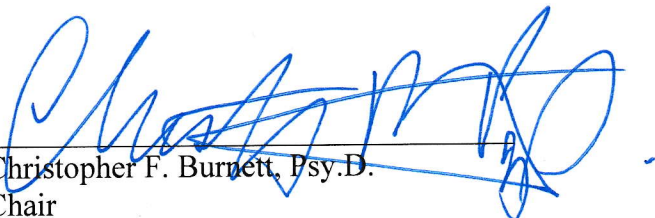
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Abstract

Cooking is a universal activity which all humans can relate to on some level. Historically, cooking has continued to connect people across cultures and time, simultaneously providing nutritive sustenance as well as socio- and psychological benefits. Medical and mental health practitioners only in recent years have utilized cooking in a therapeutic process, and most of those cooking activities available tend to focus on cooking from an occupational and nutrition-education stance. A gap in the literature pertaining to cooking and its therapeutic applications exists around the relational nature underlying the cooking process, especially as it pertains to couples. While marriage and family therapists have used a number of creative experiential modalities in therapy for years, such as art and music therapy, cooking has been especially underutilized in comparison, despite its therapeutic and relational applicability. Therefore, this study was conducted to offer a foundation for understanding how the interactions in a kitchen can highlight relational elements between people.

Eight couples (16 participants) who have lived together for at least two years and who cook together often were interviewed in their homes. A constructivist grounded theory methodology was used for this study, and subsequent to data analysis, a three-part theory describing the relational components of couple's cooking interactions emerged, called The Couple's Cooking Triad. The theory is made up of Relationship Skills, Emotional Connections, and Language. Results from this study, which organize the complex interactions of couples in a kitchen, indicate further use by marriage and family therapists in an experiential therapeutic capacity.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

My Experience with Cooking

Food is part of life. Whether you live to eat or eat to live, food consumption is usually a part of your daily life. What that means is just like breathing, walking, talking, and sleeping, all humans can relate to eating on some level or another. In fact, humans are not alone; all animals need food to survive (Wrangham, 2009, p.9). For this very reason, humans and animals all over the planet know what it is like to relate to food, both physically and emotionally. One could say that food plays a major role in all our lives. Over time, this has become evident among humans by the increasing interest in and complexity around food-related activities such as hunting, farming, dining, and cooking.

In particular, cooking has taken shape as the cornerstone of many people's hobbies and careers around the globe. I am one of those people who lives in the world where cooking is a significant part of life. My passion for cooking started years ago when I was old enough to mix things in a bowl while standing on a chair pushed up to the counter. My grandmother spent much time teaching me how to measure, mix, fold, scoop, pour, and taste ingredients in the kitchen to make delicious dishes. As I grew older, I graduated from baking cookies and rolling matzo balls to eventually emulsifying dressings and chiffonading basil.

I realized early on that there were other people with a similar appetite for learning about cooking, and just like many people do when they are passionate about something, I talked about cooking with anyone I could. I was able to relate to people on this level; I felt more comfortable talking about cooking, especially when things felt awkward or unrelatable. I became interested in recent years in what this connection to cooking was

about which so many people like myself felt, and I began observing every interaction I could in the cooking world.

I made my own judgments and hypotheses about people who were competing on The Food Network shows, I would find my way into kitchens during events to watch in awe as caterers organize their delicacies, and I always reflected on my own experiences and interactions with my family during holiday meals. What I discovered was that there were always certain dynamics or patterns that emerged between people during cooking interactions. As I was studying family systems models at Nova Southeastern University (NSU) in the Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) Master's program, I began to see the world differently than I ever had before, including the relationships with people in my own system and others around me. This new perspective also shaped my perception of those interactions in the cooking world that I was constantly trying to make sense of. As anticipated, I started to see the MFT in the cooking.

Cooking and MFT

BTI Case Study

The development of my new systemic world view over the years in the Master's program, and eventually throughout the Ph.D., has been reinforced with every case I have seen and conflict I have run into, especially when I saw clients at the Brief Therapy Institute (BTI) at Nova Southeastern University. The evolution of how I viewed my relationship with my husband and interpreted our behaviors made me even more curious about the ways in which couples interact with each other, especially on a daily basis. During my first internal practicum in the PhD at BTI, my team was assigned a case of a couple where each was from a different cultural background. John and Gloria (names

changed to maintain confidentiality) had presented to therapy after being together for a year because Gloria felt John was “not understanding her” and they were fighting frequently. After several sessions with this case, the team had learned a lot about the couple’s goals and what had worked for them in the past, but the team expressed a general consensus of feeling “stuck” with the clients.

Since I had already spent a significant amount of time researching cooking therapy as a possible dissertation topic over the years, I brought up the idea to the supervisor of our group about asking John and Gloria to participate in an experiential cooking therapy exercise. The group and main therapist on the case agreed, as did the clients, that it would be worth having the clients engage in the exercise the following session. I excitedly put together an activity that I thought would allow the team (the observers) and the clients (the participants) to see elicited patterns of interaction that we could then discuss after the activity. At this point, I was unsure what model approach(es) would be best to use with cooking as a therapeutic activity, so I left any interventions up to the main therapist and looked at this activity as a good opportunity to gather information for the team.

I modeled the cooking activity off my favorite cooking show, *Chopped*, where contestants had to come up with creative dishes based on a few randomly assigned ingredients placed into their food baskets. What I liked about the challenge on this show, and what I thought could be beneficial to therapy, is that the contestants/participants had to go beyond typical, already-planned meals to deciding in-the-moment how to create a dish with ingredients that were not commonly used together. In the case of the clients, the nature of this activity would hopefully foster creativity and encourage the clients to

engage cooperatively in deciding together what to make and how to execute their plan. All behaviors, experiences, interactions, observations, and feedback were open for interpretation and considered valuable information at the time.

At this point, I was unsure exactly what I was looking for in the cooking interactions, but I hoped I would notice something as I was curious about the interactions *in situ*. The day of the session with the couple, I went to the grocery store and bought a bunch of ingredients that did not need to be heated or cut and that were not particularly related (as they do on Chopped), and I tried to vary the tastes, consistencies, and ethnic-relativity of the ingredients. For example, some of the ingredients I chose were cream cheese, mixed nuts, La Unica Cuban crackers, M&M's, jalapeños, granola, tomatoes, oranges, and sliced turkey.

I presented the couple with this basket of many random food items and instructed them to “cook something together,” and told them that there were no rules besides that. The group and I observed the couple interact from behind a two-way mirror as they compromised with each other and decided what to make. The team watched in awe as the couple interacted differently than we had seen them yet and was excited to hear about the mini-sandwiches they decided to make for each other with the ingredients. After they spent about 30 minutes making different things with and for each other, the main therapist went into the therapy room with the couple and asked about their observations. The therapist also shared with the clients some of the team's observations, and had the couple reflect on all that was brought up after the cooking activity.

The couple shared in the end that they were glad to “do something different” in the therapy room, and that they were surprised by what they learned about themselves

and each other. For example, John shared that he noticed how brave Gloria was for touching what she referred to as the ‘dead body meat,’ the sliced turkey, because she knew that John liked it even though she was a vegetarian. John reflected that her willingness to do that represented to him that Gloria makes sacrifices in their relationship, and that he sometimes does not notice them all. Gloria told the group that she noticed that she “dug right in” to the basket and the exercise while John sat back and was more hesitant before joining her with the creations, and that this is typical of the timeliness of their reactions to things in the relationship. Gloria also shared that upon reflecting on this, she sees how valuable his pace can be sometimes because he works better when he can observe and think about things before deciding to do them, and that she just works differently. The couple related some of their revelations in this activity to their difference of opinions on when to have a baby and discussed that the insight they gained during processing the activity helped them to understand each other’s perspective more.

Equine-Assisted Therapy

I referred back to this case many times in different assignments and projects in the Ph.D. program, developing my theories about couples and cooking one class at a time. In the winter of 2014, I took an Equine-Assisted Therapy class at NSU, which increased my interest in observing couples interact experientially. During this class, I came to appreciate how experiential therapy can offer a way for clients to participate in the therapeutic process differently from the traditional “talk therapy.” Both equine and cooking therapy utilize experiential components and can be described as “creative activities that focus on involvement and interaction between [people] rather than simply talking and discussing problems” (Thompson, Bender, Windsor, & Flynn, 2009). One

thing was for sure after taking this class; I was going to learn more about people through cooking by having them interact both experientially and conversationally.

Cooking Relationally

Many mental health practitioners have since recognized more and more advantages cooking has on people's psychological wellbeing, and in turn in the mental health field as a whole. For example, one hospice program partnered with the culinary arts department at a local community college to mix cooking with cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to create a cooking-based bereavement program for individuals grieving the loss of a partner (Nickrand & Brock, 2017). Another study demonstrates the benefits of cooking therapy on Alzheimer's patients, pointing out that it "evokes pleasurable memories, stimulates the senses, and provides clients with physical activity" (Berenbaum, 1994). I was curious then, since cooking can be used in a number of mental health settings with individuals, what sort of benefits cooking might have on clients in a relational context.

I first started working in the field as a counselor, years prior to starting any classes at Nova, and I worked in a day treatment facility for adults with chronic mental illness. I ran a small, interactive cooking class for the clients to participate in at this facility, and upon running the group I found that there were therapeutic benefits beyond what I had imagined. Like many treatment facilities, cooking has been used in occupational and vocational capacities for clients with different types of mental health diagnoses, as cooking has been shown to be beneficial in many ways (Ball & Brown, 2012; Sun & Buys, 2013; Utter, Denny, Lucassen, & Dyson, 2016;). With a limited scope of knowledge about the mental health field, I was able to see how clients could, according

to the billable goals at this facility, increase independent living skills, social skills, and coping skills. What I didn't notice as much yet was what was going on *between* the clients. Some clients in the group had formed alliances with each other, which was strengthened by learning and bonding over cooking a meal together; some clients were particularly anxious about sharing personal information, yet engaged enthusiastically with others and with the activity unlike ways they had in group therapy. Although I may have passively noticed some of the relational interactions between people, I still did not know what I was looking for, so I concerned myself the benefits we already knew could come from cooking in this type of environment.

As marriage and family therapists, we concern ourselves very much with the relational matter *between* individuals. Arguably, talking about our relationships can be difficult, especially while those whom we are in relationships with are in the same room. In this regard, experiential therapy can often ease the tension between clients while in session, as it enables clients to express their thoughts and emotions in a less threatening and more positive way, versus traditional talk therapy (Thompson, 2009). Aside from being an experience-rich activity marriage and family therapists can use in therapy, cooking also offers an abundance of metaphors clients can use when communicating, as well as sets a precedence of cooperation during the session as the clients cook something together. Regardless of the type of relationship, cooking as an experiential activity can yield all sorts of benefits to the therapeutic process.

While I was in my doctoral clinical externship, which came after the case at BTI, I saw a family in their home, and engaged the mother and daughter of this family in an experiential therapy session involving cooking. During this session, the mother and

daughter interacted in a way that was markedly different from their usual high-conflict conversations, and both the clients and I appreciated this difference. Throughout the experience of cooking something together, I asked questions that were relative to their progress and goals, and I noticed that not only was the activity serving as a calming and distracting buffer for the conversation, but it also helped the mother and daughter be able to communicate differently, too. Both clients in this activity were using food and cooking techniques as metaphors to talk about things that happened during the week and how they felt about some things; the clients also took care to talk to each other more carefully and thoughtfully about the problems than they usually do, likely since they were already in a different, more polite-style of communication as they were cooking with each other. This one session stood out to me a lot during my time doing in-home therapy, as I realized just how disparate the session was from previous sessions, yet how much information I was still able to get from the clients and process with them that was pertinent to their progress in therapy. It was interesting to me how cooking was able to facilitate this family therapy session in such a helpful and still very relational way.

Cooking and Couples

Internationally-known chef, Jean Pierre, of the Chef Jean Pierre's Cooking School has recognized a demand for and the rewards of relational cooking activities, holding couples-only cooking classes on certain days, and attests to the quality of the experience that a couple seems to have when they cook something together (personal communication, October 26, 2015). During a conversation with him, Chef Pierre shared with me his observations specifically about the couples cooking class, stating that there seems to be a sense of intimacy and bonding that occurs while learning and eating a

delicious meal together (personal communication, October 26, 2015). Recently, mental health clinicians have taken an interest in couples cooking together therapeutically as well, and some offer couples cooking groups in a variety of settings. From what I had noticed in the field and from trying to learn more from these clinicians, there is an overwhelming consensus about cooking being "therapeutic" because of the same reasons already discussed; it is a sensory activity that fosters closeness and cooperation in which the couple can reap the rewards of their labor together. While it is difficult to argue that cooking is without its benefits both to the couple who cooks together and to the therapeutic process as a whole, I also wondered what we as therapists can learn about the couple while they are cooking.

After taking the aforementioned equine-assisted therapy class, I began looking at couples' interactions while they would be in any sort of experience, such as discovering something new while on vacation together, moving in together for the first time, and anything else that I thought presented a good opportunity to see how couples would react to each other, especially when external stimuli seemed particularly influential. Many opportunities even presented themselves throughout my own relationship with my husband that I observed over the last several years, even though my own interpretations and analyses of our interactions were clearly biased.

One thing that made particular sense to me about couples was the fact that when two individuals get together, they bring to the couple their own set of relationships with two different families of origin. In each set of families, many different patterns are passed down from generation to generation, manifesting sometimes similarly or in unique ways in family members between generations (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). I noticed many

differences in the way other couples and my husband and I reacted to all sorts of issues because of our own family-of-origin patterns (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). I was especially curious about these intergenerational characteristics that manifested within couples, and I wondered if they could be seen through the couples' interactions in the kitchen. Certainly, it was likely that the scope of these intergenerational patterns reached interactions in a kitchen.

In observing my own relationship with my husband, I could see how what we brought to the kitchen as individuals definitely influenced the way we approached cooking together. For example, because my husband and I are from not only two distinct cultures, but also our own families-of-origin, our communication, our values, and our emotional reactions all make for vastly different relationships with food, dining, and cooking. Whenever we would have friends or family over for dinner, as interactional intensities increased in the kitchen, our differences would become more obvious, such as our beliefs about cooking portions, the quality of the food and serving ware, and all sorts of interesting cooking-related quirks of the like. In my family, it is taught and believed that when you feed guests, if there are no leftovers of a certain dish, it means you did not make enough for everyone to take as much as they wanted, which is frowned upon. In my husband's family, they believe in making enough of whatever they have and making it well and then everyone shares however much is available, only consuming your shareable portion, which they considered to be more intimate in some ways. Over the years, these differences in our cultures and what we bring from our families have certainly led

to a few disagreements, and inevitable compromises nonetheless. Interestingly, it was our experiences around food and cooking that allowed for us to see some of these differences.

Study Rationale

Cooking has long been an underutilized activity that can provide many therapeutic benefits to clients in the mental health field, as well as and especially to relational and systemic therapists who look beyond the individual experience of cooking. Other forms of creative experiential cooking have increased in popularity in recent years, such as art therapy, music therapy, psychodrama, and adventure therapy, and many have been shown to be beneficial when used with couples (Botello, 2008; Carson & Casado-Kehoe, 2013; Shirley, 2003). With cooking being a safe way to discuss emotions and thoughts, as well as a bountiful platform for relationship interactions to be displayed, it seems like a natural fit to bring cooking to the world of marriage and family therapy. Furthermore, it would be one experience that may allow a large variety of interactions to show. McLean and McNamara assert that "food preparation activities involve tasks essential to daily living" and because of this, they give us a starting point in looking at "cognitive, affective, and social behaviors" (1987, p. 57). For this reason, I thought marriage and family therapists may be able to use cooking as a platform to help couples identify and discuss interactional patterns that are noticeable in their relationship. I was hopeful that the findings of this study inspire further explorations of the use of cooking as an experiential activity that marriage and family therapists can utilize in therapy. In Chapter 2, I present the literature relevant to cooking as it is used clinically, the relational aspects of cooking, and I discuss possibilities for further implications as

cooking pertains to experiential therapy. In Chapter 3, I describe how I executed the study using a grounded theory methodology.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Cooking

Food and its preparation is one of the most necessary components of our survival (Capaldi, 1996, p. 3; Chamberlain, 2004, p. 468), making cooking a particularly important topic for all human beings in one way or another. There have been drastic changes over time in the evolution of cooking, including how we define cooking, our perceptions and interest in cooking for health and as a hobby, and the roles people play in families regarding cooking. Cooking is defined in many different ways; Bove and Sobal refer to cooking, or foodwork, as "the labor involved in making meals" (2006, p. 70), while others specify cooking to be defined by the application of heat, using ingredients from scratch, or putting a twist on already written recipes (Wolfson, Bleich, Smith, & Frattaroli, 2016, pp. 148-149). Because of the wide scope in definitions of the term, it may be best to leave what constitutes as "cooking" to the cook him or herself. Wolfson et al. conducted a study, in which the participants agreed: "In fact, there was a general consensus in our sample that how one defines cooking is a personal decision and there was not a single standard that could or should be applied to everyone" (2016, p. 152). For the sake of this study, I considered a broad, more open-to-interpretation definition of cooking, leaning towards the side of any form of food preparation.

Logue claims that a lot of an animal's behavior has to do with food consumption (2004, p. 1). As a species, we are not unique in our drive to survive or in our consumption of food, both literally and in time and energy. However, as humans, we are special in that we have adapted to a lifestyle in which our food consumption as a whole involves cooking: "Cooking is one of relatively few odd practices which are peculiarly human—

odd, that is, in the scales of nature, judged by the standards of common approaches to nourishment" (Fernandez-Armesto, 2002, p. 3). It is uncertain whether humans' food consumption behaviors have evolved in response to a cooked diet or if we adopted a cooked diet in response to our biology; many theories, including those of Charles Darwin, Claude Lévi Strauss, and Michael Symons merit both arguments (Wrangham, 2009, pp. 11-14). However, as enough research has posited, we can support for the sake of this study the former position, that "humans do not eat cooked food because we have the right kind of teeth and guts; rather, we have small teeth and short guts as a result of adapting to a cooked diet" (Wrangham, 2009, p. 89). Therefore, it is possible to explore our relationships to food and cooking, while also holding the position that our dependence on cooking as a species for survival contains complex factors intertwined within all of these relationships.

Physiology and Nutrition

On a physical level, one general consensus we all have is that food and cooking provides us with nutrients that are essential to our health. It is interesting, still, that even physiologically, there are myriad ways in which humans approach the nutrients they consume. For example, lactase persistence allows for some adults to be able to digest the carbohydrate lactose after infancy, while other adults experience a different genetically-determined intolerance to it (Ingram & Swallow, 2007, pp. 197-198). Additionally, many people around the world, and definitely in the United States, follow strict vegan and vegetarian diets not just for ethical reasons, but also because of their belief in these diets being healthier for them (Cramer et al., 2017, p. 561). These two examples are just a fraction of the number of ways in which "concerns over health

and nutrition have increased our interest in diet choice" (Capaldi, 1996, p. 3), and yet, it hasn't really come into purview that our physiological responses to these choices are able to change through our learning and experiences with food (p. 5).

Capaldi continues about the influence of our experiences on our consumption and preparation of food, arguing that it can play a role in the way we approach it physiologically (1996, p. 3). One example of this phenomenon which we can all relate to would be our taste preferences. It was originally thought that our relationship to food was fundamentally homeostatic, that we simply reacted to our bodies' physical responses of hunger and satiety (pp.3-4), but scientists have since then recognized that our interactions with food and cooking are much more complex than this (p.4). Logue points out some of these complexities:

For example, I'm sure that you've noticed that a lot of people consume so much of certain foods and drinks that bad things happen-- such as weight gain from eating too much chocolate, high cholesterol from eating too many eggs, and liver damage from drinking too much alcohol. Why do people do these things? And, even more intriguing, why do some people over consume these foods and drinks more than other people or only at certain times? Why do women tend to crave chocolate at certain points in the menstrual cycle, for instance? (2004, p.2)

There is something beyond our needs for nourishment and sustenance that influences what we choose to eat. Without even much consideration, we see evidence of this fact demonstrated numerously in societies as children, teens, and adults suffer from different eating disorders. Another example, illustrated by Anthony Worsley, mentions how the ways in which many people categorize and perceive foods (male influence foods, female

influence foods, and partner foods), change the way they eat as they enter cohabitation with people of the opposite gender: In his article, he points out that for the most part, women's diets tended to have a positive effect on the healthiness of men's, and that men's had a negative effect on women's (1988). We humans have a complicated relationship with food, which seems to be affected on many different levels. As social scientists and therapists concerned with relationships, it is important to understand some of the most influential relationships involved.

Our Relationships with Food/Cooking

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, a famous historian, summarizes our complicated relationship with food, stating that food "has a good claim to be considered the world's most important subject. It is what matters most to most people for most of the time. . . Food is a subject of pleasure and peril" (2002, p. xi). Logue proposes that we spend much more time than we even realize thinking about eating and drinking and preparing meals (2004, p.1). Considering food and its preparation is so vital to our survival, and that we usually spend a good amount of time both eating and thinking about eating numerous times each day (Capaldi, 1996, p. 3), it makes sense that food and its preparation get so wrapped up in our other multifaceted relationships to the world.

In Act II, Scene iii of William Shakespeare's comedy, *Twelfth Night*, Sir Tobey Belch asks to Sir Andrew, "Does not our life consist of the four elements?" to which Sir Andrew replies, "Faith, so they say; but I think it rather consists of eating and drinking" (2011). For many people who "live to eat," like Sir Andrew, there is a lot of meaning attached to food and the way we prepare it. Over the years, cooking has found its way into hobbies, religion, professionalism, and many other arenas of life. If you walk into

any supermarket, flip through cable television, or visit a local bookstore, you are bound to find a good number of magazines, tv shows, cookbooks, and other materials on the topic of cooking. Several millions of North Americans consider themselves gourmet cooking hobbyists, collecting bunches of cooking literature and continuously practicing cooking as a leisure (Hartel, 2010, p.848). Cooking shows/programs have dominated a decent percentage of our television viewing options, feeding the Western world more and more episodes as it gains popularity (de Solier, 2005, p. 465).

Logue discusses how "no other fundamental aspect of our behavior as a species except sexuality is so encumbered by ideas as eating; the entanglements of food with religion, with both belief and sociality, are particularly striking" (2004, p. 87). To this day, many people still abide by dietary restrictions, such as kosher or halal, simply because of religious beliefs. Fernandez-Armesto describes about food, "that its production, distribution, preparation and consumption generate rites and magic, as eating becomes ritualized and irrational or suprarational" (2002, p.xiii). We see many traditions, especially around holidays, that surround different interactions with foods, making them meaningfully ritualized. As previously mentioned, there is a large following of people who shape their diets according to vegan and vegetarian restrictions for health reasons, but there are also people (maybe some of the same group) who follow these diets because of a specific belief system, as well, encompassing their morals, values, and attitudes towards eating animals (Capaldi, 1996, p. 256).

Identity and Culture

What we eat and how we prepare our food oftentimes has a large part in shaping our identities; how it defines people and groups has been a long-time interest among

historians (Fernandez-Armesto, 2002, p. xi). A study conducted by Linda Kiaer Minke examined the outcomes that self-catering alone has on the positive identity-forming process for prisoners in a Danish correction facility (2014, p. 228). To this point, Minke discusses the following findings:

Social identity occurs in the complex interaction between a person's membership of certain social groups (self- or group identification) and the categorisation of others. In that way social identity is never unilateral but develops as a product of social process – identification and categorisation. . . . When the prison system offers possibility for membership of the social group "cook" it gives prisoners opportunity to have a positive social identity. (2014, p. 230)

With the popularity of television cooking shows growing, prisoners are able to construct such positive identities during a time where male culinary figures, such as Jamie Oliver, are held in such high esteem, which helps support this preferred identity (p. 230). Some of what helped to shape the development of these positive social identities, aside from the role they played in their "food groups," was the ability to have control over what and how they cooked, respecting personal preferences of health or dietary beliefs (p. 233). This is just one example of how our preferences and values about cooking have an influence on how we identify socially (Logue, 2004, p. 63)

Our cultures have a lot to do with our beliefs and attitudes towards what and how we prepare our meals, as they define what food means to us (Capaldi, 1996, p.248), such as whether we simply "eat to live" or if we "live to eat," if the ability to cook denotes a position of power, or if cooking nourishes our souls. In a way, the way in which we orient ourselves to cooking can say a lot about our cultural identities. Capaldi talks about how

culture attributes to our decisions of how to interact with our meals, pointing out that culture defines for us rules about what dishes we can order during certain meals, what foods can be served together in a meal, and the time or occasion certain foods should be eaten. She continues to explain how food can serve as a social vehicle: "In varying degrees depending on the culture, food serves to establish social linkages through sharing or to maintain social distance through food taboos. (p. 236). When we talk about culture, we could refer to the ethnic, religious, and generational customs that whole groups of people share, and later we will look at how even nuclear families set their own customs that shape how we relate to cooking. Embedded in our cultural orientations are ideas about what is right or wrong to eat, what we welcome and what we avoid. Capaldi illustrates an example of how Americans view the moral status of some foods: when confronted by why they would not drink a cockroach-dipped glass of orange juice, most would say they see it as unhealthy, yet if you ask these same Americans why they still would not drink the orange juice even if the cockroach was dead and sterilized, the explanation changes, but the degree of aversion remains just as high (248). In this example, it is the "cockroachness" of the orange juice that causes Americans to evade its consumption. Yet, in other areas of the world, eating insects is not considered to be unhealthy or as off-putting, as it has been a normal and accepted practice for many years (Hamerman, 2016).

Even cities have distinct meals and traditions that its citizens share which set them apart from others. As cities can be compared to living organisms with their own structure and systems, their own personalities because of who its citizens are and how they interact, it is easy to say that even cities can have their own food culture (Smith, 2014, p. viii). If

someone tells you, for example, that they grew up eating Po'boys, you likely would think they are from New Orleans, a cheesesteak might tell you they are from Philadelphia, and depending on whether they grew up with thin-crust or deep-dish pizza you might be able to tell whether they hail from New York or Chicago. Especially in recent years, we have seen a variety of responses to the emphasis cities and towns place on other food-specific rituals and ideas, such as food-specific festivals, eating organic-labeled foods, or participating in local farmers markets (Szabo, 2012, pp. 48-49).

Cooking and Our Relationships with Each Other

Every person relates to food and cooking differently, and when you look at all these differences in the context of individuals interacting relationally with one another, a whole new layer is added, a whole new dynamic presents itself. From the very beginning of our lives we depend on others in the consumption of food to survive, whether we are nursed from our mothers or not (Capaldi, 1996, p. 235). We are never really uninfluenced in our food consumption; there is always some sort of social element involved when we eat (Bove, Sobal, & Rauschenbach, 2003, p. 37), from harvesting to procurement, to preparation and ingestion (Capaldi, 1996, pp. 235-244). Throughout history, food has been utilized as a means of socially defining groups, for example, as far back as the Paleolithic period, and it is still just as socially employed today (Fernandez-Armesto, p. xiii). Food can also be used to lessen the gap in some social groups, such as in work environments, where simply sharing a meal can increase team performance (Kniffin, Wansink, Devine, & Sobal, 2015).

Interrelatedness of Eating Disorders

One of the most widespread studied phenomena having to do with people's relationships to food and to each other involves eating disorders. There is a lot of research conducted on eating disorders, or disordered eating, including the varying social influences on their prevalence and treatment. Aside from the more obvious social industrial influence of the media (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006) on the pervasiveness of eating disorders, other social, more personal relationships for people with eating disorders are proposed to be a large factor in their development (Moye, 1985). For example, one of the more significant factors that plays a role in the development of anorexia and bulimia is a person's family environment (Gillett, Harper, Larson, Barrett, & Hardman, 2009, p. 160). In one study, researchers determined that along with other biopsychosocial factors, conflicted parent-child relationships may increase the possibility for eating disorders to occur (p. 169). Another study explored the eating behaviors of patients with disordered eating patterns and found that different social situations and social triggers increased or decreased the amount of food the patients ate (Brown et al., 2003).

As powerful as the social relationships in one's life are in contributing to the development of eating disorders, they are equally crucial in aiding in their treatment (Linville, Brown, Sturm, & McDougal, 2012, pp. 220-221). In fact, according to the patients in a study that looked at the perspectives of their social support system while in recovery from an eating disorder, family and friends' reactions played an important role in the recovery (p. 222). Many people whose relationship with food is detrimental to their mental and physical health have found some benefit from seeking social support online,

such as in sharing experiences with others, especially since there may be less shame and a more positive affect in these connections (Eichhorn, 2008; ter Huurne, Postel, de Haan, & DeJong, 2013). The way in which people relate to others definitely seems to have an influence on the way in which they relate to food at an emotional level.

Interrelatedness of Preferences

There is evidence to support the claim that some of our food preferences come from our genes as well as our experience in our mothers' wombs (Capaldi, 1996, p.53), but it seems that our interactions with others, especially our families early on, and the world around us growing up have a lot of influence on our eating behaviors and preferences, too (Ramirez, 2015; Rozin & Millman, 1987; Skinner et al., 1998). It is interesting how these preferences for certain textures, smells, meal times, etc., which are determined much by our families and exposure, and largely by our cultures (Capaldi, 1996) stay with us into adulthood, either unchanged or evolved, affecting the decisions we make about eating. As we already know, our interactions surrounding food are never uninfluenced (Bove et al., 2003, p. 37), it is logical to assume these choices we make about eating inevitably affect how we eat *with* others. In the aforementioned study about self-catering in prison, Minke noted that the prisoners formed "food groups" in which they would cook with and for each other, and it seemed that food preferences had some part in determining membership in these groups (2014, p. 233).

Early in her book, Logue reflects on her limited exposure to and tolerance for many foods, and shares that what saved her "from an unhealthy preoccupation with eating and not eating certain foods" was her relationship with her husband and her career

in experimental psychology (2004, p. x). As her husband had a much more varied repertoire of liking foods, his influence on her relationship with food eventually took hold. Entire families often experience convergences across members, as they make decisions and negotiate about their food choices (Bove et al., 2003, pp. 25-26; Brannen, O'Connell, & Mooney, 2013). Not only do people make decisions about what foods they are willing to tolerate or try based on who they are with, but sometimes they make decisions about who to be with based on similar food habits and preferences (Bove et al., 2003, p. 28).

Cooking Clinically

Given that cooking is a universally observed phenomenon, there have been many studies conducted on the role it plays in people's lives in many varieties of contexts. One such context has to do with how cooking is used clinically, especially as it may pertain to the mental health field. A lot of studies have concluded that cooking as an activity can have positive mental health benefits (Ball & Brown, 2012; Sun & Buys, 2013; Utter et al., 2016). For example, cooking is considered a form of art in which one can express creativity, setting the stage for improving personal agency and showing care for others (McCabe & de Waal Malefyt, 2015). One study discussed the benefits of adolescents cooking frequently, highlighting its association with positive family connections, as well as showing less depressive symptoms (Utter et al., 2016). As one expert in the mental health field notes, "the very process of cooking can nourish your psychological well-being" (Andrews, 2015), increasing mindfulness, encouraging communication and cooperation, and can be used in treating depression and anxiety, as well as a host of other

mental health conditions (Andrews, 2015). Simply put, the act of cooking can bring pleasure and comfort to many people (Gough, 2007, p. 334).

It is no surprise, then, that because of its mental health benefits and relatability to all humans on some level, that cooking is utilized in some clinics and private practices. Some researchers argue that cooking is a good representation of a real-world activity that relies on many necessary cognitive and behavioral processes (Tanguay, Davidson, Nuñez, & Ferland, 2014). We also know that cooking can elicit emotional experiences, especially depending on someone's prior experiences with foods and other subjective (like cultural) influences (Brouwer, Hogervorst, Grootjen, van Erp, & Zandstra, 2017; McLean & Mcnamara, 1987). For these reasons, cooking has been used in numerous clinical settings, some more than others in recent years.

Cooking Clinically with the Elderly

A significant amount of studies regarding cooking in clinical settings in the mental health field show a tendency for cooking to be utilized in occupational and psychoeducational capacities. For example, in the study mentioned earlier where self-catering systems were implemented in a Danish prison, there were undoubtedly social and emotional benefits found, but there was also a focus on the advantages it provided to increasing prisoners' living skills like managing budgets, getting jobs, and being able to cook various meals for themselves (Minke, 2014). Additionally, since cooking is a common life skill, clinicians have implemented cooking programs in schools and treatment facilities to help teach patients ways that they can cook for themselves and others, and about the nutritional and safety considerations involved.

One such population where this has been established more than any others is the elderly, especially those diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and dementia, where cooking has been shown to be rehabilitative for the elderly (Berenbaum, 1994; Fitzsimmons & Buettner, 2003; Manera, et al., 2015). For many elderly, particularly those with cognitive impairments, cooking can be an activity that brings familiarity and comfort (Berenbaum, 1994; Clément, Tonini, Khatir, Schiaratura, & Samson, 2012, p. 538; Fitzsimmons & Buettner, 2003; Fjellstrom et al., 2010; Manera et al., 2015). Cooking is a very sensory activity, as it includes all of our physical senses and relies on sensory memory, such as auditory and olfactory cues, which may be helpful for elderly to help them recall events that are otherwise difficult to remember (Fitzsimmons & Buettner, 2003; Rusted, Marsh, Bledski, & Sheppard, 1997).

According to the research, it seems that aside from the clinical benefits that cooking can provide for assessment and intervention for elderly patients, the interest among elderly runs relatively high in wanting to engage in food preparation-related activities (Fitzsimmons & Buettner, 2003; Fjellström et al., 2010; Manera et al., 2015). Naturally, then, cooking was chosen as the activity used in a "serious game" developed to assess and improve certain cognitive functions of patients with mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease (Manera et al., 2015). In some cases, the effectiveness of cooking as a clinical tool for Alzheimer's and dementia patients was explored in comparison to other relatable activities such as music, and both cooking and music were found to be useful in eliciting positive behaviors (Clément et al., 2012, p. 538; Narme et al., 2014, p. 117). Specifically, both cooking and music were effective in "decreasing the severity of behavioral disorders and caregiver stress" (Narme et al., 2014,

p. 117). The effects on and perceptions of the caregivers of patients with cognitive disorders is something that has also been studied in the context of cooking (Fjellström et al, 2010; Narme et al., 2014, p. 117). Fjellström et al. noted from an exploratory study that the patients' caregivers had difficulty adjusting to new roles in becoming the sole food providers or in ensuring that cooking is planned with nutritive treatment in mind (2010).

It can be difficult for clinicians of elderly patients to implement actual in vivo cooking activities as assessments in clinical settings sometimes because it can be costly and take too much time, as well as not always easy to standardize (Tanguay et al., 2014). However, in 1983, one well-known cooking-related instrument was created, called the Kitchen Task Assessment (KTA), giving several other clinicians the opportunity to utilize it in further cooking-related studies (Baum & Edwards, 1993, p. 431). The KTA is a "functional measure that records the level of cognitive support required by a person with Senile Dementia of the Alzheimer's type (SDAT) to complete a cooking task successfully" (p. 431). The KTA is able to be used in different settings, so it is applicable in a facility or patient's home, and the clinician's observations of the patient's abilities during the KTA are transferable to other common life activities (p. 432). During an assessment using the KTA, clinicians look for cognitive-related performance skills, such as beginning and ending the tasks and following steps in order to make a cooked pudding (p. 432). The clinician's findings after observation are then used to help create treatment plans for the patient, many times including the caregiver, whenever the patient is able to return home (p. 435). In 2010, a group of researchers even used the KTA to develop a

more individually applicable assessment tool of daily activities, a grid that allows for both qualitative and quantitative analysis of Alzheimer's disease patients' performance (Wojtasik, 2010).

Cooking Clinically with Other Populations

The KTA was also adapted to be used for children, adjusting some of the safety and comprehension elements, and also changing the recipe to making play dough so as to make it more child-friendly (Rocke, Hays, Edwards, & Berg, 2008, p. 530). The pediatric version of the KTA, now the CKTA stood for Children's Kitchen Task Assessment (p. 529), and it still studied the performance of planning and carrying out the task to complete a recipe in the kitchen, just with a younger population (p. 534). As mentioned earlier, there have been explorations into how we come to adopt certain tastes and preferences, and what is apparent in the research is that some of the studies need to include the perspective of children in order to get a larger picture (Capaldi, 1996, p. 104; Caraher, Baker & Burns, 2004). Much of the research that is available about children relating to cooking, however, still leans towards the occupational (like the development of the CKTA) and psychoeducational side, usually focusing on healthy eating behaviors.

For instance, in Chicago, a cooking program was implemented in the community with the help of the school system in an effort to improve healthy food choices in students between the third and eighth grade and their families (Jarpe-Ratner, Folkens, Sharma, Daro, & Edens, 2016, p. 698). Students took part in the hands-on cooking classes after school for ten weeks, led by culinary instructors who focused on the recipes, cooking skills, and nutrition, while also attempting to instill enthusiasm for healthy eating in children (p. 698). Results indicated an increase in cooking self-efficacy in the students,

which also impacted the discussion and inclusion of healthier eating habits at home with their families, even after 6 months (p. 702). A similar type of hands-on cooking program with a similar goal was introduced in South Carolina by Clemson University, focusing on preschool-aged children and their families (Condrasky, Graham, & Kamp, 2006, p. 324). As expected, the results of this program also had a positive influence on the family's awareness of healthy cooking and seemed to have encouraged exploration of trying ingredients and techniques they were unfamiliar with (Condrasky et al., 2006, p. 325).

Psychoeducational cooking programs appear to be helpful in communities and facilities where there is concern about the health of the populations, such as those with high obesity rates or diabetes, (Condrasky et al., 2006; Condrasky & Hegler, 2010; Jarpe-Ratner et al., 2016), and research also shows their prevalence and need in settings where people's independent living skills need improvement (Clark, Bezyak, & Testerman, 2015; Duncombe, 2004; Inoue, Iizuka, & Kobayashi, 1994). This is especially the case for people with severe mental illness and intellectual or developmental disabilities (Clark et al., 2015; Wilneff, 2013). Both recent studies conducted by Wilneff (2013) and the one by Clark et al. (2015) make a case for how cooking psychoeducation can improve the physical health and life skills of patients with mental illness and developmental disabilities. One study even demonstrated that the setting of cooking classes for patients with schizophrenia (in their homes or in a clinic) may be irrelevant to their ability to learn and apply their skills (Duncombe, 2004, p. 276), which could hopefully encourage more mental health facilities to incorporate cooking programs into their curriculum.

Clinical Relational Cooking

Cooking Clinically with Relationships in General

For some of the studies examining cooking, which have been discussed to be primarily of an occupational and psychoeducational nature, there were some peripheral benefits of improved family and social relationships discovered. For example, in the two studies where cooking programs were implemented in the community for school-aged children, although the primary focus of the studies was to improve healthy eating habits, they also highlighted that the communication and practice of healthier eating occurred with their families, as well (Condrasky et al., 2006; Jarpe-Ratner et al., 2016). Likewise, Elizabeth Ramirez developed a cooking program that did keep the family unit in mind from the beginning, but this program's objectives targeted the improvement of healthier eating behaviors, too, even if it was in the context of the family (2015). However, limited research is available that explores the relationships of people in the context of cooking as its primary focus, and considering what is available in this regard, there seemed to be a need to conduct more recent, up-to-date studies. This is where one of the first gaps discovered in the literature needed be strengthened.

In 1998, Geoff Ripat set out to investigate what goes on behind the scenes in community food kitchens in Winnipeg, Canada (pp. 1-3). Through his open-ended interview process, Ripat learned about the role that cooking played in fostering relationships among community members through the sharing of recipes and cooking tips, and the sharing of food itself (1998, pp. 24-27). Ripat touched on how cooking together helped the community members "open up" to each other and talk about problems in their lives, which helped members be able to mutually support each other emotionally

and provide each other with resources (p. 25). Ripat also mentioned that laughter while cooking aided in relationship-building (p. 58). Here, the relationships established by the community members were the vehicle for change in Winnipeg, which was concurrently the objective of the study that occurred as a product of people cooking together.

In a more recent study, researchers from Cornell University were curious about how the act of eating together, or "interacting over food" may encourage workplace performance (Kniffin et al., 2015, p. 281). The researchers concluded that, at least in organizations where the culture encourages cooperation among all members, commensality can serve as an important activity in strengthening workplace relationships (2015, p. 296). In the prison study mentioned earlier, relationships were also explored in different contexts surrounding food-preparation activities. In this study, membership in the different "food groups" not only provided a foundation for social identities to be formed and food preferences to be respected, but it also created a system of perceived physical safety and loyal alliances, as well as one of financial security (Minke, 2014, p. 233). This study also demonstrated other social phenomena integral to relationships regarding roles and positions of power, which naturally unfolded within and between the different food groups (2014, p. 234). Each group defined roles for their members such as who the cook was, who washed the dishes, who served the others, and each role held with it a social meaning in terms of the power one held in the group (p. 234). The roles of members in a group cooking together go beyond constructs of social power; they carry with them responsibility and cooperation in a system, too. For example, the role in a family of parents feeding their children is to provide sustenance and to model eating behaviors and other skills necessary for their child's development (Utter et al., 2016). In

negotiating food choices and preparation practices, the role of the decision maker(s) holds significance with regard to the direction a mealtime follows for all people eating that meal (Bove et al., 2003). In many relationships, the role of the food provider is imbued with the identity of the caregiver, or one who shows care (Fjellström et al., 2010).

McCabe and de Waal Malefyt describe cooking as a creative process and assert that creativity is "relational and a key aspect of defining motherhood" (2015, p. 50). Here, the researchers claim that cooking is just one of the creative ways in which mothers show their families how to transform materials from individual ingredients to whole meals, all while considering the needs and preferences of their family members (p. 51). This type of balancing act and expression of creativity is considered by some as labors of love, which cooking requires (Wolfson et al., 2016, p. 152). Since we already know that eating and cooking are social activities, cooking can sometimes actually be a painful reminder of the loss of a loved one with whom someone used to plan, cook, and eat with (Nickrand & Brock, 2017, p. 181). It was the recognition of this that led Nickrand and Brock to develop a "Cooking for One" culinary grief therapy series which provided participants an experiential platform for which to process their grief while also learning healthy approaches to planning, grocery shopping, and cooking for just themselves (2017, p. 182). Regardless of who was the main decision maker regarding food choices in a relationship, the loss of one relationship member can require of the other a big adjustment to the new experience of cooking for one person.

Cooking Clinically with Couples Specifically

Fjellström et al do a good job of illustrating how roles in the relationship change, perhaps due to circumstances such as illness in one partner, and how food plays an

integral part in that couple's roles (2010). As the roles people play regarding food in a relationship can greatly impact the relationship itself, I was curious how else food and food preparation influence couples' relationships in other ways, or inversely, how the relationship shapes the couple's approach to cooking. Bove et al. state that each partner "brings his or her own particular set of gendered, ethnic, class-based and other food preferences and intolerances into a marital relationship, and the two formerly separate individuals combine their personal food systems into a new joint family food system" (2003, p. 26). Many of these preferences and intolerances each partner has come from a combination of their family backgrounds and other social environments and experiences (Wolfson et al., 2016, p. 147). Interestingly, there are a number of theories about the genetic and environmental influences of the individual's preferences and habits that they bring to the relationship, too (Logue, 2004, p. 64), especially as they relate to values and morals regarding food choices (Capaldi, 1996, p. 255).

Foodwork equality. It is important to consider that the trend in how heterosexual couples relate to cooking has changed in some ways over time, as some of the outdated research suggests that a bulk of the cooking in the majority of homes was and *should* be done by the female (Craig & Truswell, 1988; Kemmer, 1999; Stafford, Backman, & Dibona, 1977), yet we have seen a trend towards a more equal sharing of foodwork in recent years (Szabo, 2012). According to much of the recent the research, equality in the division of labor with regard to cooking is a topic of particular interest among scholars studying couples (Aarseth & Olsen, 2008; Neuman, Gottzén, & Fjellström, 2017; Szabo, 2012). Most of the recent literature, while seemingly concentrated in northern Europe, suggests that in Western societies, there are still some

traditional gender roles about cooking adopted in households, while younger generations tip the scale overall towards a much more equal sharing in foodwork responsibilities (Neuman et al., 2017; Szabo, 2012). In either case, it seems that cultural strides have been made regarding the perception of cooking being a feminine task, and ideas about defining masculinity in the context of cooking are a popular concern (Aarseth & Olsen, 2008; Neuman et al., 2017; Szabo, 2012). For years, there was even a divide in the gendering of certain foods, with some being considered more masculine or feminine than others (Bove et al., 2003, p. 26). In the following presented research, there will be a focus on men and masculinity in respect to cooking, as studies about cooking have been shaped by the perspective that cooking at home is a female-dominated activity (Szabo, 2012, p. 35).

Aarseth and Olsen. In 2008, Aarseth and Olsen analyzed couples' narratives of cooking and cooking related activities in search of understanding the pull away from a gender division in households related to foodwork. In their study, the researchers included couples where both members had full time jobs and whose housework in the home was viewed as equal (p. 278). Upon analyzing the narratives, Aarseth and Olsen identified three different patterns that emerged regarding the equality of cooking at home. The first pattern has to do with the couple's view on cooking being primarily the woman's responsibility, regardless of the work actually being shared relatively equally, which could be due to the woman doing more of the planning of meals, enjoying the food preparation more, or talking about cooking in the context of a bad conscience (pp. 280-281). This perspective for couples' interactions towards cooking could become

problematically frustrating for each partner, as it could incite more guilt for the woman or feel like a personal failure for the man (p. 281).

The second pattern that came to light during the study was two-fold regarding an "I do it my way" attitude: in one way, men approached cooking based on the realistic needs of the family, and the other based on men finding pleasure in cooking (Aarseth & Olsen, 2008, pp. 281-282). Those men who oriented towards cooking as a pleasurable activity tended to describe cooking as a hobby (p. 283), which the researchers argue are in support of some of the more traditional views where women bear most of the responsibility while men are able to choose it as a hobby (p. 283). The last pattern defined by the researchers from their analysis is of greater concern to the point of this dissertation, where couples approached cooking as a common interest, one in which they enjoyed doing together and with family, and one in which neither partner saw either as the main responsibility-holder (pp. 283-284). The main findings about these patterns maintains a position where, despite the actual division of labor, in the household, the perspectives of masculinity around cooking are still unequal (p. 285).

Michelle Szabo Studies. Following this study, Michelle Szabo wrote 3 articles related to this topic, which can be found in her dissertation. In her first article, Szabo investigates our relationships with cooking and convenience foods, especially as they relate to gender (2012, pp. 47). Here, she highlights that our connection, or re-connection, with food has become a particularly Western interest lately because of an increased convenience culture, and posits it as possibly a premature movement because it does not take into consideration the purpose of convenience foods for a busy workforce and the ways in which men and women approach them differently (p. 50). Szabo points out that a

large majority of households in the United States and Canada have a lifestyle that requires skillfully balancing at-home unpaid work and paid employment, especially considering the longer hours and increased employment demands in recent times (p. 56); and when you consider, despite recent improvements, that there is still an inequality of gender expectations towards foodwork at home, this puts a burden on women more than on men (p. 63). In this paper, Szabo has pointed out a clear distinction in the gender inequality regarding foodwork, encouraging a change in the social approach of men towards cooking at home, as well as a change in the conditions surrounding the proportion of unpaid to paid work in households as possible solutions to reconnecting with our food.

As domestic cooking has long been a feminine characteristic in many households across the globe, few studies have explored the perspectives and motivations of the males who do engage in cooking at home (Szabo, 2012, p. 82), which could have been of relevance to the couples discussed in this current dissertation. On that note, it is important to mention that these findings about men are in many ways applicable to women, too, but a lot of what we have already discussed in the literature may have been more representative of women's voices, so these studies add another layer of perspective. Szabo recognizes that gender approaches to cooking are different at the "individual, interactional, and institution" levels, which all influence the experiences of each gender, and thusly, their motivations for cooking (p. 90). In this second study, the researcher identifies three main motivations behind men's involvement in domestic cooking (p. 95). The first is the intrinsic pleasure of cooking, that it can be a creative and artistic endeavor, relaxing and fun, or even a form of entertainment (pp. 95-96), and that it can also be a way to show love and connect with others (p. 97). The second motivation found

in this work is the rewards men get for "being a man who cooks" since it is not viewed as the norm, making it "special" and something to be recognized (pp. 100-101). The last motivation has to do with the drawbacks of *not* cooking, such as possible tension in the relationship due to unfair and unequal expectations of the division of labor, or the desire to avoid being overly dependent on their partners (pp. 104-106). These findings indicate that the motivations for men, at least for those men who regularly partake in the cooking at home, may have similar underpinnings to those of women in general whose motivations have been discussed in previous studies (pp. 110-111).

The theme in Michelle Szabo's third study of her dissertation regarding gender equality in relationships towards cooking is similar to the question behind one of Aarseth Olsen's discovered patterns about men cooking for leisure (Aarseth & Olsen, 2008, p. 283). In her third study, Szabo investigated men's relationships with cooking as leisure and as work in the context of the imbalance in the amount of work men do at home, which researchers argue may free them up to engage in cooking as more of a leisure activity (2012, p. 118). However, the bias in past research has certainly been addressed to this point, pointing out that few studies have been conducted, and of those, a relatively small population has been considered (p. 120). Szabo had great difficulty in relegating men's experiences of cooking at home to only one category of work *or* leisure, as most of the participants attributed their experiences to both, sometimes simultaneously (pp. 127-128). She offered the possibility that cooking may have a different meaning to men who don't cook as often in their homes, but asserts the reality of her participants who do not have as much flexibility in choosing cooking as just a leisure (p. 140). While other factors relative to one's experience in the kitchen may pose as possible explanations for gender

differences of work and leisure in the kitchen, the overall findings of this study negate the position that cooking is "work" for women and "leisure" for men (p. 143).

Neuman, Gottzén & Fjellstrom. In support of Szabo's claim that a feminist view of men's approach to cooking needs to be reconsidered, three researchers sought to explore the foodwork stories of men in Sweden, a nation whose gender equality success has set progressive standards for other nations (Neuman et al., 2017, p. 151). Neuman et al. refer to Sweden as a country where gender equality has been an intentionally important political topic and where foodwork seems to be much more equal in couple's homes (p. 153). The researchers stress that even in this social climate, some men still see cooking as a means to an end, even though they are actively involved in the foodwork at home (p. 152). The study's findings suggest two possible reasons for this: men in Sweden striving to uphold gender equality beliefs, and men in Sweden's desire to improve their culinary repertoire (p. 160). Despite these narratives, the study demonstrated that in a more gender equal society, men's perceptions of cooking ranged greatly from "boring" and "mundane" to enjoying it as a leisure (p. 158), which offers an additional perspective when juxtaposed to the findings of Szabo's and Aarseth and Olsen's studies.

Couple food negotiations. The processes of how couples make decisions regarding their food choices is of particular interest in this dissertation; however, the more contributive research on this topic was conducted in 2002 and 2006, and both studies included two of the same researchers (Bove & Sobal, 2006; Bove et al., 2003), which should be kept in mind. Nevertheless, the ways in which couples negotiate their

choices about how and what they eat as they conjoin lives could be relevant to how they interact in the kitchen.

Couple food choices. In the first study, Bove et al. examined the process in which newly married couples make food choices after coming to the relationships with their own set of preferences and tolerances about food (2003, p. 26). The researchers make particular mention that each partner's prior social systems and experiences before they become a couple influences how the negotiation process unfolds when they do come together (pp. 25-26). This claim is actually consistent with recent research which still talks about people's cooking perceptions as being a product of their family backgrounds and larger social systems (Wolfson et al., 2016, p. 147), which inevitably impacts the balancing of one another's food systems as they come together. Also, this point and the rest of the findings in Bove, Sobal, and Rauschenbach's study were found to be applicable to cohabiting partners and not just legally married ones (2003, p. 27).

Dietary convergence was one of the themes of process that emerged in this study, which has to do with the merging of couples' diets into one, where their diets and eating habits begin to become similar (Bove et al., 2003, p. 28). Dietary convergence happens at different times, in a different number of stages, and at varying symmetries for couples (pp. 28- 29). Food conflicts, the second theme of the study, can occur between couples, especially when settling differences is not easy (p. 29), but conflicts depend on several factors: "partners' prior food broadening experiences, the initial congruity of partners' food choices, partners' health and body weight philosophies underlying their food choices, foodwork related factors, and commensal eating with relatives and friends" (p. 30). The food-broadening experiences factor is of particular interest because of its

possible implications on the study's participants who are mostly located in a vastly culturally diverse section of Florida. Bove et al. discuss the ramifications food-broadening experiences have on couples' food choice conflicts and negotiations: conflicts were less common when both partners in the couple had food broadening experiences, that is, experiences trying new foods and cooking styles (pp. 30-31). However, when both partners lacked food-broadening experiences, it could become conflictual if their preferences were not similar (p. 31). Additionally, regarding foodwork patterns, it was interesting to note that half of the couples in this study made cooking decisions together, while in the other half of the participants, there was usually one lead decision-maker (p. 32).

The study's third discussed theme is food individualism, the couple's attempt at minimizing conflict by accommodating differing food preferences within the relationship, which happened both when the couple ate together and separately (Bove et al., 2003, p. 34). We see food individualism behaviors in many groups of people who eat together, where people make adjustments to theirs or others' foods to suit individual preferences (p. 34); for example, adding spicy condiments to your own plate, serving someone a smaller portion, or cooking one person's steak longer than another's. The last theme in Bove et al.'s research is food projects: "actively molding eating partners" (p. 35). Food projects occurred in couples where one partner attempted to change the other's approach to food preferences or behaviors, which was more evident in couples where the "director" (the one who takes on the change project) attempted to improve the health quality of their partner's diet (p. 35). Perhaps health is a common context in food projects because,

as a later study showed, it is not uncommon in the earlier stages of couples' relationships for food-related health like weight to decline (Anderson, Marshall, & Lea, 2004).

Ristovski-Slijepcevic and Chapman conducted a similar, less-extensive study in 2005, focusing on the food choice integration process in childless couples as it pertained specifically to health. In their study, the researchers discovered three themes that were somewhat similar in findings to those of Bove et al, while also adding another element. Upon examining the meanings and values of individuals regarding health, most participants seemed to agree about the meanings of healthy foods, but diverged in the values of different aspects of healthy eating, such as increasing the intake of nutrients versus decreasing the intake of fat (Ristovski-Slijepcevic & Chapman, 2005). In regards to the negotiation processes of healthy eating decisions upon these couples' cohabitation, similar and somewhat predictable patterns were evident based on the congruency of healthy eating values. However, a new insight was discovered about factors in the negotiation process, which is that in addition to cohabitation, "work schedules, weight gain, lifestage/age, partner's knowledge about healthy eating and cost of food" all played a part in the negotiation process (Ristovski-Slijepcevic & Chapman, 2005).

As eating plays such a crucial part in our lives, it is reasonable to assume that it remains so as we enter relationships and merge our individual food systems with that of our partner's. This is why food choice negotiations, the conflicts and satisfaction it brings to couples' relationships is the topic Bove et al. set out to study in 2003, as well as Ristovski-Slijepcevic and Chapman in 2005. Unfortunately, one of the only other studies done in more recent years in the same narrowed area of research focused strictly on the influence of romantic partners' increase in fruit and vegetable eating choices, and the

findings did support the study's hypotheses because of methodological and sampling limitations (Newberry, 2013, pp. i-ii). There is clearly a need for further research in the processes involved in food choice negotiations in cohabiting couples that reflect current social trends.

Couple foodwork negotiations. Surely the advantages to understanding the processes involved in couples' food choice negotiations extends to the ways in which they plan, shop, and cook meals. In a second major study three years later, Bove and Sobal's curiosity led them to take a look at another food-related process for newly married couples, but this time focusing on the foodwork negotiations, that is, how the couple makes their decisions about the work involved in cooking dinners, the most shared couple meal (Bove et al., 2003, p. 28) from planning to execution and even clean-up (Bove & Sobal, 2006, p. 70). Bove and Sobal found a common thread in many of the participants that their foodwork experiences were tied to their foodspaces, or where the foodwork took place (2006, p. 82). At the time of this study in upstate New York, it was common for many newly married couples to move into new residences, even if they were cohabiting before marriage, and often into places with larger food spaces (e.g., larger kitchens) (pp. 81-82). This move seemed to increase the interest in cooking at home for these participants because of more overall enthusiasm about the foodspace and in consideration of financial reasons (pp. 82). This finding is important to note because it may be an experience relatable to other couples as well, but this study only included almost married or newly married couples in 1997 and 1998, so I am curious about the generalizability to couples who have been married for a longer time and who have perhaps lived in a consistent residence for longer, as well as to cohabitating couples who are not planning to

wed anytime soon or at all, as the trends in marriage have somewhat changed in recent years (Kefalas, Furstenberg, Carr, & Napolitano, 2017; Kislev, 2017). Nonetheless, it is understandable that foodspaces would still have an effect on couples foodwork experiences.

Bove and Sobal continue about a noticed foodwork pattern: couples whose partners were not as regularly involved in the home cooking as the other partner rarely were involved in the dinner decision-making process or shopping either (60% of the couples), whereas couples in which both partners were regularly involved in the cooking (40% of the couples, and the group of more focus in this dissertation) were more inclined to be part of the decision-making and shopping (Bove & Sobal, 2006, pp. 74-75).

Interestingly, factors relating to levels of education, occupations, and gender did not have as much of an influence on the foodwork negotiations between partners in this study as much as did age (historical views on traditional versus flexible roles), prior cooking experience, and couples' cohabitation duration (pp. 74-75). Employment demands did have some influence on foodwork negotiations (p. 84), although from previous research, we find that lack of time is not necessarily a determinant of engaging in leisurely cooking (Szabo, 2012). The findings of these influential factors support some of the previously mentioned literature's claims regarding gender equality, as men and women appeared to be actively involved in the foodwork (Bove & Sobal, 2006, p. 75). Curiously, though, in some cases where there was an "appointed" decision-maker who was an inexperienced cook or who did not enjoy cooking, all of these roles happened to fall on the women, and this produced some resentment in the kitchen (p. 78). Furthermore, these women's

"displeasure over their assigned foodwork roles exacerbated, and was compounded by, other food conflicts they experienced with their partners, most notably conflicts over food choice" (p. 78).

I am curious about whether this resentment, or any other feelings spurred by this role, went beyond food-related conflicts into other parts of their relationship, and if so, how it manifested in their interactions elsewhere. Bove and Sobal mentioned that the evolution of foodwork roles sometimes did create conflicts in the household, and that this usually depended on partners' opinions of the other's cooking skills (2006, p. 78). So, in fact, the food roles and feelings in the kitchen did have some effect on the couple's agreement in the home. Also, the skill level itself of the cook was not as pertinent to determining the sharing of the foodwork negotiations, as much as *how* the meals and skills were perceived by the others were, such as whether they were appreciated (pp. 78-79). Sometimes depending on the level of cooking experience in foodwork-sharing couples, the cooking was divided into leading and assisting-type kitchen roles, where one partner might be the main preparer and the other a sort of sous-chef or assistant (p. 79). In most of these cases, the lead cook was often the one who did the shopping, whereas in couples where the decision-making was more equal, the grocery shopping was more evenly shared (p. 80). For fewer couples, and those in relationships where the decision-making was not shared as evenly, the one who was not as involved in the cooking still felt they were able to contribute by sometimes doing the food shopping and cleaning up after dinner (p. 80).

Participants in Bove and Sobal's study shared that love was one of the motivating factors behind how they approached foodwork (2006, p. 80), which is also consistent with

other research that implies cooking is often affiliated with care and nurturing (Fjellström et al, 2010; McCabe & de Waal Malefyt, 2015; Szabo, 2012). While this study did note a consideration for gender equality among its couples in terms of foodwork, one distinguishing exception was apparent, which is the gendered patterns around grilling; in almost all of the couples, regardless of who the decision-maker or main food preparer was, the man was the one who engaged in the cooking on the grill (Bove & Sobal, 2006, p. 81). Additionally, men and women sometimes shared foodwork responsibilities differently, as was the case where grocery shopping afforded some partners the ability to still contribute to the foodwork, and it is interesting to note that in these cases it was usually the older of the participants, as we are more likely to find younger couples sharing the actual cooking equally (p. 84). Overall, in foodwork negotiations, more positive interactions about food and cooking was found among the couples where the foodwork involved both partners, minimizing food-related conflict (p. 83). As cooking involves more than just physically preparing food, it includes emotional and social factors existing in a couple's relationship (p. 85), we might expect to find that the ways in which the couples engage in foodwork may have something to do with other aspects of their relationship. Bove and Sobal advocate that "these newly married couples, in expressing their love and marital commitment through foodwork, made new families as they made family meals" (p. 85). What part, then, of creating the family meals percolates into the creation of the family, or vice versa?

Relationship Connections in the Kitchen: What We Can Learn

McLean and McNamara indicated years ago that foodwork activities involve behaviors inherent in our everyday lives, which may provide us a starting point in looking

at people's "cognitive, affective, and social behaviors" (1987, p. 57), which are largely the factors that make up the way in which we approach the world as humans. Moreover, these factors influence and are influenced by each other from before we are actually born into our families, into a society at a particular time, along with others who share our earth, bringing with us our own genetic and emotional predispositions which concurrently mold our life experiences, too (Capaldi, 1996; Gilbert, 1992, p. 83; Logue, 2004, p. 64; Szabo, 2012, p. 135). And, as we know that our interactions with food and cooking are shaped by our biological, emotional, and social systems (Bove et al., 2002; Capaldi, 1996; Caraher et al., 2004; Fernandez-Armesto, 2002; Fitzsimmons & Buettner, 2003; Jarpe-Ratner et al., 2016; McCabe & de Waal Malefyt, 2015; McLean & Mcnamara, 1987; Wolfson et al., 2016), it was conversely speculated that looking at the ways in which we interact with food could offer us a glimpse into those systems which make us up. As couples come together, they merge all of these systems together into one couple entity (Bove et al., 2003; Bove & Sobal, 2006; Neuman et al., 2017; Szabo, 2012). It is the relational nature in which these couples' systems negotiate their synergy in the kitchen that was particularly interesting. So what, then, could a couple's interactions in the kitchen tell us about their individual and combined systems?

Where They Come From

It is important to remember that when a couple comes together and brings with them their own set of food systems, we can look at all of the factors involved in creating these food systems for the individuals (Bove et al., 2002, p. 26), such as their family backgrounds or social environments (Wolfson et al., 2016, p. 147); however, any behaviors that we observe in the kitchen cannot be entirely attributed to a single genetic

or experiential cause (Logue, 2004, p. 64). Let us instead consider that our actions around food are influenced at both the physiological/genetic and experiential/social levels (Capaldi, 1996, p. 3). With that being said, we can examine how our families and cultures of origin shape what cooking practices we as individuals bring (or do not bring) to the new couple entity. For example, Hunt, Fazio, MacKenzie, and Moloney mentioned that some of the participants in a study expressed an interest in creating family meal-times with their new family, despite not having had that as a norm in their family of origin (2011, p. 400). Gold refers to a similar process experienced by many immigrants, where they must choose what cultural aspects to keep and which new ones to incorporate into their current practices as they merge with a new culture (2007, p. 18).

As two individuals (or cultures as noted above) unite into one couple, there is a process in which the couple negotiates the newly combined food system's practices, rituals, and values (Bove et al, 2003), and that process is influenced by an emotional system determined largely by the individual's family of origin (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Depending on each individual's ability to emotionally separate from his or her family of origin, the families' emotional patterns will inevitably influence which behaviors the individuals each bring into the new relationship (Gilbert, 1992, pp. 83-84). Gold argues that "emotional reactions to food are common because food often functions as a memory trigger for people," especially for those who experience significant change in new cultures (2007, p. 15), or in new relationships. The manifestation of particular patterns of emotions and behaviors can be seen by repetitions (Gilbert, 1992, pp. 83-84), or rituals, which vary from family to family depending on how committed or adaptive a family is to maintaining those rituals (Gold, 2007, pp. 131-132). Food-related rituals are no exception, which are

communicated through families and culture, such as "sharing mealtime, holidays . . . telling stories, planning meals, gardening and gathering food, preparing traditional staple foods, respect for food, passing on food knowledge, and mealtime manners" (Gold, 2007, pp. 131-132). Therefore, in looking at the food-related behaviors negotiated by the couple, it was likely that each family of origin's emotional relationship to certain rituals had much to do with which individual's (or both) family's ritual was accepted or integrated into the new system.

There are examples in the literature of ways in which our culture and family of origin's emotional food systems affect individual responses to food, such as a mother's modeling eating patterns on a child's expectations of thinness (MacBrayer, Smith, McCarthy, Demos, & Simmons, 2001), or a culture's rules about what is acceptable in terms of ordering certain dishes at mealtime (Capaldi, 1996, p. 236); yet there are far fewer written instances that tell us about someone's emotional systems based on the way they respond to food (the inverse). Gold writes, "food is a metaphor for family life" (2007, p. 4), and Caraher et al. add that "food is often used to explore family relationships, gender, age, ethnicity and as a metaphor for society" (2004). Gold, one of the few researchers who *has* examined what our food-related behaviors can tell us about our origins, asserts that observing food patterns or listening to stories about food can shed light on family interactions (Gold, 2007, pp. 3-4). Similarly, Capaldi discusses how our food selection and eating practices illustrate culture-specific beliefs, attitudes, and values (1996, p. 242). Further, Capaldi clarifies that these values are passed down inter-generationally much more than tastes and preferences are (p. 255), which will likely be of more interest to a marriage and family therapist.

Other Possible Inter-Relational Patterns in the Kitchen

The gap in the literature which I am addressing here has to do with the connection between couples' relationships and their interactions in the kitchen. I present here a summary of the literature that specifically discusses inter-relational patterns found in people's interactions in the kitchen in general, highlighting those of couples specifically. I also pose areas of curiosity where those studied interactions in the kitchen may serve as an opening for further inspection. Very few studies demonstrate curiosity about how these interactions in a kitchen relate to interactions elsewhere, which is where further research needs to be conducted.

As with group interaction, a level of collaboration or teamwork to some degree is inevitable. With regards to collaboration while cooking, Ripat argues that cooking lends itself as an activity that helps group members practice collaboration both in the kitchen and out, such as in families and at work (1998, p. 53). One way in which cooking together fosters collaboration in relationships is by sharing information and learning together while creating the meals (pp. 24-25). Over time, couples often develop skills for solving problems and learn how to relate to each other in ways that work for the couple. This learning, which happens laterally and is an area we can explore, occurs in many cases where people complete tasks together, as they do when they cook together (1998). As marriage and family therapists that are curious about partners' willingness and openness to change, we may look to the way in which they negotiate food preferences (Bove et al., 2003) and how well they adapt to trying things they are unfamiliar with (Ripat, 1998).

Bove et al. illustrate the collaborative nature of couples as they not only create meals together, but also combine their entire eating systems; and within this process,

patterns of convergence based on the couple's collaboration and experiences emerge over time (2003, p. 29). Examples of the collaboration process of couples in the kitchen and how they negotiate their food systems may include how they handle food conflicts, how they accommodate individual dietary preferences, and how they respond to their own and each other's health philosophies (2003). These process patterns seem similar to those found in other areas of couple's lives together, such as the combination of religious systems or how they handle other non-food related conflicts, and it is interesting to see how the processes relate to one another.

Food-related collaboration is not an isolated process, it is governed by the decisions each partner makes, and when it comes to cooking, there exists a natural platform on which we can observe how individuals plan and execute tasks (Tanguay et al., 2014). Ripat mentioned the consistency of this process among groups in community kitchens, stating that the group participants almost always planned the menus, group structures, and other meal-creating tasks collectively (1998, pp. 71-101). Within a couple, it was found that there were patterns related to who, whether one or both partners, was the decision maker of what was to be cooked and how it would be made (Bove et al., 2003, p. 32). For instance, in some couples, when there was one main decision-maker, he or she was also often the main cook (p. 32), and as we know from Bove & Sobal's other study, sometimes the other partner had responsibilities that contributed to the foodwork process even if they were not the main decision-maker/cook (2006, p. 80). From another study, we learned that the decision-maker role is not a constant, that other aspects of the relationship and individual factors such as health, relate to a change in this role (Fjellström et al, 2010).

An individual's role in a kitchen, whether in a group of many or a couple, may provide us an opportunity to explore roles in other areas of his or her relationships. For example, kitchen or foodwork roles can relate to status, power, and resistance (Minke, 2014), pride and self-worth (Fitzsimmons & Buettner, 2003), nutritive support (Bove et al., 2003), and love and care (Aarseth & Olsen, 2008; Szabo, 2012). Minke, specifically, pointed out how one's role among a group in the kitchen (like the cook or assistant) can influence people's social identities outside of the kitchen (2014). Fjellström et al proposed that a partner's ability to live up to what they consider a "good food provider" can impact the couple relationship nutritionally and socially (2010, p. 525). While the roles of decision-maker and assistant may not be consistent across all aspects of a couple's relationship, I was interested to see if there is any correlation at all, and if so, what more we could learn from that. Regardless of the context in which the roles are carried out, the role itself can simply serve as a basis for further conversation about the couple's relationship.

Experiential Therapy

In order to understand how cooking may be used experientially in therapy, it is helpful to review the relevant beliefs and proponents of experiential therapy in the marriage and family therapy field. Experiential approaches began gaining popularity in marriage and family therapy around the 1960s and has since been applied in a variety of ways by therapists of various theoretical backgrounds. This is important to note, as experiential therapy is not often considered a model as much as it is an atheoretical approach (Becvar & Becvar, 2006, p. 158). Some of the most influential proponents of experiential approaches to marriage and family therapy are Carl Whitaker and Virginia

Satir (Becvar & Becvar, 2006; Thomas & Krum, 2014), each who have contributed to our knowledge of experiential therapy in vastly different ways. Nonetheless, the importance of human interaction and growing through experience remain a common thread throughout both approaches.

Carl Whitaker

Carl Whitaker's psychodynamic approach to experiential therapy is known as symbolic-experiential therapy (Becvar & Becvar, 2006; Thomas & Krum, 2014).

Whitaker was known for his bold, sometimes controversial interventions, as he believed in putting the family in safe, yet anxious situations that offered opportunities to fuel change and growth (Becvar & Becvar, 2006, p. 160; Whitaker & Bumbery, 1988).

His style of experiential therapy was consistent with his personality, as he also emphasized the use of the therapist's own skills in relating to the clients and building a close relationship with them that included "personal feelings and real affect" (Whitaker & Malone, 1953, p. 199; Becvar & Becvar, 2006). He warned against other therapists following techniques prescriptively, as doing so could take away from the relationship with the clients (Whitaker & Malone, 1953, p. 195). Whitaker similarly stressed the importance of experience instead of educating people: "I have very little confidence in the notion that ideas or information can lead to growth. In order for real change to occur, the family needs to engage each other emotionally. They need real experiences, not cerebral insights" (Becvar & Becvar, 2006; Whitaker & Bumbery, 1988, p. 27).

At times, the family therapist would act unconventionally, although usually purposefully, with clients; for example, he might get on the floor to play with a child, walk out of a room when parents were arguing, or fall asleep during a session. Whitaker

did not address symptoms head-on with the families he worked with, instead he worked to understand and bring out the underlying emotional states in order to then redefine the families' symptoms (Thomas & Krum, 2014). He believed that dysfunctional families became "stuck" in their attempts to grow during life-cycle events (Thomas & Krum, 2014), and that the goal of therapy then was to help family members gain autonomy both individually and as a family system so they could navigate their way through events themselves and live more adaptive lives (Becvar & Becvar, 2006; Whitaker & Bumbery, 1988). Similarly, Whitaker viewed issues in couples as a battle of partners negotiating whose family of origin patterns will serve as the model for the next generation (Becvar & Becvar, 2006). For this, Carl Whitaker helps couples to "accommodate each other's differences," and Becvar and Becvar remind us that in charming Whitaker-fashion, "the therapeutic process aimed at achieving such goals are anything but traditional and often have been described as crazy" (2006, p. 162).

Virginia Satir

Virginia Satir brought a humanistic perspective to experiential therapy and based her approach of family therapy on communication theory. One of the experiential techniques Satir was known for was her use of family sculpting during sessions as a way to demonstrate communication patterns in families (Thomas & Krum, 2014). Family members, often one "star" member, would be instructed to move family members' bodies into positions that reflected perceptions of the family relationships, which externalized patterns for the therapist to see (Vila, 2009). Family reconstruction is often a term associated with Virginia Satir, as well, which is a process of reconnecting generations and helping the family members understand each other in new ways (Vila, 2009).

Satir believed that all families had potential for growth (Thomas & Krum, 2014), and that communication based on congruence was key for successful families (Satir, 1996). She further theorized that at the core of healthy communication in families was a healthy sense of self-esteem and self-worth (Satir, 1988; Thomas & Krum, 2014). Using these concepts and techniques for couples was common work for Satir. She encouraged couples to be emotionally honest in order to communicate more congruently so that they do not fall into negative communication patterns, represented by the communication stances: placating, blaming, super reasonable, and irrelevant (McLendon & Bitter, 2011; Thomas & Krum, 2014).

Creative Experiential Therapies

The way in which a therapist approaches the use of experiential techniques in therapy is as unique as the therapist herself. So, too, is the way in which the experiential therapy is presented. Creativity often plays a role in the way experiential therapy is utilized. Some commonly practiced creative experiential therapies, uniquely applied by each therapist, include art therapy, music therapy, play therapy, adventure therapy, and psychodrama. Regardless of the form of experience the therapy takes, most have similar therapeutic goals for families and couples: to foster a safe environment where clients can explore and clarify elements of their relationships, and to use the information that is discovered during experiences to build on the strengths and grow (Carson & Casado-Kehoe, 2013, p. 231). Creative therapies as these mentioned specifically help clients achieve this by allowing them to express what is going on inside in a different way than they are accustomed to like through words (Carson & Casado-Kehoe, 2013, p. 229; Malchiodi, 2012).

Carson and Casado-Kehoe argue that creative experiencing happens at both the individual and shared-systemic level (2013, p. 229). When therapists and clients employ creative solution-building, it helps bring forth changes in the ways in which clients see themselves in relation to others, as well as uncover deeper, perhaps subconscious or unrealized needs and emotions, which could very well lead to "emotional healing and relationship breakthroughs in session" (p. 229). For example, Riley proposes that art therapy, through the "language of art" can facilitate change for couples because "visual images of relational problems provide a fresh view of rigid patterns of behaviors and introduce a new mode of communication," helping the couple and therapist utilize artistic expressions for establishing goals in therapy (2003). Similarly, one study shows how a music therapy assessment tool may be effective in helping couples communicate with each other "musically," and could elicit another level of interpersonal thoughts and feelings about the relationship (Botello, 2008). Cooking, too, meets similar criteria, as it has many times been an interactive and creative activity that has served as a means of helping humans express feelings with each other over generations, cross-culturally, and within family units as small as a two-person couple (Capaldi, 1996; Logue, 2004; McCabe & de Waal Malefyt, 2015; Szabo, 2012; Thompson, et al., 2009).

Hopes for Further Implications

As briefly mentioned previously, cooking and food can be highly metaphoric when talking about family, social identity, and life in general (Caraher et al., 2004; Gold, 2007). Because of its metaphoric nature, cooking has been used to linguistically describe other systemic processes that are more relatable and easier to understand when talking about food (Hardman, 1998; Kaplan, 2000; Sterne & Rodgers, 2011). This makes cooking

helpful in therapy, utilizing it both through language and experientially. This may be of significance to marriage and family therapists when treating clients, as metaphors are often helpful verbally and visually (Kerr, 2015; Liu, Zhao, & Miller, 2014).

One of the reasons metaphors are helpful for therapists and clients alike is because they help us connect ideas and processes to other similar ones, which gives us another context for understanding, especially when those ideas are too emotionally difficult to discuss or we don't know how else to describe them (Killick, Curry, & Myles, 2016). As already discussed, cooking can involve a multitude of systems and processes (emotional, social, and physical), and can also be a medium through which changes occur (Capaldi, 1996; Logue, 2004; Smith, 2014; Szabo, 2012), which is why it serves as a useful communication tool and foundation for demonstrating behavioral interactions. Through their studies, Ripat and Minke substantiate how the non-threatening, relationship-building nature of cooking can be used to facilitate social and emotional changes (1998; 2014). Ripat's study in particular mentions how cooking can allow for humor to play a part in relationship-building and emotional support (1998, p. 58).

Cooking has been used experientially, as we have discussed, to assess and treat cognitive functioning (Baum & Edwards, 1993; Clément et al., 2012; Fitzsimmons & Buettner, 2003; Manera et al., 2015; Rusted et al., 1997; Wojtasik et al., 2010) and to educate children and families about nutrition and healthy habits (Condrasky, Graham, & Kamp, 2006; Jarpe-Ratner et al., 2016). There are further opportunities yet to be explored as to the relational nature of cooking that will be of relevance to marriage and family therapists. Because of this and my own personal interest, as discussed in the previous

chapter, a curiosity about cooking in the field marriage and family therapy field was what spurred a topic of study, which is described in the methodology section.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Just like other experiential modalities, using cooking experientially in marriage and family therapy could be a powerful tool for treating couples and families, because like other experiential therapy, it is also a "creative activity that focus[es] on involvement and interaction between people" (Thompson, Bender, Windsor, & Flynn, 2009).

However, in order to understand how cooking can be best applied experientially in marriage and family therapy, we needed to understand more precisely about what the interactions while cooking tell us about relationships. Sufficient literature tells us that cooking is an important activity in families and in communities, as it supports positive social identities, is a way of expressing love and care to others, and can be used to help foster more healthy lifestyles (Condrasky et al., 2006; Jarpe-Ratner et al., 2016; Minke, 2014; Szabo, 2012; Wolfson, 2016). For couples, we understand that cooking is an activity in which two previously determined systems proceed to become one, and that this new couple's food system takes different shapes over time (Bove et al., 2003; Bove & Sobal, 2006). We know very little about what contributes to the interactional behaviors in the kitchen while a family or couple is actually cooking together. If we can bridge a gap in the literature with regards to how interactions in the kitchen relate to the interactions between couples outside of the kitchen, then perhaps we can better understand how to utilize cooking as a relational experiential therapy for the future, at least as it pertains to couples. This is why I wanted to study this possible connection. The overarching research question in this study is "What are the relational elements of couples' interactions in the kitchen, and how do these interactions relate to other areas of their relationship?" I wanted to know how these things relate because I was curious about what we can learn

about a couple based on the way they interact in the kitchen, such as if there were other similar interactional patterns that can be seen elsewhere in their relationship.

Qualitative Inquiry

In order to address the relational nature of a couple while they are cooking, relationships of couples who cook together had to be explored. In exploring aspects of these couples' relationships, the study provided insights about the connection between couples' relationships and how they relate, or interact with one another, in the kitchen. Hays and Singh write, "Relationships are at the heart of qualitative inquiry" (2012, p. vii). Although this quote is layered with rich meaning, the essence of it is that qualitative inquiry has to do with relationships, as does what I wanted to study. In looking at couples' relationships to each other, their relationships to cooking, the relationship that their cooking has with their couplehood, and all of the systemic pieces around the central phenomena, one is naturally employing qualitative inquiry. The experiential phenomenon of the relative nature of a couple cooking together lacks in scholarly research, and a deeper, more "complex, detailed understanding" (Creswell, 2013, p. 48) of the phenomenon could provide a substantial basis for further use in therapy and in developing subsequent theories. Hays and Singh further indicate that sometimes research topics require a new angle from which to be explored (2012, p. 4). As there is literature about how new couples negotiate adjustments in dietary convergence, how older couples' change as caretaking needs evolve, and about the cultural and socially gendered expectations of foodwork in a couple, there is little to no understanding about the connections between the couples and their cooking behaviors. Ergo, a new research angle was necessary.

The phenomenon I wanted to explore can seem quite complex, and there is very little understanding about it in literature, as well as many different theoretical directions from which people approach the topic. According to Creswell, qualitative research is ideal for problems in which current theories do not satisfactorily explain their complexities (Creswell, p. 48). In approaching the research, I have examined my own ontological beliefs as they pertain to the topic and determined that a qualitative approach was the best path to take in supporting the multiple realities of the studied individuals (2013, p. 20), as well as broaching the complexities of the relationships, behaviors, and their contexts. I wanted the realities of the couples to tell the stories that helped to bridge the gap in our understanding of how their relationship and interactions in the kitchen illuminate one another; I therefore worked inductively to formulate a theory about their experienced phenomena. In contemplating what I hoped to accomplish with this study, as suggested by Creswell (p. 123), I decided that grounded theory would be the best applicable design because I wanted to generate a theory that can explain the phenomenon, as well as further use the theory as a foundation from which I or other researchers can build other ideas and practices in marriage and family therapy (Charmaz, 2006, p. 184; Creswell, 2013, p. 83).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss, two sociology researchers who were dissatisfied with the vague trends in data collection and analysis, so as they were studying death in hospitals during the 60's, they created their own qualitative method (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 4-5; Creswell, 2013, pp. 83-84). Unlike the qualitative methods before it, grounded theory emphasized the creation of a theory that could be used

as a framework for understanding phenomena or for furthering more research on a substantive topic (Cresswell, p. 83), which are both the intent in this study. Specifically, grounded theory is a "research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants" (p. 83). Grounded theorists believe that a theory, or an explanation or understanding (p. 85), should emerge from the large amount of data gathered in the study, especially as they pertain to the "interactions and social processes of people" that share an experience (p. 84). An understanding of the interactions of couples cooking together as they relate to other areas in their relationship was needed, and therefore fit with the objective of a grounded theory methodology. It was expected that by looking deeper at the "specific factors and relationships that comprise the process" of couples cooking together (p. 116), a theory may develop which can provide a framework that will allow for further research into utilizing cooking as an experiential modality (Charmaz, 2014, p. 10; Creswell, 2013, p. 88).

Since the establishment of grounded theory as an accepted methodology in the social sciences, several theorists have implemented subsequent and relative methods based on their own interpretations of the best applications of grounded theory research (Creswell, 2013, p. 84). One such researcher was Kathy Charmaz, who advocated for a constructivist view on grounded theory, highlighting the "views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies" of the participants *and* of the researcher in the study (p. 87). Creswell points out that grounded theorists must set aside their own theories and ideas about a topic in order for the theory from the data to naturally emerge (p. 89), and Charmaz argues that a good way to do this is to acknowledge the researcher's own

constructed reality as part of a multiple realities perspective, and to take his or her position into account while gathering and analyzing data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). As a supporter of multiple realities, this constructivist view fits well with my understanding that my many years of experiences of cooking and working with couples not only propelled my interest into the topic (Charmaz, 2014, p. 3), but undoubtedly also influenced the way in which I oriented myself as a researcher in the study (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 12-14).

Charmaz's constructivist view of grounded theory emphasizes the value of meanings of language and actions, throughout the research process, rather than taking the findings of the data at face value (Charmaz, 2006, p. 184). Charmaz writes, "Research participants' implicit meanings, experiential views – and researchers' finished grounded theories – are constructions of reality. . . I advocate building on the pragmatist underpinnings in grounded theory and advancing interpretive analyses that acknowledge these constructions" (2014, p. 17). With respect to my own reality and that of the participants, utilizing an approach that allowed me to interpret the actions and language used during interviews to help me formulate a theory was important in understanding how contexts such as culture, family of origin, and health played a part in framing the data findings. As a systemic therapist and a qualitative researcher, context is important, so studying the phenomenon *in context* is crucial (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 4). As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the ways in which individuals and societies relate to food and cooking is multifaceted and complex, so understanding the "contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue" (Creswell, 2013, p. 48) is of utmost relevance. Here, I wanted a theory to emerge that came from my interpretations of

the diverse worldviews and complex interactions of the study participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 87). This research goal was concurrent with Charmaz's version of conducting grounded theory with the intent to understand the experiences of couples cooking as they correlate to other relationship aspects by engaging in a flexible, less mechanical application of the methodology itself (Charmaz, 2014, p. 12). I still intended this study, as other constructivist grounded theory researchers, to employ traditional strategies of collecting rich data, but viewed the rigorous methods as "tools to use rather than recipes to follow" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 18).

Study Procedures

For this study, I conducted intensive interviews of couples who shared the experience of cooking together on a regular basis and generated a theory with the data gathered during the interviews. It is important to note that the data collection process is not itself a distinct step separate from those of analysis and report writing; in fact, they go hand-in-hand within the research process (Creswell, p. 182), as is typically emphasized in the non-linear application of a grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014, p. 17). As expected with grounded theory, I "shaped and reshaped" my data collection, learning and narrowing what to focus on as I collected the data (p. 26). This is an important skill for many qualitative researchers, as reflexivity of the researcher helps to make explicit the subjectivity of the research and the voices of the participants (p. 14). Therefore, during data collection and throughout the whole of the research process, I constantly asked myself what the "next best set of questions" were (Burnett, personal communication, 2017) in order to continually move the data toward a theory that emerged naturally, adjusting the methods as needed. This means that as I interviewed participants, what I

learned at one time during data collection changed my focus and subsequent research questions. Hence, a "next best set of questions" (Burnett, personal communication, 2017) method guided me continuously throughout data collection. Creswell writes about the emergence of the qualitative research process that "all phases of the process may change your shift after the researchers enter the field and begin to collect data," since the best ways to learn about the participants' views means collecting that data in whatever practices fit best at that time (2013, p. 47).

Role of the Researcher

I was the key instrument in collecting and analyzing data throughout this study, as is typical in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). In keeping with a constructivist grounded theory methodology, I continuously reflected on my own world view and perspectives about cooking and couples' relationships, as I recognized that the theory that emerged from the research will be co-constructed from the meaning of the participants within and alongside my constructed reality (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). It is typical in qualitative research for the researcher to identify and make clear the values and biases that inform their orientation to the research (Creswell, 2013, pp. 17-20), especially as they pertain to their personal history, ethics, and political issues (p. 51). One way in which I chose to increase my awareness and identification of my own views and biases on the topic was to write and then review Chapter 1 several times, highlighting any preconceived notions about cooking and couples I may have from my personal experiences. I did this because I want to be clear about what I personally bring to the research before collecting data from participants. Prior to the literature review, I could say that my passion for cooking, along with my experience as a marriage and family

therapist who has worked with many couples, my cultural identity as a Jewish woman from South Florida, and the fact that I have been in a committed relationship for over ten years all play a part in my presuppositions about how couples interact in the kitchen. I also chose to conduct a literature review before data collection for a similar reason, explicating the trends in research to acknowledge what issues may be of concern according to recent literature, such as the gendered practices and nutritional issues that may inform my participants and can be considered a context. Charmaz points out the necessity of remaining current on the topic and experience that will be studied (2014, p. 59). However, she warns about the following:

Professional researchers and many graduate students already have a sound footing in their disciplines before they begin a research project. They often know about the research topic and the literature about it. Such vantage points intensify looking at certain aspects of the empirical world but may ignore others. We may begin our studies from these vantage points but need to remain as open to what we see and sense in our research. Treat earlier concepts and perspectives as subject to rigorous empirical and analytical scrutiny and possible dismissal from your study. (2014, pp. 31-32)

During my research, I learned about the participants' perspectives and tried to let categories and patterns emerge regardless of what I believed to be the truth, requiring that I remained open to what emerged, using my dissertation committee and continuous reflexivity to keep me honest. Further, I made sure to incorporate a systemic lens as much as possible, but also to take a step back at different points to try to look at the data from other sociological perspectives.

Data Collection

Participants. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, my overall research question is “What are the relational elements of couples’ interactions in the kitchen, and how do these interactions relate to other areas of their relationship?” Essentially, my research sample included couples who cook together, since in a grounded theory study, I needed to purposefully sample individuals who have experienced the "action" (Creswell, 2013, p. 150) of cooking together so they can "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon" (p. 156). These participants, who all regularly experience the action of cooking together, were part of a homogenous sample (p. 154). In deciding how many interviews or participants to include in the study, I heeded the advice of Charmaz and let the quality and adequacy of the theory development determine the extent of my interview quantity (2014, p. 107). As I analyzed and compared my data, I ended up reaching saturation after interviewing eight couples.

Creswell discusses the difficulty the researcher may have in finding common experiences or themes, which is important in a grounded theory study, among a more diversified sample, while other researchers have argued for the need to remain flexible and open about the sample (2013, p. 150), which led me to believe that it was best to start the study with less exclusion criteria, and narrow my focus as my theory developed. This strategy is common in theoretical sampling, as the researcher selects a sample that might specifically help to further develop the theory that is emerging (Charmaz, 2014, p. 8). Charmaz explains that with theoretical sampling, "theoretical sensitivity can also turn an unexpected moment during an interview into an occasion for theoretical development. Thus, opportunities for theoretical sampling may occur without being

planned in advance" (2014, p. 104). With respect to the authentic nature that theoretical sampling allows for the study, I kept the sample characteristics as open as possible beyond the "couples who cook together;" yet, as a researcher who also values ethical standards and is accountable to a university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I outlined specific criteria I intended to include of the sample at the onset of the study.

From conducting the literature review, it seemed that there was historically a very gendered approach to foodwork, so in order to add another level to the current understanding about gender and cooking, it made sense in this study to focus on couples whose partners each identify as male and female. Therefore, as I wanted to interview participants who have experienced similar phenomena, I had to make a distinction for the sample of heterosexual couples. Additionally, it seems that culture and economic status play a large part in the values individuals place on food and cooking, and while the values themselves may differ, the processes surrounding how humans orient towards cooking are all very similar (e.g., survival needs, social identity). It was thought that culture will more likely help add context to the interviews (Charmaz, 2014, p. 57), which would help make sense of patterns.

After careful consideration of the broadness of my research sample, including reflection on trends in literature, my own presuppositions, and the recommendations for quality grounded theory research, I chose to study the following population with the understanding that theoretical sampling might possibly change it: adult heterosexual couples who have lived together for at least 2 years, between the ages of 24 and 90 who regularly cook together in the kitchen. For the purposes of this study, "regularly" was defined as roughly once a week or more frequently, and "cook together" required that

both partners were physically engaging in food preparation, meal execution, and/or clean-up activities in the same kitchen at the same time. There were no exclusion criteria at this point regarding culture or religion, as well as whether or not the couple was legally married. I recruited study participants advertising by flier via social media and by word of mouth. I intended to advertise fliers in local cooking schools, as well, but ended up not needing more participants. I also remained open to the possibility of my sample criteria and recruitment changing, as with grounded theory studies, sometimes you don't know what you are specifically looking for until you analyze some data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 106).

Interviews. Upon participants expressing interest in participating in the study, I assessed whether they met the inclusion criteria in order to move on to the next step. If they met the criteria, an informed consent form was sent to the contact person(s) from the couple, and both participants of each couple were encouraged to read the informed consent form to better understand what the study was generally about (Creswell, 2013, p. 174), what their rights and expectations as participants were, and what the potential benefits and risks were (p. 153). I made myself available for questions and asked both partners if they understood all of the informed consent details prior to the interview. I sent the informed consent forms via email for participant review prior to the interview, but also provided a copy to be signed in-person before the interview began. Once both partners had signed and acknowledged that they understood what they are consenting to, I began the interview.

During the interviews with participants, I used an audio recording device alongside my own note-taking. Both the audio recordings of the interview and my notes,

or memos, were important sources of data collection. Researchers need to be prepared as much as possible for issues that can arise, such as technological malfunctions, which would be a concern if the audio recorder stops working during an interview (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). I did not want to interrupt the flow of the interview in the event of the recorder malfunctioning, so I had the extra source of collecting data (memos) to rely on as well. Having the two sources of data also helped me get a better picture of what was actually happening in the moment as accurately as possible, an important element in constructivist grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2014, p. 44), and it was helpful to be able to jot down preliminary analytic ideas as they occurred at this first site of data collection (p. 111). Unlike some other approaches to more traditional grounded theory research which rely on more thorough note-taking, audio recording the interview so that you can take fewer notes helps researchers focus more of their attention on the participant, maintaining the flow of the interview (p. 68).

Intensive interviewing. I conducted face-to-face intensive interviews of couples in their homes, making sure the couple was comfortable with that. It is common in qualitative studies for researchers to collect their data in a natural setting, at the site where the central phenomenon occurs (Creswell, 2013, p. 45), which in this case was in the participants' homes since that is usually where they cook together. Gathering data in a natural setting helps the researcher obtain data that is rich in detail, including observations, context clues, and body language. This extra information is important for constructivist grounded theory research, but also to ensure the best interest of the participants, such as by adding an element of comfort to the participants by being in their own home, or changing course if the researcher notices discomfort through body

language. Charmaz further discusses that it is relevant to constructivist grounded theory work to use intensive interviewing, as it helps the researcher "to understand the research participant's language, meanings and actions, emotions and body language" (2014, p. 58). Consequently, I did conduct intensive interviews to help gather rich data for this study.

Intensive interviewing is a data-gathering method that includes general, open-ended questions that focus on understanding the participants' perspectives about the central phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56; Creswell, 2013, p. 163). Intensive interviews are "gently-guided, one-sided conversations" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56) that allow the researcher the flexibility and opportunity to notice and inquire about unanticipated information that the participant shares (pp. 56-57), which may lead to further areas of inquiry as the interviews and study move forward. During an intensive interview, the participant does most of the talking, with unobtrusive encouragement from the researcher so that the researcher can learn about the topic from the participant's perspective, all while making observations and writing memos. I took note of everything I could contextually without losing focus on the conversation, such as on the participants' interactions with each other, their non-verbal communication, and inflections in their voices (p. 111). Charmaz emphasizes how this can be important when she says, "What participants do not say can be as telling as what they do say" (p. 91).

An interview guide (Appendix C) is a tool that assisted me during the interview to maintain a natural demeanor and progression while asking conversational questions that were pertinent to the research inquiry (Charmaz, 2014, p. 64). In other applications of grounded theory methodology, such as those similar to Glaser, interview guides are not commonly used for fear of forcing the data into preconceived categories, but Charmaz

makes a case that they can rather be helpful in avoiding this and making continued, repeated mistakes like blurting out ideas instead of asking practiced, thoughtful questions (p. 32). Charmaz also encourages researchers to treat the interview guide as an adaptable tool (p. 62), which starts with the open-ended questions that are often sub-questions of the initial research question. Having kept in mind that the questions may change as the study progressed, and that the wording in the interview was that for the participants to easily understand (Creswell, 2013, p. 164), the interview guide first included general questions such as "What have you noticed about the way in which you cook together, and what does that tell me about you as a couple?" "What interactions between you two in the kitchen are similar or different to other interactions in your relationship?" "What factors influence the way in which you two cook together?" and "Can you describe for me the process of how decisions in the kitchen are made?" Using the interview guide while asking these types of open-ended questions allowed me to be able to take notes on my observations about thoughts as they arise during the interview, and some were points to follow up on later during data analysis (Charmaz, 2014, p. 111).

Ethical considerations. From the beginning of recruitment, the best ethical practices were considered to minimize potential risks for participants, while also gathering as rich data as possible to conduct a thorough and contributive research study. To ensure that my ethical considerations were in accordance with the professional standards of my field and the university, I only began collecting data once I had been granted approval from the IRB. After approval, when I recruited participants, as previously discussed, I made sure by checking-in with participants that they understood the informed consent form, what they would be expected to do, what their risks and

benefits were, and I made myself available if they had any questions regarding the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 174). It is also important that the clients understand that participation is voluntary and that they are able to withdraw at any point for any reason, and I reminded them of this before and during the study. Before and during the interview, I remained mindful of non-verbal communication as well as verbal. This means that if I were to sense at any time that a participant was uncomfortable, I would do my best to attend to their discomfort, such as reminding them that they would not have to discuss something that will cause them stress (Charmaz, 2014, p. 68). Aside from verbally thanking my study participants, to show my appreciation for and out of respect for their time, I provided compensation to each couple by gifting them a \$20 Visa gift card, and told them that they could use it anywhere, but also reminded them that they could use it to buy ingredients to cook a meal together.

It is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to plan to the best of his or her ability for any ethical issues that might arise. One such ethical point of consideration, which is easier to plan for, is that of confidentiality. To avoid breaches in confidentiality in the study, I assigned codes to each couple so that anonymity was protected (Creswell, 2013, p. 174), and I kept all relevant documentation such as the informed consents and audio recordings in a locked filing cabinet that only I was able to access, which remains there for 36 months after the study.

With regards to interview procedures, I practiced my intensive interview skills beforehand with other mental health colleagues and brainstormed with them for any emotionally sensitive issues that could arise during the interview, especially as they pertained to the couple relationship, as that is central in the topic (Charmaz, 2014, p.

60). I utilized some of the skills I have as a therapist, attending to sensitivities gently during the interview; however, I was prepared for if the participants experienced any unforeseen emotional discomfort. I would have provided resources for them by way of referring them to therapists in their community. Practicing interviews also helped with my learning the best language to use during the interview, which helps to ease participants, too (p. 61). Creswell brings to discussion the ethics of whether the researcher self-discloses about personal experiences during the interview (2013, p.175). In this constructivist grounded theory study, I want to honor the participants' meaning, so I wanted to make sure that I was not influencing the participants' stories or what they think I am expecting of them, and I kept self-disclosure to a minimum. On the other hand, in order to lessen the distance between the researcher and participants, and to build some rapport, I spent a short amount of time prior to the interview "joining" with them by asking non-topic related questions or discussing a neutral topic like the weather or traffic.

It is important to be aware during interviewing that perceived differences in power may influence what is shared or not shared by participants, and the overall direction of the interview (Charmaz, 2014, p. 73). To account for this, Creswell recommends collaborating "directly with participants by having them review our research questions, or by having them collaborate with us during the data analysis and interpretation phases of research" (2013, p. 48). Fortunately, a key aspect of grounded theory research and intensive interviewing includes checking in with participants to review the accuracy of the representation of their meanings (Charmaz, 2014, p. 69). In an effort to keep the interview open for the participant to feel in control and that they are the

experts, the researcher can take a position as an "interested learner" rather than a "distant investigator," and the language which I chose to use during the interviews made a difference in the interview relationship (p. 73). Even "softening a question" or wording it in a respectful way that fits the client's world view can seem less invasive (p. 69). An example of how I did this was by wording a question in a culturally relevant way or normalizing an issue to reduce stigma and encourage open-sharing.

Creswell reminds researchers that good interview procedures include minding the timing of the interview, being courteous, and listening without offering much advice (2013, p. 166). As intensive interviews are more like semi-structured one-sided conversations, with the researcher taking an "interested learner" position, refraining from interrupting and interjecting ideas is crucial. By joining with the participants beforehand, explaining that I wanted to hear the participants' perspectives without influencing them as much as possible, being aware of non-verbal communication, and by remaining polite and respectful, I tried to create a space for an enjoyable interview experience for the participants.

As a researcher, my goal was also to get as rich data as possible, and in order to do that it sometimes required keeping the interview direction open and remaining flexible, but doing this also helped keep the client's best interest in mind. I employed validation strategies to ensure that the data was trustworthy and closely reflected the thoughts and feelings of the participants (Creswell, 2013, pp. 52-53). Using multiple data collection sources helps with this by capturing different levels of the information (e.g., the words used from the audio recordings and the observations from the notes of the researcher), and thus supporting the multiple realities in the data (Creswell, p.

20). Similarly, I continuously checked-in with the participants to make sure that I understood the meaning of what they were trying to convey, and my dissertation committee was able to review the study, which accounted for even more perspective on the data and its interpretation as well (pp. 52-53).

Data Analysis

Technically, analysis of the data occurs even at the data collection stage, which is a feature of grounded theory research, since you are always collecting and thinking critically about the data you are collecting, which spurs the next step in the study. The recursive nature, found in constant comparative methods, lends itself to the process of data collection and analysis in grounded theory, which make it so that the methodological research steps are not followed strictly linearly (Charmaz, 2014, p. 17; Creswell, 2013, p. 182). Nonetheless, for the sake of an organized report, the practices of how constructivist grounded theorists might analyze data are discussed here. The distinction in analysis between classic grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory is described by the value in staying close to the data and letting codes and theory emerge so that the preconceived ideas do not force the data into categories (Creswell, 2013, p. 196). Instead, Charmaz encourages researchers to be aware of and make known their own preconceptions (2014, p. 156) about the data so as to juxtapose it with what we can discover through the language of our participants (p.114). As we analyze our data, the distinctions in our languages, and world views, become more apparent, which is part of the learning process during constructivist grounded theory analysis (pp. 114-115). By interacting with the data in this way as we look for distinctions and patterns, one benefit of grounded theory strategies becomes clear: researchers can learn about the gaps in data

from the beginning and fill in those gaps with more accurate, purposefully directed data collection and analysis (p. 118). There are two major stages of coding in grounded theory, the initial coding, which in this study included close-range interview transcription incident-by-incident analysis, and the focused coding, which is where I took a wider stance to organize and decide which categorical data made sense to move forward in the direction of a theory (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). To assist with the organization of the data during analysis, I used a computer software called Nvivo (Version 12), which has been used in many qualitative research studies. With this software, I imported the de-identified transcripts to code the large amounts of data.

Initial Coding

While data are being collected and simultaneous analysis pursues, the researcher in a grounded theory study is constantly coding. According to Charmaz, coding is what links data with the theory that emerges from beginning to end (2014, p. 113). In the beginning, during initial coding, I scrutinized small units of data intensely to determine the analytical sense that they made (p. 109), naming or labeling the units that later were used to determine categories. As a researcher starts to code the initial data, she provides an interpretive lens to bring forth the meanings of the shared stories and her own observations (p. 111). In order to do this, I needed to take apart the data (typically the information from interview transcription and notes) and make sense of the actions and meanings embedded in the data (p. 113). At this point, I asked myself what was going on in the data, what certain statements and actions meant implicitly and explicitly, and what might the participant have said about the data itself? (pp. 111-116). It is important to

consider the participant's perspectives to understand both what is being said and what is not being said.

It was also as important during initial coding to "remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your readings of the data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 114). I noticed that sometimes as I explore one theoretical category, my data indicated a different direction, and instead of trying to make the data fit my frame, I followed the data's lead, making the analysis more trustworthy (p. 120). Another way of respecting and validating the data from the participants was to code for actions rather than topics like some other qualitative studies do (p. 121). Coding for actions helps researchers avoid coding for types of people, which can narrow your focus on the individuals instead of patterns, and it also helps prevent us from jumping to premature theoretical conclusions (pp. 116-117). I used gerunds when I coded as often as possible, which made it easier to stick to coding for actions and then later turn these actions into categories (pp. 120-121).

Through the initial coding phase, I constantly tried to keep in mind what categories I thought certain actions, processes, and meanings belong to (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). After a while, I was able to conceptualize a bit bigger of a picture in which these data fit (p. 113), which was later use in focused coding. Concurrently, I was also able to see a couple things happen at this point that helped determine how valid my analysis had been. Firstly, I checked to see if my conceptualization made sense in the empirical world and whether or not it was relevant to what was actually happening in the data (p. 133), and then I was also able to see what kinds of gaps existed in the data and where more information was needed (p. 118).

Initial coding considerations. For this study, I conducted my analyses of data in incident-by incident units, since I wanted to compare processes and behaviors and make sense of them in their contexts (Charmaz, 2014, p. 128). In order to do this accurately, I transcribed all interview recordings and my memos so that I could maintain and refer to details that were as close as possible to the participants' language and individual realities (Charmaz, 2014, p. 92; Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Coding full transcripts can provide the researcher a deep, up-close level of analysis, so it is important to take a step back from time to time to get a wider view across codes and sections (Charmaz, 2014, p. 136). For that reason, I engaged in a comparative method of analysis, as well, to compare my data during each step of the analysis. This method requires constantly comparing data with other data and with the codes that you develop so as to gain multiple perspectives of your data and also challenge your perspectives to see if your codes still fit (p. 132). When it was appropriate, I also used the participants' own words/terms as codes themselves, known as in-vivo codes. By using in-vivo codes, we can pay better attention to the language participants use, which "serve as symbolic markers" of meanings (p. 134). In-vivo codes bring us one step closer to maintaining the participants' meaning, so the codes can help us stay in-check that we have properly understood what the data is saying (p. 135).

Focused Coding

During focused coding, the researcher continues to test codes against large quantities of data to make sure they still fit (Charmaz, 2014, p. 114). However, the data is tested using categories that are determined using the initial codes. At this point, I was able to have some idea of the central theories that would be emerging in the data, and I was

more confident about the "adequacy and conceptual strength" of the codes (p. 140). As I analyzed the initial codes and continued to work inductively through them, I looked for patterns among initial codes to help me select and refine them to higher levels of abstraction in the direction of theory development (pp. 140-144). Essentially, I was looking for codes of my codes. Focused coding is usually a bit quicker process than initial coding, as it requires the researcher to be less immersive, taking that step back to analyze what has already been analyzed and making sense of those analyses.

Theoretical coding. As the focused codes are being selected, theoretical construction can strengthen even more during theoretical coding. Theoretical sensitivity is needed to bring forth the processes and meanings of the patterns from the categories that have been discovered during focused coding (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 160- 161). At this level of analysis, I compared focused codes with each other to understand their relationships and begin theorizing about these relationships (p. 150). Again, to strengthen the validity of the study, a researcher can take advantage of the new data to determine if there are more areas where information is needed (p. 151). It is during theoretical coding that I needed to remain even more reflexive, as preconceptions can permeate throughout the study, but can be especially influential when making sense of codes in broader contexts (p. 153). For example, because of my own world view and my training as a marriage and family therapist, it is easier to see how processes make sense through these lenses, so it was important to consider how the data would be perceived from other disciplines and through other concepts, as well (p. 153).

Memo-writing. I mentioned earlier in the chapter that I took notes, or memos, during the intensive interviewing, making note of body language and interactions that

occur, and anything else that I observed that the audio-recorder did not record. Memos about ideas that occur to you in the moment while coding or about observations you make of interactions can be powerful to helping "compare data, to explore ideas about the codes, and to direct further data gathering" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 12). Memos also become useful in theory-development too, as they help the researcher get a bigger picture of the identified processes (Creswell, 2013, p. 89). Charmaz points out that through memos, assumptions may become more apparent too (2014, p. 162), which makes sense because memos are your personal, informal thoughts throughout the study (p. 165). I kept a memo journal throughout the study to compare ideas and help keep me accountable and reflexive about the data (p. 165).

Theoretical Sampling and Saturation

Unique to grounded theory, theoretical sampling is not a method of sample selection, but a purposeful collection of data that helps saturate categories of the emergent theory (Charmaz, 2014, p. 192). As you go back into the field to gather more data to strengthen your categories, you hopefully will have more information to define and saturate the properties of the categories (pp. 192-193). Technically, theoretical sampling can happen at any stage in the data collection and analysis process in which you have categories developing (p. 204). With regards to generalizability, grounded theory does not aim to make theories that are generalizable and representative of a population, rather to generate theory about a phenomenon or process (pp. 7-8) For that reason, Charmaz distinguishes the following about theoretical sampling:

The purpose of theoretical sampling is to obtain data to help you explicate your categories. When you fill out the properties of your categories, you define pivotal

qualities of the studied experience. Simultaneously, you provide a useful analytic handle for understanding it. In short, theoretical sampling pertains only to conceptual and theoretical development of your analysis; it is not about representing a population or increasing the statistical generalizability of your results. (2014, p. 198)

When seeking further data to saturate my categories, I went back out into the field and interviewed more people, and each time my focus on the emergent categories was more refined, which required adjusting the interview questions and interview guide accordingly (p. 200). The refining of my categories as the theory started to take shape led to more specific questions during interviews over the course of the study. Because of this, interviews became more efficient from one interview to the next. Not only does theoretical sampling help categories, and in turn theories, become more saturated, but it also helps the researcher further validate theoretical ideas by making sure participant experiences still seem relevant, as well as help make distinctions about those experiences which otherwise may not seem different until you dive deeper into the data (p. 200). Since theoretical sampling defines the properties of categories, essentially, saturation is reach and theoretical sampling can cease when the categories are defined and relationships between categories are explicated (p. 213). In Chapter 4, I will discuss how I have sorted and integrated the data and salient codes to assist in developing a theory about how the interactions of couples in the kitchen relate to their relationship overall.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter begins with a description of the pertinent characteristics of the study sample to use as a reference when considering contexts surrounding the data. I then continue by briefly discussing the grounded theory that encompasses the three relational components of couples' cooking interactions and how it emerged from the data. The chapter then includes a detailed analysis of all major categories that emerged naturally to create the central theory, supported by quotes taken directly from the interview transcripts to illustrate participants' meanings.

Sample Characteristics

Eight couples of various backgrounds and experiences were interviewed over the course of a six-month period. The intensive interviews lasted anywhere between 54 and 94 minutes, with the mean interview length being 76 minutes. All interviews were conducted in the couples' homes and no one else was present but the couple and myself. During the interviews, I made sure to check-in with the participants continuously to honor each of their meanings of their experiences, as well as to make sure the participants were emotionally in a safe space. I recorded all interviews with a digital recorder, as well as wrote my observations in a notepad, which I included as part of the memoing process. I transcribed each interview and memo thoroughly and analyzed the data recursively, returning back to each step of the analytic process to make sure theory development most accurately represented the participants' meanings.

Seven of the couples were interviewed in South Florida, while one was interviewed in North Texas. All couples were heterosexual couples who lived together for at least two years and who cook together at a minimum of once per week. Of the

couples, five were married, two were dating, and one was engaged to be married. The ages of each participant ranged from 28 to 68 years old with a mean age of 43.8 years old. The length of time each couple had been together ranged from two and a half to 48 years, with a mean length of time being 19.1 years together. Each participant was asked how they identify themselves culturally, and the following spread of cultures according to them are as follows: five Jewish-American, four White-American, two Italian, one Jewish Canadian-American, one Jewish-Cuban, one Hispanic-Italian, one British, and one White-Native American. In keeping with a tenet of constructivist grounded theory, I decided to leave most of the cultural identifiers that people used to describe themselves rather than simplifying them, as most of the participants had indicated during the interviews that each of their cultural identities (often more than one identifier per person due to blended families) played a role in shaping the way they approach food and cooking. Also, since culture did end up influencing one of the more theory-informing categories, it seemed important to preserve the cultural identifiers and to be as close to the participants' perspectives as possible. Throughout the rest of this document, participants will be referred to by the codes that were designated to maintain confidentiality. Codes are in the format of C1F, where C is Couple, 1 is couple #1, and F is the female of the couple. Similarly, C2M would refer to the male of couple number 2. In any dialogues, "N" represents me, the interviewer.

The Couple's Cooking Triad Theory

For this study, I set out to explore the relational elements that made up how couples interact in the kitchen, wanting to understand how to organize the phenomenon I could see but not explain. One participant shared a sentiment that described this

phenomenon well:

I mean we can't have a different relationship than the one we have in the kitchen because the kitchen is the relationship manifested . . . I mean the kitchen is the relationship made manifest. It's like we get along well in there, we work as a team, it is symbiotic. And when we're out of the kitchen, we work well as a team, it's symbiotic. (C2M)

This quote is also an illustration that supports the intended purpose of the study.

During initial coding, I coded each incident using gerunds and ended up with 95 initial codes and a total of 1,387 references of the data. While constantly comparing the data, and through focused and theoretical analyses, categories of the initial codes emerged, which became part of creating a central theory. When all the categories were saturated and categories were analyzed for relationships, a theory emerged that helps to explicate what relational elements are involved when a couple is cooking together. This theory about couples' cooking interactions is made up of three main components: Relationship Skills, Emotional Connections, and Languageing. It is important to note that each component is not in itself an isolated factor and that all three components are interrelated. That is, relationship skills are often illustrated by the emotional connections of couples and the languageing they use to communicate; emotional connections are often dependent on the strength of the relationship skills and determine the direction of the languageing being used; and the languageing of couples interacting in the kitchen is part of what highlights the relationship skills and unspoken emotional connections between them, especially as they relate to cooking.

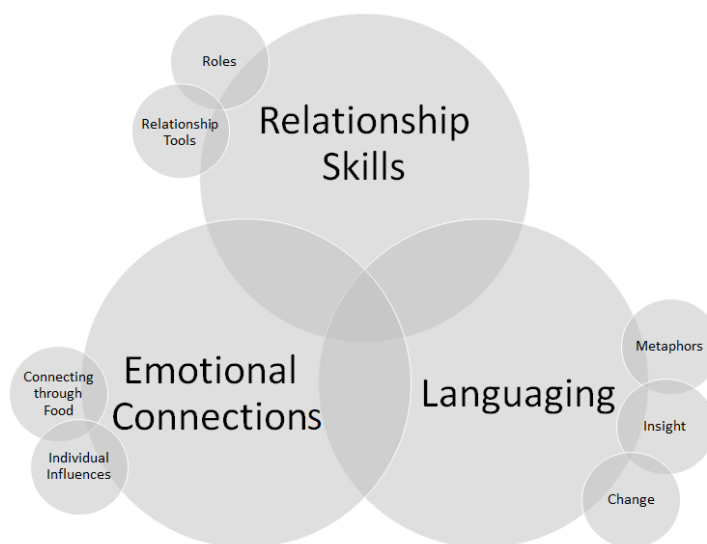


Figure 1. Three Components of Couples Cooking Interactions

This figure illustrates the relationships between the Couple's Cooking Triad and their subsequent properties. The smaller circles in the figure represent the conceptual categories that make up the major theoretical components; these subsumed categories are also to be considered as interrelated to each other and the other major categories at times. The Relationship Skills component includes the specific relationship tools found that couples employ while cooking together, as well as roles that each take in the kitchen and with each other. Emotional Connections is made up of the different connections humans have with food and each other that make their way into the kitchen with a couple, and the individual differences that each partner bring with them when becoming a couple. Languaging is a category that describes the metaphors couples use to talk about their relationships in the kitchen, the insight that talking about their interactions in the kitchen has provided them about their relationship, and the changes they have noticed and practiced using cooking as a platform.

Relationship Skills

One of the three parts of the central theory about how couples interact in the kitchen is Relationship Skills. This category describes and contains the interrelated subcategories Relationship Tools and Roles. During the process of the interviews, and confirmed through the analysis, couples brought forth various relationship skills that are used while interacting in the kitchen, some of which are considered relationship tools that they actively used to maintain their relationship, and some of which are the roles that each person fits into given different contexts.

Relationship Tools

Relationship tools, which you need in order to perform skills, were mentioned through every interview in a variety of ways, both in the kitchen and in the relationships. Every couple discussed tools they use while cooking to relate to each other in order to complete a meal, and in some cases relationship tools were noted in the analysis process that were not explicit in the quotes. Nonetheless, relationship tools like respecting each other, showing appreciation, complimenting each other, and compromising presented themselves many times when couples talked about cooking together, and many of the tools appeared to be important to the couples. In interview number two, C2M stressed that even if they don't always agree, there's always "a level of appreciating efforts," which most couples seemed to agree in different words. Making compromises for each other when they could, like C4F does: "I found out he doesn't like soy sauce. Okay, so, uh, I just won't cook things with soy sauce," seem to go a long way in helping the couple relationship. Incidentally, compromises and many other tools in this category were not only important to the couple, but they also expressed these tools were evident while the couple were

cooking. The figure (below) illustrates Relationship Tools, the first of the two categories that make up Relationship Skills, and its subcategories.

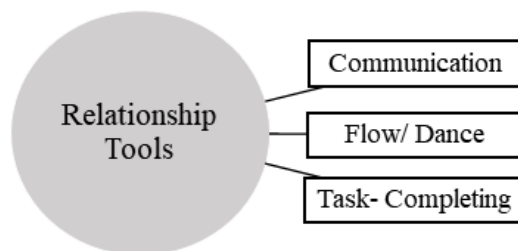


Figure 2. Relationship Tools Category

Communication. All participants referred to “communicating” in one form or another numerous times throughout the interviews (referenced 75 times). When asked about what interactions of the couple might be seen in the whole cooking process, participant C6F answered:

I typically work day times and [he] usually works in the evening when people get off work, so I'll call him and be like, “Hey can you check, make sure there's enough broccoli? When I come home I have this idea, etc.” So even though it's communication about food, it's still some form of communication. So it opens up a new realm of being able to talk to each other and communicating with one another. So then I can just be like, “Hey, how are you doing? Are you having a good day? Oh, by the way, can you check to see if there's broccoli in the fridge?”

Communicating with each other about any part of the cooking process, as mentioned in the last quote, while cooking seemed to present opportunities for some couples to actually practice communicating effectively. Participant C3F shared about how communicating differently in the kitchen has helped the process run smoother:

I've learned to just ask, "What can I do? And how can I help?" instead of walking into the kitchen and just doing it. Because it makes him- I think it would make him frustrated that I would just go in and start doing stuff like if I saw that the water was boiling or if I saw some, you know, I would just act. And now I ask.

When talking about communication in the kitchen, couples referred to how they use communication both verbally and nonverbally. Nonverbal communication is especially important to note in the study because of its relevance in experiential therapy. In one interview, participant C6M mentioned how he and his partner are able to pick up on each other's nonverbal communication in the kitchen:

I would say we're able to pick up each other's kind of vibe in the kitchen. . . We know when something's bothering us, we kind of pick up on each other. Like "Hey, there's something bothering there, do you want to talk about it? Is there something on your mind?" We'll kind of bring it up, we'll know if we're in a good mood or not, so we're able to pick up on the little stuff like that.

Similarly to how this couple used their nonverbal communication to check-in with each other, many other couples talked about checking-in with their partner at multiple points of the cooking process. For example, C7F stated:

We, I think we check-in with each other a lot. Like I don't, you know, in our... By checking in I mean you'll... Say I'm peeling something, you'll say, "Do you want me to do that for you?" But I'll, I'll be like "No, I'm fine, I can do this." But like throughout the day, if we're making a meal, we'll text, we'll be like "What do you want to eat?"

Couples also demonstrated checking-in with each other throughout the interview, asking

each other if the other wanted to speak first or what the other person thought. This type of communication was very common among most of the couples.

Flow/Dance. In addition to communication, several couples expressed how anticipating each other's needs happened quite often in the kitchen either purposely or unknowingly. Some participants described the way in which they are able to anticipate their partner's needs while cooking as a sort of "flow" or "dance" in the kitchen (22 references). Illustrated in the following example, couple number one refer to their movements in the kitchen as a dance:

C1F: Yeah, we dance! I mean it's a dance in the kitchen. We know where-

C1M: I know when to go to the sink and clean and when not to.

C1F: Yeah! Yeah, we know where to move!

C1M: I get the parchment paper ready when it's, before it's asked for.

From this couple's interview, it seemed that each of them took pride in being able to anticipate each other's needs and movements in the kitchen because to them it meant they knew each other well and have been practicing tending to each other's needs in (and out) of the kitchen. Another couple discussed how the flow in the kitchen visibly changes and is interrupted if they are not getting along.

C2F: Or we bring it into the kitchen and it just doesn't meld as well. If we're not in a good place and we go into the kitchen to do something, it's not-

C2M: It's not a good place.

C2F: The dance doesn't flow as well cuz you're uncomfortable around each other.

Gathered from everything the couples said about being able to anticipate each other's needs, the flow/dance (referenced 22 times) in the kitchen depends partly on the

sentiment of each partner and greatly on the way the couple is communicating. Couple eight shared that when they are not communicating well with each other about their needs and movements, they “bump into each other getting things done.”

Task-completing. Referring to the cooking process during the interviews, all eight couples talked about decision-making (27 references), and seven out of eight couples addressed how they approach problem-solving (18 references) while cooking together. Couples indicated that from the beginning to the end of the cooking process, making decisions together and dealing with problems that come up were important skills in completing meals. Further, the way that couples approached both decision-making and problem-solving differed depending on the situation and between each other.

For most of the couples, decision-making about meals happened jointly in the planning process. Regardless of who initiated the plan, most decision-making involved an exchange of ideas. Typically, the exchange would involve a lot of asking the other for their thoughts or opinions, such as in the following:

C6M: I'll say like, “What would you like to eat tonight?” . . . She was like, “Ohh, I don't know, but fish? . . . Hey maybe we can go to Coscto.”. . . So when she got home, we both went to Costco and we got the fish and stuff, and we sort of started planning what we wanted to do with it. And I wanted her to have the fish cooked the way she made a dish a few months ago, which was special-style like she made the salmon. So I was like, “Hey, why don't we make it like that one again?”

The back-and-forth decision-making process between the couples differed from couple to couple slightly, with most of the differences having to do with what influences their decisions, such as what they were in the mood for, their schedules, or what was on sale at

the store, but most of the interactions between idea-exchanging were similar in the process.

In some cases, a few couples took turns letting one person make final decisions about the meals, and two couples stated that one partner almost always makes the final decisions, but that they still consider the other partner's preferences. For one of those two couples, couple number eight, they noted that decision-making depended on the context; although the wife usually makes the decisions about what they are going to eat, the husband makes final decisions about other things between them like on finances or house maintenance. For the other of the two couples, couple number one, the husband was satisfied with their process.

C1M: I will throw an idea out to [her] and she will react to the idea, and if she likes it, she goes with the idea. And if she doesn't like it, "Nope, can't do that." I say, "Okay, just a thought."

For some couples, this process may not work, and problems could occur in the kitchen. Two distinct patterns of interaction emerged from the data that couples use as tools for effective problem-solving skills. The first pattern was not blaming; couples dealt with problems as they arose in a way that worked for the two of them, sometimes even getting creative, but pointed out specifically that they didn't blame each other. In reference to problems that occur in the kitchen, participant C2F stated, "It's a, you know, 'I guess we're calling pizza,'" and continued that she and her husband make a joke out of the things that don't turn out well. Similarly, couple number seven shared that they sometimes keep trying to work with what they have, like C7M did when they burnt their steaks: "I think I served it for breakfast yesterday and I just kind of dressed it up again."

Another tool couples seemed to utilize that emerged as a problem-solving pattern was being mindful. This mindfulness came across in the way of compromises, adjusting ingredients or procedures, or considering their reactions. C7M lends the advice:

Yeah, and I think, you know, kitchens are, meals are generally a source of frustration at times, and so handling the other side of the relationship, not just the good, you know, how you handle the ups and downs, cooking is similar. So you can't just lash out at the other person and so, kind of taking a more mindful approach. Knowing, you know, what's gonna cause frustration and nipping that in the bud.

Whatever the solutions, which are unique to each couple, and the ways in which couples get to their solutions, all of these decision-making and problem-solving processes help to get meals completed.

Roles

Just like with any group dynamics, couples fell into patterned roles while relating to each other in the kitchen. Often, these roles depended on different contexts, too, such as who of the couple had more experience with certain recipes/technique, who introduced the meal idea, and what each of their strengths were. One of the most commonly mentioned descriptions of roles in the kitchen, appropriately, were “chef and sous chef.” As described above, some couples take turns playing each role, “I mean one of us is usually the chef and the other is the sous chef” (C4M), and some assumed their roles more consistently in the kitchen. Equally, the roles each partner took in the kitchen were not static across other areas in their relationship, but discussing the roles gave them an opportunity to compare them across contexts.

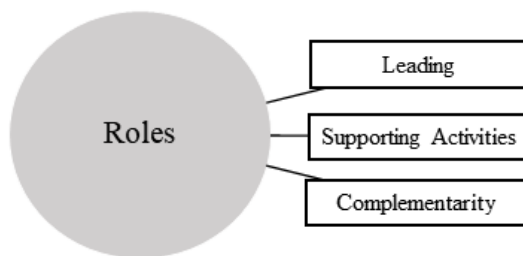


Figure 3. Roles Category

The figure (above) illustrates Roles, the second of the two categories that make up Relationship Skills, and its subcategories.

Leading. Again, the roles that each partner took in the kitchen varied across meals and other areas of their lives, but all couples talked in some way about leading a meal or task while the other partner “supports” (see next subheading). In some cases, leading roles (41 references) in the kitchen were assumed because of experience or expertise.

C4F: I’m the most experienced cook. He never cooked before he left his home. I, I grew up cooking and stuff like that so it’s kind of like he’s learning, he’s learned a lot. Still learning with me, so I definitely take the lead in the kitchen I would say.

In other cases, couples took turns taking the lead, sometimes based on who came up with the idea. C7F discusses their roles:

So we have like two sides of the counter space and one of us is either at the counter, and one of us normally takes the lead on the meal, would you say when we’re planning? Like okay, so it’s my turn to kind of direct or your turn to kind of direct and then we’ll both be doing different tasks.

For many of the couples, leading the meal included delegating duties to the other partner,

“So I gave him the responsibility of getting me more meat. . . ‘This is what you’re gonna do. . . This is the time you’re gonna do it’” (C1F). Taking leadership roles, whether consistently or sharing them, was seen as just “natural” and a way to be efficient in the kitchen.

Supporting activities. Every couple mentioned various support activities (65 references) that either one or both of the partners did when they cook a meal together. Supporting activities tended to be the “sous chef’s” responsibility, but were sometimes shared depending on schedule/timing, personality differences, and what each person prefers doing. Supporting activities in this study describe any task that one or both partners do to support the other person’s role in completing the dinner, and are usually done peripherally, such as shopping, prepping, cleaning up, menu-planning, and providing feedback. Participant C1M mentioned, “So my role here in the kitchen is the partner who helps the other partner accomplish a mission. . . I’m there to give support and occasionally give an idea. . . I like that role.” Cleaning, and providing feedback were the most frequently mentioned support activities, and every couple approached each activity differently. Whether while the other person was cooking or at the end of the meal, clean-up tasks were referenced as an important part of the collaborative cooking process. When her husband was cooking the main dish, C5F still kept busy, contributing to the meal: “I wasn’t eating bon-bons and lying around. I was still in the kitchen cleaning up or whatever.”

Meal-planning was the one supporting activity that was done the most collaboratively. Most couples either decided together what was going to be cooked that week or while at the grocery store. Food prepping was one activity that was done most

separately, where one person might be preparing side dishes or smaller ingredients while the other person prepared the “main dish,” or where one person prepared most of the foods for the other to put together at the end. Couple number three demonstrates:

C3F: It’s something that we enjoy doing together because we both, we know what our roles are, like he’s the chopper.

C3M: Right!

C3F: Like he chops up everything, like when I need pancetta for the carbonara, like he doesn’t make the carbonara, but he prepares everything. So he cuts up the pancetta really small for me. When I need prosciutto, he slices the prosciutto in the prosciutto slicer.

Seeking and providing feedback while cooking was another common supporting activity and mostly happened in the way of tasting, as illustrated in the following example given by C6M:

Sometimes the chicken, sometimes I might make a little too salty, but lately it’s a lot better. And I always ask her, like “Hey, was that okay?” and she’s like “Yeah, it was perfect” or “too much or little there.” Or sometimes with the fish when I would bake it, it would be cooked just right or sometimes “Hey, it’s a little more overdone” or “We could cook it a little more next time.”

One interesting point about the feedback is that couples seemed to make it a point to provide feedback sensitively or in a humorous way that didn’t offend the other person.

C2M reflected on his wife’s feedback: “If she doesn’t like something I make, she goes, ‘Oh, that’s interesting.’ It’s not terrible, it’s not bad, it’s interesting.” Feedback was an important part of the cooking process because as many partners shared, they wanted the

other enjoy the food, “I don’t want to make it, I don’t want it not to come out the way he wants it because I want him to enjoy what I’m making” (C3F).

Complementarity. Throughout the interviews, each couple discussed ways in which each partner complements the other and how this complementarity (70 references) helps them work well together in the kitchen. As one participant stated, C2M: “There’s a level of ‘I’ll be the frame, you be the art.’” Couples expressed that their unique strengths and personalities help create a balance in the ways they interact in the kitchen. One couple pointed out that they even make an effort to “figure out ways to complement each other” (C6F). Some ways in which couples felt they complemented each other in the kitchen were by picking up where one person lacks, taking on the different leadership roles together, and by making accompanying dishes that pair well with each other to make a whole meal. Participant C8F offered a metaphor of their relationship in speaking of the accompanying dishes complementing the meal:

Like it’s a true partnership because you need the other things to have the meal with the steak . . . But to have like a good beautiful meal and you need all those pieces . . . and so, I also think [there are] a lot of parts of our life where one of us does take the lead. Someone is sort of the main dish in that area, and the other person is supporting.

Often couples talked about their complementarity in terms of strengths, especially as they pertain to things the other partner is weaker in. Couple number three shared about their strengths:

C3F: But we both have strengths. Like for example, I suck with dough. I can’t do dough.

C3M: You can't do bakery.

C3F: And I'm not good at baking either. I can cook great, but certain things I'm not good at. And that's one of the things he's very good, like when we make fresh pasta . . . Like he can fix the dough, make the dough, like when the dough gets screwed up and disgusting, he just has a way of like, he can fix it. I can't do that. . . So I think that we're both good at certain things.

When couples talked about their division of tasks based on strengths, some referred to it somewhat as a deferral process. C5M stated, "I think I wash the dishes better," to which C5F replied, "Well that's fine, it saves my nails. I dry and put away." By utilizing what each person was good at and deferring to each other person based on those strengths, or by supporting different roles in the kitchen (because of personality, preference, or whatever reason) couples found it easier to complete meals together.

Emotional Connections

The second of the three components of the Couple's Cooking Triad is Emotional Connections. Throughout the interview process, couples shared experiences and beliefs that connected them to each other and to other people in their systems. Couples used the food to describe these connections, as well as how different connections influence them to relate to food and their partners while cooking. Therefore, the theoretical category Emotional Connections contains the conceptual subcategories Connecting Through Food and Individual Influences (such as culture and values).

Connecting Through Food

Many people, not excluding the couples in this study, use cooking as a creative way to show love and care, and as a way to bond with each other. Participant C7F

describes this connection: “I see cooking . . . I would say like 90 percent of the time we cook and we eat at the table. And I think that’s important for us, I think we see it as time together, connecting.” One couple even shared that their creativity is more evident when they are spending time together: “So a lot of our more creative dishes will happen when . . . we’re using it as time spent together” (C3F). Through more examples, I will illustrate some of these types of connections couples make through food. The figure (below) illustrates Connecting Through Food, the first of the two categories that make up Emotional Connections, and its subcategories.

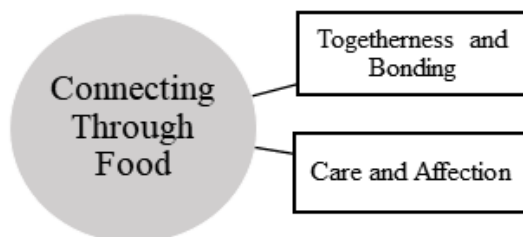


Figure 4. Connecting Through Food Category

Togetherness and bonding. Using cooking as a way to spend time together came up frequently (70 references) throughout seven of the eight interviews. Some couples shared that they made it a point to prioritize their time in the kitchen:

C5M: And we are not watching television. . . And so, it’s our time, I guess you could say.

C5F: Yea. So, we are enjoying being together.

Although almost all participants did talk about cooking together as a way for the couple themselves to spend time, it was difficult for many not to extend their stories of bonding in the kitchen to other family members. For example, C1F stated:

And we always had family dinner. And I think that’s really important, too, for this. Because the cooking includes the family. And now I pass it on to the kids.

I'm making aprons, they come here, they pull out the bottom drawer, they know their aprons. [Our granddaughter], the first thing she [says], "What are we cooking tonight?" and she pulls up the stool to the sink. So I think that cooking together is not only as the couple, but to engage the family.

Other couples shared similar stories, emphasizing the importance of spending time with their children, grandchildren, and parents.

Several couples also explained that they feel close to other family members when they cook certain family recipes, even family members who have passed away.

C1F: My father is the one who always did the cutting for my grandmother. So she'd roll out the pasta paper thing by hand and roll it really, really tight into a cylinder and then he would take over and go chop, chop, chop, chop, chop. And I did that this weekend. And it was like I'm guided, I am physically guided by my grandmother when I do these things.

Memories of cooking together as a couple and of special recipes from their families seemed to make a big impact on the connections participants felt to their cooking. This also included for some couples who were parents wanting to make sure their children had memories of them cooking and eating together as a family. Couple two shared:

C2F: So that's kind of, I think what I, what we've created, and I want all of that to, I want memories to be surrounded. I mean that's not the goal, but that's the, at the end of the day I think that's what we've done, like-

C2M: And it's also, it's not a bad goal by the way.

C2F: No, no. And there's nice mem- fond memories of being around the table.

Six couples specifically talked about when they spend time traveling together, that many

of their memories are centered around food. C5F demonstrates this recall of a certain trip, “[He] and I have fond memories of going there. So a lot of our memories are food related.”

Care and affection. Every couple interviewed in this study described cooking in one way or another as a way to show care and affection (41 references) in their relationship. Naturally, couples approached the way they show care and affection differently. At its most straight-forward, cooking and food were used between couples to show care by taking an interest in their partner’s health. One couple talked about always making the other chicken soup when they are sick, and another couple specifically stated that they check-in with each other about their nutrition. C7F reminded her partner during the interview, “You’ll always be like, ‘Have you had your greens today? Did you eat your greens?’”

Another way couples showed care and affection through their cooking were by cooking foods that they know the other person loved. Couple number three stated several times that their own happiness was for the other person to enjoy their food. The wife even went so far as to incorporate her husband’s family recipes for this reason.

C3F: So I got some tutorials from his mom. Like I spent time with his mom, I learned how to make her tiramisu that’s his favorite, I learned how to make cream sauces from her, her ragu. So that this way I could take some of his favorite dishes from his childhood and like work them into our rotation.

Similarly, the wife of couple number two shared that she incorporates dishes from her husband’s Cuban culture into their repertoire as a “show of affection.”

Some couples mentioned “intimacies” that happen in the kitchen while cooking.

In some ways, participants meant this from more of an emotional closeness standpoint, and in other ways it was talked of in the form of physical affection. C8F clarified their version of physical affection in the kitchen through the following example:

C8F: I feel like the kitchen is one of the places where we're most affectionate with each other, too.

N: Okay, tell me about that.

C8F: You know, like, if I'm cooking at the stove and there's music on, and [he] will kind of come up behind me and give me a hug, kiss me on the cheek. It's like the moment where he comes home from work of course is like the, you know, that moment when we come together and a kiss has to happen, and at some point in there, the greeting.

Just like couple eight, most participants talked about some form of physical playfulness, touching, and/or kissing while cooking together.

Individual Influences

Although it is difficult to see couple interactions outside the context of the relationship, there are some other individual influences, like from their families of origin and cultures, that play a part in how each partner approaches cooking with the other. Some of those influences change or merge over time together. Nonetheless, the values and experiences that each partner come to the couple with serve as at least a starting point at the beginning of the relationship. These influences can sometimes still be seen throughout the relationship, depending on how the couple negotiated those differences. It is especially important here to remember that many categories and subcategories can relate to each other in various ways (like culture and family), so while I differentiate

these categories here, they should also be seen as interconnected. This figure (below) illustrates Individual Influences, the second of the two categories that make up Emotional Connections, and its subcategories.

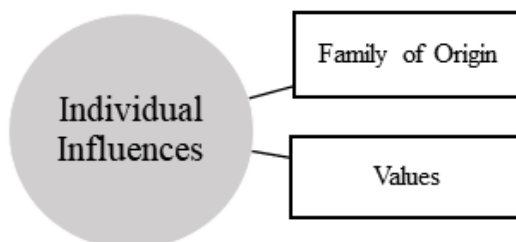


Figure 5. Individual Influences Category

Family of origin. In most cases, before couples become couples, they have had years of their own experiences with food and cooking, usually within their own family of origin (61 references). Inevitably, as the couple comes together, some of the influences from the families of origin merge because they are similar or they find a way to combine them, or they clash and couples have to negotiate whose way of doing something will make its way into the kitchen. The following example illustrates where two ways of cooking did not blend, and the couple adopted one partner's family of origin's way of cooking:

C2F: So typical American. Hamburgers, steak-

C2M: Breaded chicken, bacon. . . .

C2F: But we're bigger in the potted meals [now] and that's a conflict because I'm more comfortable, "Give me a pork chop or give me a steak." I had my meat, salad, potatoes, and rice.

C2F explained that in her husband's family of origin they made a lot of potted meals (one pot meals), and that is what they do a lot of in their newly combined family, but it is not

what she was used to. In some couples, different food systems combined more harmoniously, as in couple number six. Participant C6F had shared that she and her partner come from families that approach cooking differently, but that they incorporate both ways when they cook together.

C6F: My mom was the main chef, so- And she worked a lot. At one point in our lives, there was a point where she worked three jobs, so she was home but there was limited times where she was home. So whenever she would cook, it was like “Hey, this is what we’re having cuz this is what we have right now.” Mom didn’t have time to go to the store or whatever. So I think that my upbringing that way kind of just made me more aware of leftovers that got thrown away with her, it just hurt. And so even now, financially, we’re okay as far as like if I throw away some extra macaroni, it doesn’t really hurt my soul, but I remember that . . . So I always try, that’s why I’m always trying to think of things like . . . cuz I don’t keep food for more than a week in the fridge. And I’m like ‘Okay, this has three more days left, if I make it tonight, I have about this much left, we can use all this food.’ . . . Whereas he’s like in-the-moment-type of prepping.

This participant showed how she made some compromises with herself regarding leftovers, but had also shared that she’s okay buying things “in-the-moment” like her partner does, too.

Similarly, couple number four explained that they had somewhat similar upbringings in terms of limited exposure to food choices, but that they decided together to be different than either of their families of origin: “A lot we’ll look up . . like the recipes and stuff . . . and be like ‘Oh this is cool,’ and so I think, I think we’re both

expanding from our original family set.” Several couples pointed out that they made an effort to do things differently than their family of origin, especially for the sake of their relationship with their partner or new family.

C8F: I think on one hand, I don’t want it to be so much like the way that my parents do it now where it looks like my mom’s just chilling and my dad’s doing all the work. And so I think we’re intentional about that and not just like assuming those roles.

One pattern that came up throughout the interviews related to influences from participants’ families of origin was the level of exposure to various cultures and eating experiences. C1F discloses of her experiences:

[He] had a much more varied experience with food than I did. His parents offered him more, like he, even though he says they weren’t rich, they still had more financial means than my parents did. So we didn’t go out to eat that often. When we did go out to eat, it was probably once a year on Mother’s Day, and to the Chinese restaurant where for 75 cents you could get a plate of chowmein. [His] parents . . . took him to places where he ate lobster and shrimp and things like- And I never, ever, ever had eaten those things. It was just alien! And so the first time we ever went to a Chinese restaurant together . . . and I tasted Lobster Cantonese, I thought I’d died and gone to heaven. What have I been missing all these years?

Sometimes the different levels of exposure were due to financial means or culture, and other times families were just more reserved in what they were willing to try. Participant C4M described his family’s rituals as “basic,” and pointed out throughout the interview

that he has been interested in trying and cooking new things with his partner.

Values. Either from their own family of origin, culture, or experiences in life, each partner also comes to the relationship with their own set of values (131 references) that are important to them. Sometimes they are similar to each other's, and sometimes one person's value set gets adopted more readily in the newly combined system. In both cases, the individual and newly combined set of values are sometimes evident in the ways couples cook together. For instance, C3M shared that his value of being the person he wants to be shows in the way that he makes sure to make something that his family likes, even if sometimes he doesn't feel like doing it. Likewise, when couple number seven was asked what someone might observe about them in the kitchen, the following exchange occurred:

C7M: I would probably just say some of the values. . . That we're confident in ourselves, patient with each other, individualistic in that we both trust each other to kind of do our thing, have the right vision for our meal to come together properly.

C7F: Thoughtful of each other's needs and where we are.

Interestingly, couple number seven agreed on having most of the same values, even though they are from different cultural backgrounds.

C7F: I think one of the main cultural differences between the Jewish and the English culture is that English culture is polite to a fault, I don't know if you know. And the Jewish culture. . . How would you describe it? Not bad, not bad. Direct to a fault? (Laughing).

C7M: Yeah.

Culture can play a huge role in shaping the way we interact with each other based on values and traditions. Also, cultural influences in the kitchen can originate from someone's nationality, ethnicity, religion, their own family culture, and from many different ways we define culture. Regardless of the source of the cultural influence, according to most of the couples in the study, these differences and similarities can also be seen in the kitchen.

C2F: He'll make the more elaborate meals. I'll do the more typical thing, chicken cutlets, tater tots, and broccoli. That was like- it was perfect, you know? So I have more of the-

C2M: She creates staples, yeah.

C2F: I don't know if it's an American versus a Latin household that we were raised in.

This same couple (number two) also expressed their belief that there are marked gender differences in the kitchen. Referring to a metaphor about complementarity mentioned earlier, C2M stated, "Men have this unwarranted ego and they're in charge. I think that like the dance, he's the frame, he's the one who creates the stability so that she can do her dancing." One other couple, number eight shared similar thoughts about some of their duties being more gender-specific, but that they make sure to approach them in "respectful ways." One of the more gender-specific behaviors, which was consistent with the literature, did happen to involve grilling. Half of the participants, possibly because it only came up in their interviews, stated that the men are always the ones who do the grilling. C8F elaborated on this, adding her role to the grilling process, "And then if we were grilling, [he] would do the meat on the grill and I would make whatever side dish."

Holidays and traditions are a big part of the way cultures identify themselves, especially with food; and they were frequently mentioned as a value among couples in the study. In the following example, couple number three illustrates some holiday traditions they have adopted from their families into their own:

C3M: But then Christmas comes and Christmas becomes the-

C3F: Oh my god, it's like a, it's like a panettone factory. It's like a factory every time. They come with a fruit- I hate panettone.

C3M: We have the seafood, we have the prime rib, we have the pasta, we have the rice, and everybody's cooking. And then my sister comes down from Boston and her husband and her two kids and the house is full of, you know, fantastic.

One couple revealed that as a tradition when they make certain recipes, they use an heirloom cooking utensil:

C5M: And he used to make pickled cucumbers and pickled tomatoes. And he would use a special spoon, but we didn't know much of the spice using the special spoon. . . Cuz he wouldn't let us help him. He has, we still have the spoons.

C5F: We have the spoons. Cuz they're a special shape, they're not like regular tablespoons.

The couples shared many examples where traditions were commemorated in numerous ways, during holidays, using instruments, with certain recipes, and little rituals that they do among their own families.

Most couples stressed the importance that health and nutrition and the quality of ingredients have on the ways in which they approach cooking. In several case, one partner valued health a little more than the other.

C5F: Like [he] doesn't want to try certain things he thinks sound too healthy, wacky, whatever, right? Like he won't try riced cauliflower. He says if he wants rice, he'll have rice.

C5M: I'd rather have-

C5F: Or cauliflower pizza dough, I think is an ingenious idea. He doesn't even want to try.

For other couples, some partners were more willing to adapt to the other's health and nutrition values, and in some couples, they both valued nutrition ideas similarly. One noteworthy property that helped to define this category was a participant's preference for the quality of some ingredients. Referred to as "scratch," "organic," or "fresh," participants expressed the value of using quality ingredients when cooking with their partner, especially as they were used to using them growing up.

C6M: One thing I always remember is my mother never had canned beans growing up or anything like that. She always used to make her own beans.

C6F: I'm a canned bean girl.

C6M: I still, I have bags of beans there that I can make for myself. Like boil them and make them myself.

Stretching across a wide spectrum of places where values come from and the degree of their importance, couples consistently had to navigate their value systems in the kitchen as they came together.

Languaging

The third component of the Couple's Cooking Triad is Languaging. A bit different from language, languaging refers to the process by which we use language to

make meaning of our worlds. This term fit more appropriately to describe this section's subcategories and their properties, as well as help remind me to honor the meanings of the participants' stories. Again, relating to all the other categories in the two other sections, Linguaging includes utilizing all of the aforementioned Couples' Cooking Triad factors to develop Metaphors for talking about relationships, gain Insight about our relationships, and practice Change in relationships. The figure below serves as a reference for the Linguaging component of the Couple's Cooking Triad.

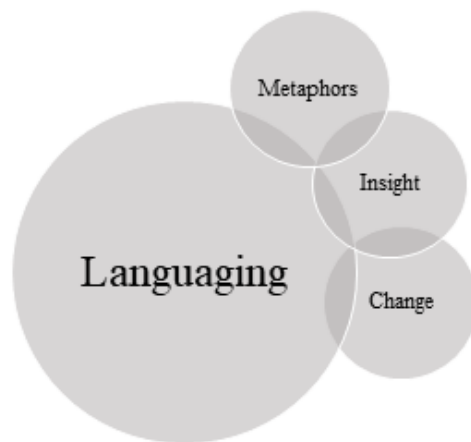


Figure 6. Linguaging

This figure (above) illustrates the Couple's Cooking Triad component, Linguaging, and its three subsequent categories.

Metaphors

One of the largest and most early noticed categories that emerged from the data during this study was the use of metaphors. Referenced 118 times in the data, participants either talked about the metaphorical nature of cooking explicitly or used metaphors to describe and compare aspects of their relationships. As we were talking about cooking and their relationships, a few couples shared their own ideas throughout the interviews

about how closely cooking related to other parts of their lives. For example, C2M shared, “The kitchen, the kitchen is a reflection of family.” Aside from pointing out the metaphorical quality of cooking, some couples also demonstrated what is common in experiential therapy, using metaphorical language to communicate ideas about their relationships in a safe way. Couple number one playfully conversed about what their foodwork interactions would look like if they were “the last two people on earth.”

C1F: No, but seriously! I would send him out to gather the rocks and the grass or whatever.

C1M: I would say when you get to the counter where all the rocks are, “They have some that are gluten free or some that aren’t.” (laughing) “Which ones do you want?”

C1F: I’d make stone soup!

Although they were joking about grocery shopping for and cooking rocks at the end of the world, they are also telling us about their supposed relationship interactions. One couple used a cooking-style metaphor to specifically describe his relationship:

C8M: [We] are a little bit like a hibachi. So pretty frantic in the prep and the putting it together sometimes. Like woah, we’re totally gonna mess this up, you’ve got so many moving parts, but at the end, it’s, it was a lot of fun to be doing that process.

Every couple provided metaphors during the interviews in one way or another, and some even compared their relationships to a specific food or dish. Participant C5F stated, “So just like chocolate and pretzels go together, they each are good on their own, but they’re better together. So we are better together. We’re good on our own, but it’s

that . . . synergy effect.” Other couples frequently found it helpful to describe particular interactions in the kitchen to compare similar interactions in other areas of their lives, such as in the following example:

C3F: He doesn’t like the way I load [the dishwasher]. . . It’s not efficient, but again, I know. I’ll try to model his way of loading it. Like I feel like in the same way that I here, I would try to make modifications to make the food taste better. We try to make modifications to keep, to consider and keep the other person happy. . . Like if [he] knows that I hate something . . . or I know that he doesn’t like something, we try not to do that as best as we can. Or try to modify the way we do things. . . Like if I take his clothes out of the dryer and put them on the wrong hanger and he gets the, you know. Sometimes I forget but I try to do it.

In this example, couple number three demonstrated languaging the way they interact in the kitchen and elsewhere, being sure to be considerate of each other. There were also many instances that I flagged in the data where couples highlighted specific and different personality traits of each partner that they noticed came through in their cooking styles.

C6F: [He] is very, very, very structured. I don’t want to say rigid in things . . . but once he has a goal in his mind, that’s his goal and there’s not much taking away from that goal. Like with me, I’m extremely flexible, probably too flexible sometimes. . . Like if suddenly there wasn’t enough broccoli, I’ll be like, “Okay, so the broccoli’s our side now” . . . And that’s how I kind of apply things with life.

Inevitably, there were plenty of examples that couples shared where personality differences and interactions differed across contexts. The way a couple interacts in the

kitchen may not be the same in other areas of their lives. To me, this is still important information, as even though the content may be different, the processes were still similar. Sometimes this exact contrast of content in a metaphor is exactly what brings out the details of the process, underlying concern, or common thread. In the following example, C3F illustrates how talking about the difference in her willingness to take suggestions in and out of the kitchen highlights her values:

It's not that I'm less likely to take suggestions from him when it comes to them [the kids] the way that I am in the kitchen, but I feel like I'm more rigid in my beliefs about stuff like that. And less accepting of suggestions when it comes to certain things in that nature.

Similarly, C4M demonstrated a similar metaphorical process, where in talking about the process of checking-in with his partner, "A whole lot of asking her to check in in the kitchen . . . Whereas outside of the kitchen it's really [not much]" he realized it was because of a difference in comfort levels in and out of the kitchen.

Insight

All of the couples shared with me during and/or after the interviews that they felt like talking about their relationships and cooking interactions either revealed new information that they had not been aware of before or helped them make connections they were not aware existed before. Several couples also responded emotionally to some of their revelations like C8F while talking about their communication in the kitchen, "Our biggest strength is communication. And like you know, I think the biggest, ah, I'm getting emotional." Although not as frequently referenced (21 times) as other categories, Insight was a significant finding that contributed weight to the theory that emerged,

especially as it pertains to further implications.

During the interviews, the couple that had been together the longest noticed that talking about the way they interact in the kitchen served as a heart-warming reminder to them that they are “doing well” in their relationship.

C1F: You know what, I love this. I’ll tell you why. Because it makes me really feel good about what we have. . . Listening to him, I mean, just our back and forth kind of says, “Oh, wow. We are doing this really well.”

C2M: It goes without saying.

C2F: It goes *with* saying!

Likewise, participant C7F shared at the end of their interview that talking about hypothetical interactions with their parents in the kitchen illuminated a change she had made with her partner’s mother.

C7F: But because of the differences with our moms, I found it very hard to go from this way of being with my mom to this way of being with a mom. And I would say that the only problems in our relationship was around that difficulty for me. But now it’s, it’s reflective in the kitchen. Like yesterday was Rosh Hashannah, and we went over to your mom’s, and your mom was putting the chicken outside on the grill, and I felt very comfortable going outside and asking if she needed help and I went to say “hi” to her. I was asking what she was doing. I say that because it’s very reflect, reflects where I am with her now in our relationship, as you can see in the kitchen now. I wouldn’t have felt safe [before] to go over into her area, you know. . . That I hadn’t thought about before . . . like the metaphors with how our relationship began or might have changed . . . Didn’t

think about that before. Never, maybe unconsciously understood like the interactions with our mothers in the kitchen, but never consciously thought about that.

From this quote, we can see the process of C7F realizing that the way she interacted with her partner's mother recently in the kitchen was different from how she might have in the beginning of their relationship (which we had talked about during the interview in a hypothetical kitchen scenario).

Some other couples made note of learning something new from the interview about their interactions, such as C2F reflecting on the following: "If I'm looking for things [to cook], he'll try to direct me differently. I don't know that I've ever picked up on that." That couple had been cooking together for "35 plus years," and from talking about their interactions while cooking, the wife learned that the meaning of her husband redirecting her when menu-planning was that he was trying not to insult her. One participant, C8M, mentioned how the act of cooking together itself provided him insight about their relationship: "There's a lot of things that we found out about each other during the process of cooking together." Couple number eight further revealed at the end of the interview that "after having this conversation," they were "looking forward to the next time we're cooking together" because it pointed out and reminded them of some of their values about family that they want to make sure to uphold going forward. Like them, other participants also shared an interest in implementing something different while cooking.

Change

One concept that emerged from the data and made sense when reflecting on my

conversations with the participants was the concept of change. Couples mentioned in different ways how cooking reflected changes in their relationships and how they utilize cooking as one platform to demonstrate wanted changes. Although every couple had been together for a different length of time, each couple discussed differences in their interactions in the kitchen over the evolution of their relationships. Couple number three expressed how cooking has gotten more enjoyable over time for them, “We know each other better. . . We know each other’s strengths, and I think that at the end of the day we enjoy even more cooking together now” (C3M). C4F shared her belief how she and her partner have evolved in the kitchen to adopt more involved and experimental meals:

We have like maybe one tray in the freezer I think. Everything else was raw meat. Where before it was the opposite, like everything would have been frozen, premade food . . . I think our fridge has actually changed from like the beginning to now and what’s in it. . . But I mean I feel like we’re both kind of growing together though . . . So now that, you know, we’re together and not just cooking for one . . . we tried a lot of new things.

As their relationships evolved and couples learned to interact differently, partners inevitably also influenced each other, sometimes even in opposite ways. For example, couple number seven explored out loud how they have influenced change in each other over the course of their relationship:

C7M: I wasn’t as mindful [before]. She’s helped me become a lot more mindful. You probably weren’t as outspoken.

C7F: Direct?

C7M: Yeah, maybe direct.

As she has made him become more mindful, he has helped her become more direct in their interactions.

Couple number seven also pointed out that while they have influenced change in each other already, that they are still practicing other changes to relate to each other better in the kitchen.

C7F: I can think of like how we peel garlic or how we handle garlic is very different. Like he doesn't like to use the . . . the presser. I do. He likes to just peel, or you use the knife to squish it or something. Or so like, there was a time, probably a few years ago, or maybe more recent, like I would say, "No, don't do it that way, do it this way." But now I think we've like "You do it your way, I do it my way" . . . I'm not gonna try and, I think I would try and change it. . . I've probably become more respectful of that.

C7F emphasized that she and her partner still practice trying to be respectful of each other's ways of doing things now, in and out of the kitchen. C1F also provided an example where she practices change in the kitchen, intentionally responding to her partner about a cake, "You said to me, 'What's one minor thing that you think I wouldn't notice but you would ask me?'" and I said 'Oh, there's nothing' because I was practicing imperfection." Her partner replied to this, "And I was practicing 'Let it go.'" Both partners in this example demonstrated how they utilized cooking to practice changes they wanted to make in the way they respond to "perfectionism" problems and to each other in the kitchen.

By implementing changes and practicing them in and/or out of the kitchen, couples can hopefully grow and learn to relate to each other even better. With its strong

metaphorical and insight-provoking nature, cooking provides the means and opportunity to make meaning of interactions and practice changes. For example, we discussed how couples in the study approached problem-solving in the kitchen, and one couple illustrates how this can further incite changes:

C2F: The battles is what brings out-

C2M: The kick in the pants-

C2F: The understanding of the other person.

C2M: The kick . . . is the thing that teaches you. And once you get kicked in the pants . . . and you have to figure out a solution to this thing that is kicking you in the pants, that's how you grow.

Summary

I presented in this chapter the results of the data analysis in this study, and thoroughly outline the significant categories and subcategories that emerged to help create the central theory that was grounded in that data. Using examples from interview transcripts, I illustrated the three components in The Couples' Cooking Triad Theory: Relationship Skills, Emotional Connections, and Languageing. In Chapter 5 I will discuss the relevance of these findings as they pertain to the marriage and family therapy field, the possibilities for further research and implications, and the study's limitations.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore and identify the relational elements of couples who cook together with the hope of utilizing the findings as a foundation to further explore cooking as an experiential therapy in the marriage and family therapy field. Additionally, I wanted to know more about how couples' interactions in the kitchen relate to other areas of their lives. Using constructivist grounded theory, I sought to generate a theory that was supported by a rich data set to best represent the meanings behind couples' interactions in the kitchen. The resulting theory, The Couple's Cooking Triad, offers a unique perspective that organizes and makes sense of this very phenomenon. The findings of this study elevate our understanding of the relational processes involved in cooking, which is hopefully just the beginning of its application.

Discussion of Theory and Literature

The Couple's Cooking Triad is made up of three theoretical components: Relationship Skills, Emotional Connections, and Linguaging. All three components together describe the forces at play when couples interact with each other in the kitchen. It is important to consider these components as overlapping or interconnected, as their characteristics can often be seen through the context of each other component given different circumstances. Nonetheless, these three theoretical categories that developed to create the central theory each describe different underlying relational aspects that make up couples' interactions in the kitchen.

Relationship Skills

In this study, couples who had lived together for at least two years, most of whom were together many years longer, were interviewed. That means that over the years of

relating to each other in many different contexts, couples developed skills for effective (and perhaps ineffective) ways to interact with each other. Upon completion of this study, results indicated that many of the relationship skills that couples develop are also exhibited in the kitchen while they cook together. While many different skills are applied in different kitchen scenarios, those skills that the data expounded fell into two categories, relationship tools and roles. The study indicated that couples demonstrate relationship tools like communicating and completing tasks, and that they take on specific roles with each other while utilizing these tools, such as by leading and delegating or acting as support person. We can probably see similar interaction patterns in other activities couples partake in like when they are driving somewhere together, dancing, or completing a house project.

The results of this study confirm what some of the combined literature has examined about cooking interactions, especially as they pertain to relationship skills, and expand our understanding of how couples specifically interact while cooking. We know from several studies that cooking in a kitchen with other people can help improve, and therefore demonstrate, relationship skills like communication (Duncombe, 2004), teamwork (Ripat, 1998), problem-solving (McLean & Mcnamara, 1987), and decision-making (Tanguay et al., 2014). Roles that individuals take in a couple and in larger groups have been explored in some studies, such as that of “food director,” where one person takes on the role of deciding the eating choices for the couple (Bove et al., 2003), as well as the roles used to pose status and power (Minke, 2014). After analyzing the data in the current study that helped form this conceptual category, Relationship Skills, we can see that many other relationship skills are evident in the kitchen such as checking-in,

respect, appreciating, prioritizing, compromising, anticipating needs, providing feedback, complementing each other, and deferring to the other based on strengths. Also, of the few studies pertaining to couples cooking specifically, only one study illustrated that the roles in the kitchen are not fixed, that one partner picked up the leading role in the couple, but this was only because the other one was sick and unable to perform the cooking tasks they use to (Fjellström et al., 2010). Furthering the literature on the fluidity of roles in the kitchen, the couples interviewed in my study revealed that depending on strengths, who presented the idea, whose turn it was, and other factors, each partner could take different roles in the kitchen at different times. This study substantiates what published literature tells us about relationship tools and roles that are evident in the kitchen, and increases our understanding of additional relationship skills used the and way couples approach them.

Emotional Connections

We know from experiences in our own lives, as well as from the literature, that we all have emotional relationships to food in one way or another, that food is not simply a means to satisfy a physical need. When couples cook together, indications of their emotional systems present themselves in various ways. The study results demonstrate that couples connect through food, conveying care and affection by cooking with and for each other, as well as strengthen bonds by spending time together in the kitchen. Also, couples' emotional connections in the kitchen are influenced by a number of individual factors that stem from their families of origin and value sets, such as culture, family recipes, and exposure and experiences.

This study reinforces what we know from the literature that couples merge their individual food systems together when they become a couple (Bove et al, 2003), while

also elaborating on what from their individual systems partners bring to their newly combined food system. Specifically, the individual food and cooking experiences people have with their families growing up and the values and beliefs that they placed on food behaviors largely influences the process of convergence. Even values that don't specifically relate to food and cooking show themselves in the interactions in the kitchen too, like individuality, trust, and wanting to make the other person happy. Touching on many of the same values and influences of cooking, a study from 2003 about couples where one partner has Alzheimer's disease corroborates what I have found about the emotional connections around cooking:

Food—and the act of cooking—have powerful meaning to older adults. Food defines culture, family history, and traditions. For many, cooking signifies basic worth, self-image, and role identity. Food is also connected with feelings of love, pleasure, and enjoyment, holidays, celebrations, family, and spirituality. The product of cooking may be regarded as something to share, as family recipes often have a history attached to them. In traditional cultures, cooking, as a practical art, is passed down from mothers and grandmothers to daughters and granddaughters with great pride. This ritual creates strong family relationship bonds.

(Fitzsimmons & Buettner)

One interesting finding that seemed to correlate very strongly with that of some of the literature about gendered approaches to cooking related to grilling. Some studies pointed out that most of their couples identified the man to be the one who grilled or barbequed (Bove & Sobal, 2006; Fitzsimmons & Buettner, 2003), as did many of the couples in my study. However, I did not find in my study any other gendered patterns

around cooking, which refutes some of the same literature about other foodwork tasks falling to the male or other gender-specific patterns (Aerseth & Olsen, 2008). Perhaps the timing of this study in 2018 and 2019 and/or the cultures of the sample led to these specific findings. One finding in my study that crossed all boundaries and both genders was the use of cooking to show care and affection; consistent with other studies' findings, other researchers discussed the use of cooking to show "love" (Hunt et al., 2011; Wolfson et al., 2016). Most of the research relating to emotional connections between couples in the kitchen reverberates what I also found, with the exception of my study showing a less gendered approach to cooking. This study should help organize some of those emotional connections found in the kitchen and elucidate the relationship between connections over food and the individual factors influencing them.

Languaging

The possibilities that cooking offers people to help make meaning of their experiences are abundant. Throughout the entire study, participants used cooking metaphors as a way to language their thoughts, likening their relationships to food and the cooking process, or comparing specific behaviors and interactions in and out of the kitchen. Insights about relationships and interactions can also be gained from simply talking about cooking together, just like the couples in my study shared. Additionally, the activity of cooking serves as a platform for changes to occur, demonstrating how partners influence and grow with each other, and how they can actually practice changes they want to make in their relationships by applying them while cooking. The use of metaphor, the insight gained, and the possibilities for changes to take place all

demonstrate how couples can language meaning about their relationships through cooking interactions.

The amount of literature that supports the metaphorical nature of cooking is almost overwhelming (Caraher et al., 2004; Gold, 2007; Hardman, 1998; Kaplan, 2000, Sterne & Rodgers, 2011). Going into this study, I expected metaphors to be a major theme in each interview conversation, but what I discovered was that while some couples mentioned metaphors explicitly, most just used cooking metaphors spontaneously to help communicate ideas. This idea was still consistent with the literature, especially as it concerned helping people express meaning. A lot of the data in this study illustrated that isomorphic processes existed in and out of the kitchen, but it is important to consider that differences in similar processes can be just as valuable of information in therapy.

Where the literature is actually the thinnest in supporting my findings is in regard to insight. In my study, I assigned the word “insight” to describe the experiences that people shared about having a deeper or better understanding of their relationship or interaction that they had not thought of prior to the interview. While none of the supporting literature uses the word “insight” to label this process, one researcher does imply it, stating that “food patterns can illuminate family interactions” (Gold, 2007, p. 3). Other articles have mentioned that cooking is made up of many processes and influences, but do not discuss how we can use cooking as a tool for deeper understanding. Hopefully this study can help join the ideas in more current literature about utilizing cooking as an activity to gain insight for couples’ interactions.

Not surprisingly, where the existing literature strongly verifies my findings is regarding change. Cooking has already been used in the mental health field to inspire

change in the social identity of prisoners (Minke, 2014), to measure creative change in mothers (Mccabe & de Waal Malefyt, 2015), increase levels of nutritional understanding and self-efficacy in children (Jarpe-Ratner et al., 2016), and evaluate cognitive performance in chronically ill patients (Baum & Edwards, 1993). Ripat argued that cooking offered group members in a community kitchen opportunities to practice teamwork and learn other skills helpful to employment while cooking together (1998). My study findings definitely confirm similar findings and highlight the use of cooking not only to practice change, but to also explore relationship changes through language. Further, this study explored relationships of couples, adding another aspect to systemic research on cooking.

Clinical Implications

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, cooking has been greatly underutilized as an experiential tool in the marriage and family therapy field. In fact, there is little to no research supporting its experiential utilization for couples. What this study has done is provide a theory grounded in rich data that establishes the relational aspects found in cooking for couples. Not only do we have an organized theory about couples in the kitchen, but this information substantiates the use of cooking for therapeutic application. From this study, as well as from supporting literature, we know that cooking presents abundant languaging opportunities for couples to help communicate ideas, includes emotional processes at the individual and systemic level, and serves as a stage where relationship skills are displayed. These three components of couples' cooking interactions meet very similar criteria that define other experiential therapeutic activities, sharing

similar benefits and goals with that of art therapy, music therapy, equine-assisted therapy, and others.

Reflecting on the conversation one couple and I had about their cooking interactions, one participant shared what came to light for her during the interview, “I guess like understanding the relational dynamics and how they are very much present. I could have said like ‘Yeah, yeah, we are great in the kitchen. And we’re great in life,’ you know? But until you speak about it” (C7F). After all of the interviews were completed and I reflected on the sentiments participants shared with me, I thought to myself, “Imagine what more we can learn about couples from actually *doing* the cooking instead of talking about it.” Before the study, the gap in the literature was such that a starting point was needed demonstrating the relational aspects of couples’ cooking. Consequently, the findings do strongly justify applying cooking as a therapeutic relational activity.

Experiential therapies are known for emphasizing the interactions between people, as this study demonstrates cooking does, giving them an opportunity to experience and explore relationships in a different way than just talking about them (Becvar & Becvar, 2006; Carson & Casado-Kehoe, 2013; Ripat, 1998; Thompson et al., 2009). That means, having couples interact in the kitchen, rather than simply talking about their relationship, can also be an opportunity to make meaning of their interactions (Condrasky et al, 2006; Ripat, 1998). Similar to art therapy and music therapy, cooking therapy can help couples communicate with each other creatively about their thoughts and feelings, and therapists can use the information to introduce new ways of relating to each other (Botello, 2008; Riley, 2003). As we know from the findings of this study,

emotional connections are one of the components that underly couples' interactions in the kitchen. We can compare this to Louhi-Lehtio's claim that "experiential therapies . . . also provide powerful and exceptional ways to help clients strengthen social-emotional skills such as self-awareness, social awareness and empathy, cooperation, negotiation, and play and joy" (as cited in Trotter, 2012, pp. 244-245).

Talking about relationships can be an emotional and stressful experience for many clients. Experiential therapies help provide a safe, non-threatening environment to explore these relationships and practice systemic changes outside of their normal contexts (Carson & Casado-Kehoe, 2013; Trotter, 2012). Participants in this study shared how cooking both illustrates changes that have taken place in their relationship, as well as how they have practiced changes they wanted to make through cooking interactions. Given the findings of this study and the research on the nature of cooking, it makes sense that cooking as a therapeutic activity can allow clients to "let down their guards," "open up," and "feel good about themselves," and practice changes (Minke, 2014; Ripat, 1998). For this same reason, and similar to other experiential therapies, cooking therapy would naturally facilitate the joining process between therapist(s) and clients (Ripat, 1998; Szabo, 2012). The connections over food is something all of us are familiar with, something that is mentioned many times in this study, and something that can inevitably only help therapeutic processes.

The Couple's Cooking Triad Theory can be used in practice as a reference for clinicians while interacting or observing couples while they cook together. For example, in a cooking therapy session, a therapist could keep the theory in mind when making observations and ask questions based on those interactions, especially by languaging

those interactions through metaphors. It can be used to open up and follow up on new areas of questioning that the couple and therapist haven't thought of, as well as making sense of already shown interactions in new ways. For instance, if a couple either demonstrates or mentions a division of work in the kitchen based on strengths or challenges, that could be an opportunity for the therapist to follow up on strengths or challenges in other areas of their relationship. The Couple's Cooking Triad offers us as clinicians an understanding of how the interconnected components relate to each other, which is helpful when seeing them enacted in person.

The implications that this research could have on the marriage and family therapy field are far-reaching with regard to experiential therapy. The suggested experiential applications are not intended to take away from or replace traditional talk therapies. Rather, they are intended to offer additional means by which therapists can engage therapeutically with their clients, especially when they find they are "stuck". Using these findings to promote cooking as an experiential therapy, it can likely serve as a helpful training tool for other marriage and family therapists learning about systems in experiential therapy. Other possible applications of the findings may require further study.

Further Research

Upon review of the literature, I found that most studies on cooking in mental health were conducted on very specific populations (like children or Alzheimer's patients), used cooking occupationally to improve life skills, or didn't primarily focus on the relational aspects of cooking. Additionally, a lot of the associated research was outdated, conducted over ten years ago, and none of the recent literature has used cooking

to provide insight into couples' relationships. This study helps to bridge the gap in literature that exists pertaining to the relational use of cooking in marriage and family therapy, but there are still many areas to research in order to understand further applications of the findings and areas of inquiry that were opened up.

As I mentioned earlier, unlike the reviewed literature, the findings in my study did not actually find a strong connection between genders and their approach to cooking, so one area of further research that I think would be necessary is with couples of different sexual orientations. I think extending this line of inquiry to couples that identify in ways other than heterosexual would either confirm its generalizability or distinguish more differences in how couples approach cooking. Comparably, as some similar relational patterns of couples can be seen in other relationships (e.g., care and affection of parent and child, or leading roles of coworkers), it might be beneficial to expand this study to other types of relationships. This would be of particular use in the marriage and family therapy field, as increasing our understanding of multiple types of systems is important.

It would be especially interesting for marriage and family therapists to see how clinicians make sense of the findings in this study through different theoretical models, like how a solution-focused or narrative therapist might organize the interactions found in the kitchen. Understanding the major relational components of couples in the kitchen through different models could help systems thinkers understand and apply cooking as an experiential therapy. Likewise, learning about the interpretation and application of this theory for cooking therapy in other mental health arenas as social work and clinical psychology could add another dimension to this research.

This study could serve as a starting point, but further research would definitely need to be conducted to see how the findings of this study might benefit therapeutic treatment of clients with eating disorders, since we know there are significant relational factors involved in the development and treatment of eating disorders. To improve the use of cooking that is already being used as a therapeutic tool with patients with illnesses like Alzheimer's disease, severe mental health disorders, or chronic physical illness, further exploration of how this study's findings fit with current treatment modalities of these populations could be valuable. Lastly, and most essential to this study, since this study was conducted via intensive interviews of couples talking about their cooking interactions, it would be worth studying actual couples' cooking interactions in situ, as well as how interventions can be applied to the cooking therapy process.

Study Strengths and Limitations

The most predictable strength of this study was the fact that it related to cooking. Foremost, everyone can relate to cooking in some form or another because everyone must eat. Secondly, of the participants that I interviewed, most actually enjoyed cooking, so sharing their experiences through the language of cooking presented as an easy-going task for many. The fact that cooking is of interest to a lot of people, especially nowadays with cooking shows and competitions being a part of our media culture, made recruitment for the study easier and quicker than I would assume it to be for other studies. Because of this, I only needed to advertise the recruitment flier via word of mouth and on social media. I don't believe that people's interest in cooking influenced the stories they shared with me, as there were many examples of both positive and negative relationship aspects and cooking stories given both from participants who do and do not enjoy cooking.

Participants demonstrated what seemed like openness and honest sharing, feeling free to disagree or correct me and each other during the interviews. Remembering to stay with the participants' stories and not interject my own assumptions and experiences, the interviews often went in directions I did not anticipate.

The methodology I chose for this study, constructivist grounded theory, aided in the development of the central theory The Couple's Cooking Triad. Rather than formulaically producing hierarchical categories and forcing the data into them, constructivist grounded theory allowed me to work with the data inductively, letting categories and ideas emerge naturally to illustrate the relationships between the data, some of which were non-linear (Creswell, 2013). Consistent with constructivist grounded theory, I was able to explicate and honor my own perspective while also considering the contexts and meanings that others convey about their experiences with cooking. Also, the nature of qualitative theoretical sampling aided in a natural and efficient progression of theoretical development in this study, and saturation was reached after eight couples were interviewed.

Although generalizability was not a goal of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), some consideration about the representation of genders and socioeconomic disparities was a strength of the sample in this study. The study sample consisted of an equal number of men and women, and there was a wide range of income levels among participants. Also, I ended up being able to conduct all interviews in-person and in the participants' homes, giving me a context which I think enriched my data, as I was able to make more observations in the natural environment where the central phenomenon exists (Creswell, 2013). Coincidentally, some of the couples I interviewed had also just finished

cooking a meal together beforehand, which might have helped freshen their recall of the information they shared with me. Although the couples were not privy to the interview questions, their own observations of their interactions in the kitchen might have helped them remember what information they could possibly share with me. Nonetheless, while they might have heightened their awareness of their own kitchen interactions by cooking more recently, it did not seem to influence the consistency of themes across all interviews.

Unavoidably, this study is not without its limitations. Firstly, as I discussed, focusing on heterosexual couples may have limited the participants to a narrower population than needed, since my findings did not support a strongly gendered approach to cooking among couples who frequently cook together. Further research on the topic should include all genders and sexualities of participants, as it may not change the findings so much, but it could add more contextual information for understanding the theory in other kinds of romantic relationships. Moreover, while several different cultures were represented throughout the study participants, an even wider inclusion of different cultures could also strengthen the findings.

One of the bigger limitations of this study has to do with the fact that I conducted intensive interviews of participants talking about their cooking experiences, rather than observing them cooking in action. I made the decision to carry out the study in this way, as somewhat of a pilot study for now, so that I could gather the necessary data and generate a theory based on the couples' own stories and perspectives. I felt that learning about what goes on behind the scenes from the couples themselves during an in-depth conversational interview, rather than a possibly distracted interaction, would give me

more abundant information to analyze and figure out what to focus on later. The gap in the literature pertaining to this topic was also too large that it was more practical to start from a simpler place to substantiate the need to study those relational aspects that were found. Now that this study has demonstrated and identified the complex relational interactions in the kitchen, it makes sense to apply its culminated theory to studying couples while they are actually cooking.

Since one of the purposes of this study was to use the findings to support its possible application as an experiential therapy, then another limitation of the way this study was structured could be the purposeful sample itself. Because I was seeking couples who regularly cooked together (in order to obtain information on their experiences of the phenomenon), the data represents the interactions of those couples. In a likely experiential therapy session, clients may include couples where one or both partners may not cook often or even like to cook. It is important to note that while their interactions may be different than other activities they enjoy or are knowledgeable in, the relational processes in the kitchen will still be similar, providing ample opportunities for therapists to observe and ask questions about. For instance, if one partner takes the leading role in the kitchen because they are a more experienced cook, or the couple run into a problem executing the recipe, the processes of falling into roles and solving problems are still demonstrated. The therapist would be able to pick up on and be curious about these processes and/or find it appropriate to intervene with them. Since we know from this study that there are many relational elements evident in the kitchen, marriage and family therapists can use the Couple's Cooking Triad as a reference of these elements when treating couples with cooking therapy.

Reflections and Concluding Thoughts

In the early stages of this study, I thought that because of my passion for cooking and working with couples, and because I have talked to so many people about both topics, that I knew what most of my findings would likely indicate. I am grateful and honored that participants shared their stories with me and that their stories indicated more than I could have expected they would. During each step of analysis, the meanings of all the different relational aspects of couples cooking took shape in unique ways, and it taught me so much more about the process of cooking with others. To me, as a researcher and personally, the Couple's Cooking Triad Theory beautifully epitomizes the complex relational ingredients that make up the interactions of a couple in the kitchen. It organizes and brings a systemic perspective to all those interactions in the kitchen that I set out to explore at the onset of this study. In legitimizing and shedding new light on the phenomenon I knew existed, I am anxious to apply the theory clinically and carry out further research on the topic, providing a new way to help clients while also making the gap in the literature even smaller.

I am even more encouraged that after the interviews, several participants reached out to me and shared their later reflections on our conversations, confirming that the interviews were particularly insightful for them, that they didn't realize all the systems at play in cooking and the connections to their relationship. I was initially worried about the influence my own personal bias about the topic would have on the interview process and analysis, but to mitigate this, I continuously consulted with colleagues and my dissertation committee, especially those of whom do not cook as a hobby. It was very

difficult for me to extract the quotes from the data to support the results in Chapter 4, as I wanted to include many more examples to highlight each concept.

This study exceeded my expectations as far as what I would find and gain from it. It helped organize an explanation of the phenomenon that exists between couples in a kitchen. The emerged Couple's Cooking Triad Theory has also influenced the way I relate to cooking, especially with my husband, and has definitely changed the way I see others' interactions in the kitchen. As marriage and family therapists, this study's findings should help us understand the systemic processes involved while couples cook together, and it gives us a foundation from which to work in experiential cooking therapy.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Consent Form

Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled Cooking with Couples: A Grounded Theory Study on the Relational Aspects Found in the Cooking Interactions of Couples

Funding Source: None

IRB protocol #:

Principal investigator(s)Co-investigator(s)
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For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores the relationships between couples and the way they interact while cooking. The findings of this study will hopefully illuminate relational aspects of cooking and encourage the use of cooking as an experiential therapeutic activity used in marriage and family therapy.

Why are you asking me?

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a partner of a heterosexual couple that lives together for at least two years, and you and your partner cook together at least once a week.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?

Upon agreeing to participate in this study, the researcher will contact you and set up a time to interview you and your partner together. Interviews will last approximately 30 minutes and will be in a location that is comfortable for you both, including, but not limited to, your place of residence. In some cases, upon transcription and analysis of all interviews, the researcher may call on some participants to follow-up with questions for clarification.

Is there any audio or video recording?

A digital audio recorder will be used during the interview, and the researcher will take notes to ensure what participants say are represented as accurately as possible.

What are the dangers to me?

Participation in the study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time from the study for any reason. While risks for participating in this study are minimal, unforeseen risks could arise. As you and your partner will be discussing information relevant to your relationship for a study in the field of marriage and family therapy, it is possible that a sensitive couple-related topic could cause discomfort for a participant. If any participant begins to feel distress of any kind, they are reminded that the study is voluntary and are encouraged to discuss their discomfort with the researcher. Referrals to mental health practitioners can be made if requested. Should you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact Nicole Gordon at 305-498-5579 or the Institutional Review Board at the number above.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

The researcher will be compensating each participating couple for their time in the study with a \$20.00 gift card to Publix Supermarket in the spirit of encouraging a couple to use it to cook a meal together some time after the study. There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?

All participants in the study will be assigned non-identifying codes during the study to help keep all documents confidentially private. Audio recordings and any pertinent written data will be secured in a locked home filing cabinet for 36 months after the conclusion of the study, which is only accessible by the principal investigator/researcher of the study, Nicole Gordon. Only the principal investigator and the co-investigator, Dr. Christopher Burnett, the Institutional Review Board, and regulatory agencies will be allowed access to research records. All information gathered during the study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. There will be no identifying information used or discussed for any reports or publication of this study.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study, but you may request it not be used.

Other Considerations:

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the investigators.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled *Interpersonal Process Recall: An Equine Assisted Approach to Training Family Therapy Students*

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Recruitment Flier

Research Study

Nova Southeastern University

Department of Marriage and Family Therapy

This study explores the relational elements of couples in the kitchen.

Study Title: Cooking With Couples: A Grounded Theory Study on the Relational Aspects Found in the Cooking Interactions of Couples

- Do you and your partner cook together often?
- Are you and your partner each between the ages of 24 and 90?
- Have you lived together for at least two years?
- Are you and your partner in a committed heterosexual relationship?

If you answered yes to all of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in this research study!

Eligible couples will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews may take place in-person or via skype, and may be conducted in the privacy of your own home or wherever is most comfortable for you.

For participating, interviewed couples will receive a \$20 Visa gift card

If you have any questions about the study or would like to participate, please call, text, or email Nicole Gordon at (305) 498-5579 or ng363@mysu.nova.edu



Appendix C

Interview Guide

1. Are you between the ages of 24 and 90?
2. Are you in a committed romantic relationship?
3. Have you and your partner been living together for at least two years as of today?
4. Do you and your partner cook together at least once a week?
5. Will you please describe the process of how you and your partner cook together?
6. Please tell me anything you have noticed about the way in which you cook together,
how might tell me about you as a couple?
7. What interactions between you two in the kitchen are similar or different to other
interactions in your relationship?
8. What factors influence the way in which you two cook together?
9. Can you describe for me the process of how decisions in the kitchen are made?

Biographical Sketch

Nicole Gordon was born in Houston, Texas, and before she was old enough to remember, she and her family moved to Miami, Florida. Nicole was raised for years in Miami, the oldest of three sisters. From her own experiences in a split family, Nicole was always interested in the inner workings of relationships and passionate about helping others adjust to family changes. She attended undergraduate school and graduated with a B.A. in Psychology in 2008. After a couple of years working in the mental health field in a psychiatrist's office and as a counselor at an adult treatment facility, Nicole went for her Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) at Nova Southeastern University, where she was introduced to systems thinking and fell in love with the school and the field.

Upon graduating from the master's program and deciding she wanted to learn more, Nicole applied and was accepted into the Marriage and Family Therapy PhD program at Nova Southeastern University. While in the program, she became passionate about studying Bowen Family Systems Theory and about exploring her own form of "cooking therapy." Nicole also spent several semesters working with children to prevent recidivism in schools, practicing her teaching skills as a T.A., and experiencing the world of publishing as a graduate assistant.

After taking Equine-Assisted Therapy, Nicole decided that the marriage and family therapy field could benefit from using cooking as an experiential therapy, and therefore set out to learn as much as she could about how to apply cooking as an experiential tool. This eventually led to her studying cooking with couples for her dissertation, with the hopes of using the findings as a foundation to apply cooking as an

experiential therapy in MFT. From this study, a theory was generated about the cooking interactions of couples, called The Couple's Cooking Triad Theory.

Recently, Nicole, her husband, and their dog moved to Grapevine, Texas, where they currently reside. Nicole hopes to further the research from her dissertation, exploring other kinds of relationships in the field with cooking, and also hopes to utilize the cooking therapy more in her own private practice. She also enjoys supervising interns and consulting on cases to collaborate with others in the field. Nicole has presented at national and international conferences on a variety of topics including cooking with couples and on Bowen Family Systems. Nicole is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Florida and Texas, a Board-Approved Supervisor in the state of Texas, and an AAMFT-approved supervisor. She is also a clinical member of AAMFT, a member of Relational Therapists of Dallas, and is a trained Collaborative Divorce Mental Health Professional.