I BAKE, HE GRILLS: RELATIONSHIPS IN THE KITCHEN

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my husband, Bryan, who has supported me in every way imaginable throughout this process. Thank you.

I also need to thank my family, for continuing to pester me about my progress, while always believing I would get the job done.

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ABSTRACT

Food and communication are equally vital to the human experience. They are essential to nourishment and growth. Both can be complex and rich, or rudimentary and straightforward. Food and food preparation as a lens for study has recently expanded within the communication field. This study attempts to add to the existing body of research and specifically focuses on a complex interpersonal setting: meal preparation. The author posits that a greater understanding of roles and expectations in developing romantic relationships can be gained by examining the ways in which partners communicate while working together to prepare a meal. The author employs qualitative methods, observing four couples in their own homes and conducting six follow-up interviews. With specific attention paid to food choice and task delegation, a grounded theory approach is utilized and the author attempts to establish an argument demonstrating that partners consistently challenge and strengthen their roles and the relationship in ways unique to the kitchen site and cooking process.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The act of breaking bread—of preparing and consuming a meal with someone—is significant. It can bring people together, strengthen existing bonds, forge new relationships, and soothe a conflict. Studying how people interact in this setting, and how they reflect on their interactions, might lead to a better understanding of how men and women in developing relationships are attempting to communicate aspects of themselves in this setting.

The work it takes to create a meal with someone is not mundane. Food choice, the delegation of tasks, what is and is not discussed among romantic partners in the kitchen—these are interesting areas for study. Despite its potential, the use of food preparation as a lens for study in interpersonal communication literature is an area in which there is little existing research. This particular study will seek to add to the existing body of interpersonal research as well as the somewhat newer discipline of food-centric studies in the communication field.

In addition to adding new research to existing fields, this study will develop a language which helps to describe the types of interactions occurring in this context. This can help facilitate discussions which will lead to deeper understanding about personal and partner roles and expectations in relationships. Better understandings of roles and expectations can lead to more satisfying relationships.

This study assumes the process of cooking and consuming a meal together is rich with data. It focuses on interactions between romantic partners in developing relationships.

The author aims to examine and answer the following research question: What can we learn about developing romantic relationships by studying the communicative act of preparing a meal?

Setting the Table

The author posits that several concepts may be particularly helpful to understanding developing relationships in food preparation contexts, and the review of literature below will attempt to explicate those ideas. To begin, the author will discuss *food as a topic or lens for study* in the communication field. Following that, several sections will clarify and justify the following concepts central to this scenario: *food choice, task delegation,* importance of *the kitchen space,* and *developing relationships*. Finally, before moving into methodology, some guiding theoretical assumptions will be reviewed.

As the literature is reviewed below, it may be helpful to imagine a scenario in which food and communication are at play. Consider the following: *A young man (John) and woman (Sara) have been dating for several weeks. Sara decides that she would like to host John at her apartment for dinner. She invites him and he accepts. When he arrives, he brings over a bottle of wine and some of his favorite ice cream for dessert. Sara is preparing lasagna, one of her mothers' specialties. She is running a little late, and asks if John would like to help her get everything finished. He agrees, and volunteers to finish chopping the vegetables and grate the cheeses while Sara finishes the noodles,*

meat and sauce. While they work, they discuss their favorite foods, and what dinnertime

was like in their homes. Once the meal is finished, they sit on the couch to eat it together.

Food in the Communication Field

  Food and food culture have become an increasingly popular topic for study in

recent years. However, there is a lack of qualitative data which examines the specific

interplay between food and communication in complex interpersonal settings. There are

many assumptions about these types of interactions. In *Food as communication:*

Communication as food, Cramer, Greene, and Walters (2011) say this:

> Because of our individual connections to food, we also use it as a means of
> communicating our identities to others through our process of preparation and
> eating. This relationship is situational because we may use food or associated
> behaviors in different ways depending on the social situations in which we find
> ourselves. For example, consider how a person might present his or her identity
> on a first date, a business luncheon, or at a family gathering. This person may
> purchase certain foods rather than others in order to reflect a class status or
> position of authority. Moreover, a person may also abstain from eating too much
> or may utilize formalized etiquette on the date and at the luncheon, whereas at the
> family gathering, he or she may not feel the need to prescribe to the rules of
> etiquette at all. (p. xii)

  Above, you see that Cramer et al. (2011) are operating on a set of assumptions

that food, cooking, and eating all affect interactions in interpersonal settings. One central

assumption is that the presence of food causes people to act differently than they would

in a setting without food. Cramer et al. (2011) posit that food has a unique ability to

influence interaction in a way that is not always seen in other interpersonal contexts. For

example, a couple working together to landscape their yard would not necessarily

approach tasks and interact in ways which are similar to how they function together in the

kitchen. One reason offered for this difference is the idea there is a "direct, visceral

connection to food…it is often linked to emotion and memory or serves as a source of

comfort for some people" (p. xii). These deeper and more emotional connections to food might be part of what causes couples to interact in unique ways in food preparation contexts.

But how does a food preparation context affect interactions? Why does one choose to make eggplant parmesan instead of chicken pot pies? How does a couple decide who will cut the vegetables and who will grill the steaks? What types of traditions are important to maintain? Why? Is it as simple as a matter of preference or are there more interesting cultural and personal values involved? Do men and women make decisions about how they act in the kitchen in order to represent something important to them? If so, do they do this knowingly?

These are some of the questions this study seeks to examine. There are interesting implications, depending on the answers. These answers (and subsequent questions) are important to study. This study aims to establish some elementary ways of explaining what might be occurring. Subsequent works would offer fundamental perspectives or models that could offer a more detailed explanation of interactions. Additionally, further studies will yield additional data, which will prompt further questions about how food and communication function in developing relationships.

The popularization of food as a topic for scholarship has unearthed a multitude of voices and viewpoints. Some studies grounded in nutrition and food sciences have attempted to broach social science-oriented questions dealing with healthful eating choices, gender roles, division of labor within the home, etc. (Barthes, 1997; De Vault, 1991). The bulk of the social science work in the food literature has existed in the anthropological and sociological fields, until recently.

Barthes (1997), a sociologist, conducted some foundational work in the social sciences on food and communication. He refers to food as "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviors" (as cited in Counihan and Van Esterik, 1997, p. 29). Other scholars such as Lévi-Strauss (1964) characterize the relationship between communication and food as inextricable–that "foodways are deeply rhetorical and performative" (Spurlock, 2009, p. 6) and that food can be studied as a language, or code, that can be useful in uncovering patterns in social relationships.

Other work in the communication realm offers a slightly more specific perspective. Cramer et al. (2011) say this:

> We often use food to communicate with others and as a means of demonstrating personal identity, group affiliation, disassociation, and socioeconomic class. Food functions symbolically as a communicative practice by which we create, manage, and share meanings with others. (p. xi)

Ferguson (2004) adds that food and food processes create and maintain a "community of discourse" that is collectively bound together by words, language, and interpretations of the world. By "community of discourse," Ferguson means that the two—communication and food processes, such as cooking—are inextricably linked through a mutually satisfactory relationship: food is complemented and contextualized by communication (referring generally to interpersonal verbal and non-verbal communication) and vice-versa. Both can be elegant, dramatic, rich, complex and layered, and yet, they both retain an element of rawness, of basal necessity. Without communication or food, we might wither away, be it socially or physically.

Scholars have also characterized food as an artifact that functions on multiple symbolic levels through its production and consumption (West, 2007). The relationship

between food and identity has been explored, and a case that food is central to the construction and portrayal of our identities as both individuals and cultures has been made. Karaosmanoglu (2011) reviewed cookbooks from Istanbul that focused on nostalgic and modern preparations of food. She found the nostalgic preparations were strongly associated with remembering cultural and personal identities, whereas more modern preparations tended to be strongly associated with of the loss or the forgetting of those identities. Another study by German (2011) focused on a cookbook featuring recipes from women held at the Terezin Concentration Camp during World War II. The book had been smuggled, hidden, and passed hand-to-hand during the war. German (2011) makes the case that food and the articulation of recipes are important sites of identity below:

> Food may be such a potent expression of identity because, unlike most other daily activities, it is taken into the body and becomes one with it. It also has the potential, because of its abundant variations, to mirror the complexity of human relationships that form the foundation of identity. (p. 141)

There is a fairly solid depth and breadth of sociological research dealing with the role of children and parents in meal preparation and consumption in nuclear family units (Massey, 1992; Morgan, 1996.) However, there is a noted lack of research that explores the themes which may be present when studying romantic relationships in food preparation contexts. German (2011) says, "despite increasing attention to the role of food in the construction of culture, scholars have paid little attention to its uses outside of nuclear families in stable environments" (p. 140).

You Are What You Eat: Food Choices

Food choice, as an area of scholarly exploration, has mostly been conducted from a marketing/business or health sciences standpoint. Much of it has been conducted in a relatively prescriptive manner, which doesn't always allow for the complexity of the entire food decision-making process to be examined (Franchi, 2012). Additionally, the bulk of the research is focused on the consumer purchasing food at a supermarket or in mass-market restaurants and fails to recognize the nuances presented by the myriad of complex situations in which individuals make choices about food daily. Franchi (2012) states that food choice is "the result of a number of factors, including biology, culture, individual identity, and social images. The complexity of these choices is recognized, but references to identity or cultural factors have not been fully explored in research studies" (p. 26).

Shepherd (1999) attempted to help organize thinking related to food choices. It was based on three categories of assessment: physical/chemical characteristics (physical makeup of the food item), individual factors (preferences, perceptions), and social-emotional factors (prices, availability, cultural significance). Sobal, Kettel, and Bisogni (1998) attempt to bring culture into sharper focus in a similar model. Their food choice model includes the three following considerations: life courses and events, cultural influences, and personal systems. However, again, in this model, the "choice" event refers to the acquisition of foodstuffs at the point of purchase. In the current study, the "choice" occurs prior to the acquisition of the item, and the focus of the study is how that choice is shaped by the interpersonal relationship it functions within. The above models forgo those considerations. Franchi (2012) acknowledges that, stating, "it is not easy to

study food choices because they are dynamic, changing over a person's life course, situational, selectively employed in particular situations" (p. 18).

Recognizing the need to pay closer attention to the situational nature of food choice, Bisogni, Connors, Devine, and Sobal (2002) conducted a follow-up study. This study sought to "develop a theoretical understanding of identities related to eating" (p. 128). This study used grounded theory and in-depth interviews. The results indicated a wide variety of influences related to identity which impacted participant's food choices. The influences at the forefront included preferred eating behaviors (meat-and-potatoes kind of guy), personality traits (concerned with sustainability), and social categories (busy mothers). Notably, participants exhibited widely varying levels of interest or even cognizance of enacting identities in eating (e.g., I eat only things I have killed or grown because I am very concerned with sustainability vs. I don't think about eating, I just eat).

Here again, one can observe the nutritional and health sciences fields undertaking a research project heavily influenced by social science methodology. The food choice topic has been most salient for the health sciences and business marketing fields, and the section below, task delegation, has been well covered in the sociology and anthropological fields. Understanding that food choice and task delegation are inherently communicative acts and studying them in developing relationships will provide a new, focused, and unique perspective of both of these themes.

I Bake, He Grills: Task Delegation

It is difficult to explore task delegation research without touching on the topic of gender, and this is particularly so given the purpose of this study. You will notice that all of the studies below find that gender is centrally important in how domestic task

delegations have been studied. It is also interesting to note that the studies below use different methodology which point to different underlying assumptions about the nature of gender and how it is enacted. Gender, for the purpose of this study, should be defined as more than just "male or female." It can be further defined as "a socially produced and historically changing aspect of identity that is shaped by cultural and institutional discourse within a society" (Weedon, 1997, p. 3).

Kiss the Cook: Gender Expectations in the Kitchen

Much of the research undertaken regarding task delegation in domestic duties is focused on a family unit that includes a parental figure and at least one child. Foundational work in this realm includes the book *Feeding the family: The social organization of caring as gendered work* by De Vault (1991).

De Vault (1991), a sociologist, used a form of social construction theory to examine the ways in which women's roles in the home (specifically cooking) are socially constructed and perpetuated by routine, or "invisible" activities. She also notes that while a woman typically performs the role of the primary caregiver, there is no biological predisposition that makes a woman better suited to the role. She emphasizes that it is important to be aware of the ways in which speaking, acting, and thinking in seemingly mundane routines can unknowingly create and recreate gendered role expectations.

Charles and Kerr (1988) also conducted some foundational work in the field. They studied over 200 young mothers in the London area, and found that when thinking about food and food preparation women overwhelmingly described themselves as the "servers" while men functioned as "providers." One criticism of the study was that it focused solely on couples who were expecting a child or who had very young children.

As a response to the above study, Kemmer, Anderson, and Marshall (1998) told a slightly different story, ten years later. The authors conducted two semi-structured interviews with twenty-two couples from the London area—all participants were employed full-time, unmarried, and had no children. The first interview was conducted three months before the couple was planning on moving in together—co-habitating—and the second was conducted three months after that transition was made. Their study found much more diverse results indicating that just over half of these couples indicated traditional divisions of labor where women were responsible for most or all of the food preparation. The remaining couples were a mix of sharing roles dependent on the meal or day, or men handling the majority of the duties. This study indicates both the evolving divisions of labor in the home and the importance of considering the stage of life of the participants in a study.

An even more recent study on task delegation within families found similar results. They utilized an existing scale, the Gender Role Preference (GRP) scale, to specifically study how married coupled with young children in the home dealt with family food chores. Participants used a Likert-style questionnaire to answer some question about expectations and roles in their families. Based on their answers, they were placed in one of three categories: traditional (regulation of family roles by gender), transitional (somewhere in the middle of the spectrum), or egalitarian (interchangeability among roles with little attention paid to gender). Interestingly, none of the participants who volunteered for this study identified as traditional. The couples in which both partners identified as transitional generally assigned food preparation chores to the person who was not the primary breadwinner in the family. Couples with two egalitarian

partners organized work based on three strategies: role reversal, sharing, and trading off. The above study utilized we see a more nuanced approach to studying task delegation and results which seems to better represent that changing landscape of family roles.

More recent work has allowed for another important shift in perspectives relating to gender and food preparation—that is, the recognition that gender can be performed somewhere on a spectrum, as opposed to two polars. Swenson (2009) conducted some a critical media study and allowed for that perspective. She focused on televised performances of masculinity and femininity in the kitchen. She studied the Food Network, paying specific attention to the presentation of food preparation as gendered work, hoping to specifically to discover if the Food Network presented performances of masculinity and femininity in the kitchen that corresponded with other popular discourses about cooking as primarily a woman's domain. She found:

> The Food Network does construct food preparation as gendered work, and cooking is negotiated in ways that protect traditional understandings of masculinity and femininity. For women, 'kitchen culture' is still strongly tied to the domestic family, generational legacy, and care for others. For the masculine cook, the 'cooking mystique' has shifted, in that cooking discourse no longer warns men that the kitchen in not their lair; yet, to protect the concept of masculinity, men enter the kitchen as scientists, chefs, athletes, and entertainers. (P. 15)

The above studies represent the wide variety of literature that addresses task delegation in the kitchen space and cooking processes. While there has seemingly been a shift from the more traditional gender role expectations of the mid-1900's in married couples and general expectations as depicted by the media, it's clear there are still socially constructed norms and guidelines that influence behavior in this space. What's

not clear is how couples in developing relationships might negotiate the delegation of tasks in the kitchen.

The Heart of the Home: The Kitchen Space

Today, food is prepared and consumed everywhere (food trucks, gourmet restaurants, airplanes, etc.). However, there is not much literature in the communication field that investigates the importance of the kitchen as a place where unique and meaningful communication takes place; the kitchen as what we might call a "communicative site." To be clear, the primary focus of this study is food choice and task delegation in developing relationships. However, since we are limiting the production site to the home kitchen (as opposed to ordering dinner at a restaurant or other domestic housework), it is worthwhile to explore the themes regarding the kitchen space that have been discussed in prior research.

We do know that, culturally, the kitchen is often the central hub of activity within the typical western home. Terence Conran, British designer and restaurateur opens his *Kitchen Book* with this: "A kitchen provides physical and spiritual nourishment, and for many homes is now the heart and soul of family life" (1993, p. 1). A study focusing on the importance of the kitchen in the post-war home found that for these families, "kitchens are the repositories of feelings of intimacy and warmth, of security, comfort and belonging" (Supski, 2006, p. 133).

Additional relevant literature focuses on the home and the conceptions power and order in social spaces associated with food without specifically identifying the kitchen (Sibley & Lowe, 1992). We know the majority of a family's food preparation takes place in the kitchen. We also know that families handle the division of those duties differently

based on certain factors. Some of the factors that affect the outcome when deciding how to divide kitchen chores are based on traditional gender role expectations. Thus, the kitchen is an especially important site in that it can impart comfort and warmth, but can also be the grounds in which battles related to gender role expectations, power, and traditional vs. more progressive roles play out. Meah and Jackson (2013) supported those assertions in their work studying the "kitchen as a key site in which gendered roles and responsibilities are experienced and contested" (p. 578). Men and women in developing relationships, assuming that both partners desire the relationship to continue, have something at stake in the kitchen.

The Way to His Heart: Food and Cooking in Developing Relationships

Developing relationships were selected as for this study for several reasons. First, developing relationships are sites in which identity construction and co-construction is ongoing and meaningful. Mongeau, Jacobsen, and Donnerstein (2007) explain that dating is "the participation of couples in a common activity to interact, become better acquainted, and evaluate each other as potential mates or spouses" (as cited in Amiraian & Sobal, 2009).

Additionally, in developing relationships, participants are actively engaging in what Goffman (1959) refers to as "impression management." Impression management is "the ways in which persons in the company of others strive to present an image of themselves in particular ways" (Scott & Marshall, 2005; Amiraian & Sobal, 2009).

Mongeau et al. (2007) noted (regarding first date "goals") that the foremost goal, as described by college-age and adult daters, was to "reduce uncertainty." While the couples participating in this study will likely not be engaging in a first date, it is

reasonable to assume that because these relationships are still developing, there will be some degree of seeking to reduce uncertainty about themselves and their partners in this setting. Partners are seeking to present themselves in a manner which is both appealing and consistent with their values.

A similar reason for focusing on developing relationships is the frequency of disclosures that occur in these relationships. Couples engaged in the intensifying and integrating stages of developing relationships tend to have the highest level of disclosures, according to Knapp (1984). Disclosure may be important in this context because, again, it indicates that partners are more likely to share information in order to help their significant other form a more complete opinion of them. This desire to share information could help the researcher identify important moments in the interaction as well develop strong follow-up questions aimed at understanding those significant moments.

Additionally, there is some existing literature that focuses on the important role food plays in dating relationships. Sobal and Nelson (2003) find that food consumption is inarguably a significant part of dating because (as discussed above) eating together creates and strengthens social bonds.

Vartanian, Herman, and Polivy (2007) focused on food-intake (type and quantity) as a variable, and found that most people use food and food behaviors as a basis for formulating opinions about others. Additionally, they manage their food choices in order to manage the impression they are making on others. The authors also note:

> It would be particularly important for future research to explore further the ways in which people modify their own food intake in order to convey desirable

impressions to others and to themselves, and to identity the motives, goals, and beliefs that underlie their impression-management efforts. (p. 275)

Additional work has focused on the strategies employed by individuals which attempt to influence others' opinions in social dining situations, ranging from friends, to workplaces, to romantic relationships (Young, Mizzau, Mai, Sirisegaram, & Wilson, 2009). An interesting finding in this particular study was that women consumed more or less calories in social settings based on the number of the men present in the group. The more men present, the fewer calories consumed, and the fewer men present the more calories consumed.

However, unlike the current study, the studies above used settings where a number of pre-determined food choices were presented to participants (salad or a burger?) instead of allowing participants to choose any food to prepare themselves. Choice is posited as being important because previous studies have demonstrated that people seek to manage impressions others form about them via food choices. (Young et al., 2009). Additionally, there are no studies that pay particular attention to studying the interaction which takes places between individuals as they work through the process of preparing a meal.

The above sections have reviewed relevant literature in various fields regarding food and communication, as well as summarized some discussions about food choice, task delegation, the kitchen as a meaningful site, and developing relationships. Before discussing the methodology employed in the study, it's important to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the project.

Theoretical Perspectives

The framework for this study is symbolic interactionism. George Herbert Mead's work had a strong influence on the development of the symbolic interactionist perspective (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Symbolic interactionists believe that people are purposeful, thinking, social beings who are able to intelligently interpret their surroundings and (re)act in way they deem appropriate. They also believe that studying human interaction is a good way to gain insight into human behavior.

Specifically, there are two assumptions central to this line of thinking which influenced the design of this study. The first is that "knowledge is created through action and interaction" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 2). In this study, this means that partners are creating new knowledge and reinforcing or changing old knowledge about themselves and their partners as they cook dinner together.

The second is that "actions carry meanings." and those meanings are "locatable within systems of meanings." (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 6). For example, at a basic level: A high-five on the basketball court means something (job well done, perhaps). It's locatable within larger systems of meaning (the relationship between the two players, the game, the team, the sport, etc.). Meaning is also assigned to past, present, and imagined future interactions. (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Mead, 1956).

In other words, people decide how to act based on past, current, and imagined future experiences. Their partner then decides how to react based on their own interpretation of the initial action while also considering their past, current, and imagined future interactions. "Meaning" in this sense does not refer to literal definition of a word. It refers to the more complex conceptions about interpreted causes and effects of actions,

and about the ways of understanding a particular context and they way one operates within it.

These two assumptions are important to the study because they call attention to the notion that participants are creating and co-creating individual and shared meanings while they work together. These assumptions are also important because they indicate that it is possible to construct meanings within larger contexts—in this case, their developing romantic relationship. Additionally, these assumptions illuminate the essential idea that meaning is being created in every shared moment, in every action and reaction. Researchers believe that studying these moments can lead to a better understanding about human interaction in this particular context.

To refer back to the example of John and Sara, a symbolic interaction-focused researcher would see each interaction between John and Sara is full of potentially interesting data. They would pay particular attention to the way John might choose to respond to Sara's request to grate the cheese by quickly complying with a "Yes, Ma'am!" In this case, it would be interesting for the researcher to explore what exactly is occurring here: her reasoning for the original request, his interpretation of the meaning of her request (again, "meaning" or "interpretation" does not refer to his literal understanding of the words in the request, it refers to a more complex interpretation of the cause and effect), his reaction, and her interpretation of his reaction—these are all occurring, all related, and all based in larger systems of meanings. Larger systems of meanings can also include cultural norms, gender expectations, past experiences, personal values, etc.

This is not to say symbolic interactionists believe that humans are always actively engaging in these attempts to assign meaning to actions. Sometimes, the process of

assigning meaning is a subconscious one, an inescapable product of human communication. Studying interaction and attempting to gain a better understanding of what meanings are being both consciously and unconsciously assigned is important, as it can help researchers understand values, expectations and motivations at play. Better understanding these things will lead to a deeper understanding of the great variety of human interaction.

In this study, there are two levels of interaction which become data for subsequent interpretation. The first level occurs in the kitchen, between two people involved in a developing romantic relationship, as they prepare food together. The secondary level occurs between the researcher and the participants, at a later date, when the original interaction is revisited and discussed. Furthermore, both verbal and non-verbal types of interaction are equally meaningful and able to create, enforce, or change meanings. In this study, non-verbal communication will refer to any non-spoken or written activity, action, creation, movement, cue, etc. which takes place in the kitchen space and cooking process.

Meaning will emerge not only in the study of the ways in which participants communicate via verbal and non-verbal cues in the dinner sessions, but also in the language and actions which the study participants use to characterize their choices and interactions in the interview sessions. Again, regarding the Sara and John example: she asks John if he can help her out because she is running a bit behind. Perhaps upon being asked to reflect upon why she decided to do that, she may realize that she was, in fact, curious to know if John felt comfortable pitching in. Although she may not have tacitly made that acknowledgement upon asking him, it may occur to her upon further reflection

that indeed, she was curious to know how he might react. That too, is the aim of this study—a multi-layer understanding of how cooking scenarios impact communication in developing relationships.

CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

The methodology utilized is grounded theory, as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008) in *Basics of Qualitative Research*. This particular method of research is rooted in the framework of the Pragmatists and Interactionists and can be described as theory building, as opposed to theory testing. Grounded theory dictates a careful study of the data in order to develop new ways to describe phenomena by asking questions, making comparisons, and looking for patterns.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) recognize that true objectivity is a myth and allows for the researcher to be acknowledged as a factor that can potentially impact the research setting. Additionally, they are careful to note that grounded theory isn't a mechanism for simplifying complex and nuanced interactions. Instead, it's a way of methodically creating a language which helps identify relationships between phenomena in order to equip people with the tools and vocabularies needed to discuss complex ideas.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) say this about utilizing grounded theory:

> Important to us are the great varieties of human action, interaction, and emotional responses that people have to the events and problems they encounter. The nature of human responses creates conditions that impact upon, restrict, limit, and contribute toward restructuring the variety of action/interaction that can be noted in societies. (p. 6)

The above quote helps demonstrates how the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and the method of grounded theory are a good fit for this project, noting that both the spectrum of human interaction and the great variety of responses to any

situation are important. In this case, the researcher is studying interactions while cooking in order to develop some concepts and ideas that can help explain what is occurring between romantic partners in the cooking process. Both grounded theory and symbolic interactionism also note that actions affect responses, and that we can gain a greater understanding about why partners choose to act in certain ways by studying and asking questions about those instances.

Participants

Participants consisted of men and women in developing relationships, ages ranging from 21-35. The purpose of limiting the sample to this age range was to attempt to recruit participants who were members of the same generation–the Millennial Generation. For the purposes of this study, that group can be defined as anyone being born between 1980 and 1997 (Pew Research Center, 2010). While this study does not attempt to generalize results to any particular generation, the researcher was interested to see whether limiting respondents to a particular generation might uncover some patterns and similarities not otherwise discussed in existing research.

The sample included four couples, eight individuals. Developing relationships, for the purpose of this study, was defined as relationships in which partners are "exclusive" (that is, not dating other individuals), but not engaged or already married. Sexual orientation did not preclude any couple from inclusion in the sample, however all respondents were in heterosexual relationships.

Participants were recruited via a convenience sampling technique, as described by Koerber (2008). This means that participants were recruited for the project via recommendations from friends or acquaintances of the researcher. A small study of this

nature will not be generalizable to a larger population, nor is that the goal. As mentioned above, the study is not designed to draw general conclusions about a larger population but rather to examine the richness of unique interactions in a particular setting.

Participant confidentiality was protected by storing data on password-protected drives and in locked files. Before agreeing to participate, participants were provided with a summary of the study and an agreement form for their signatures (Appendix C). Prior to signing and beginning the sessions, participants had the opportunity to ask any questions of the researcher. At any time, participants could withdraw from the study. This study was approved by Boise State University's Institutional Review Board.

Procedures

The initial phase of data gathering took place within a home occupied by one or both of the partners in the relationship. Both partners were present for this portion of the study, which will be referred to as the "dinner session."

Twenty-four hours before partaking in this portion of the project, the partners were presented with a simple prompt (Appendix A) that instructed them to work together to select a meal to prepare for dinner the following evening. The prompt also asked that they have the appropriate groceries on hand before beginning the dinner session. Just prior to beginning the dinner session, the researcher arrived and set-up a camera within the home to capture the session. At that point, the participants had an opportunity to ask the researcher any questions. Once all parties were ready to proceed, the researcher began the recording the session and exited the home. The researcher then went to coffee shop or restaurant nearby to wait. Participants were instructed to record the dinner preparation and cooking, and continue recording until the meal was ready to be consumed. The

consumption of the meal was not recorded. Once the meal was prepared, the participants contacted the researcher via text message, who immediately returned to the home and quickly retrieved the camera, just as each couple was beginning their meal. The day following the dinner session the researcher transcribed the recording word-for-word, as well as developed a record of initial impressions in typed memos.

Of the four couples, three were cohabitating, and one was not. The length of relationship varied from three months to just over five years. One couple participated in the study remotely by filming themselves and uploading their dinner session to a password protected server and completing the follow-up interview via email.

No more than one week following the dinner session, the follow-up interviews took place. Four were conducted in person, and two more conducted via email. Two male participants did not make themselves available for follow-up interviews. Thus, four women and two men completed the follow-up interviews, which did provide enough data for overall analysis. During the interview portion, the researcher took field notes and transcribed direct quotes. Interview questions (Appendix B) were designed to follow-up on specific interactions from the dinner session, as well as to open a discussion about particularly noteworthy or interesting occurrences. Interview questions also offered an opportunity for the researcher to become better acquainted with the participant, discuss motivations, clarify interactions, and check perceptions to better facilitate analysis.

Analysis

It's important to clarify some of the terminology that will be used for discussing varying levels of analysis in the following sections. *Themes* represent the highest level of abstract ideas that emerged during the thematic analysis portion of the entire data set

(more on thematic analysis below). *Categories* are a secondary level of abstraction that emerged during both the open and axial coding phases of analysis of all data sets. A third term, *Concepts,* refers to "words that stand for ideas contained in data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 159). Concepts don't fall cleanly into the theme/category hierarchy. Concepts are "interpretations, the product of analysis" (p. 159).

Two tools were employed to help guide analysis: thematic analysis and coding. Thematic analysis, as described by Owen (1984), includes combing the data and paying particular attention to concepts which are recurring, repeated, and stated with force. While recurrence and repetition seem to express the same thing, they are differentiated in that recurrence may occur when a particular line of thinking or concept is expressed repeatedly, but using different language or verbiage to convey the thought. Repetition occurs when identical or similar language is used to express an idea.

Coding refers to a process of analysis that grounded theory methodology utilizes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Two types of coding occurred during the analysis of this data set: open and axial coding. Open coding refers to the process of breaking down data, separating ideas into emerging categories, and clarifying what those categories mean. Axial coding refers to the effort to discover relationships between the categories identified. In addition to coding, the researcher also made use of field notes and memos in the analysis process. Field notes were collected during the initial viewing of the dinner episode and during interviews. Memos were employed throughout the analysis to expound on categories and concepts as they emerged.

It should be noted that studying communication which takes place in a more organic setting (en-situ) is equally as insightful as studying how participants characterize

their interactions and choices after they have taken place. Layering the two approaches in one study, as the researcher sought to achieve here, can provide an especially unique viewpoint.

Analyzing the Data

An initial round of coding took place following each data gathering session (interviews and dinner sessions). As discussed above, the sessions were coded utilizing open and axial coding methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Initial coding sessions consisted of the following: 1) transcribing interview and dinner session tapes; 2) carefully reading the transcriptions without writing long observations or memos in order to gain a general knowledge of the flow of the sessions; 3) a slower, more methodical reading of each session in which the researcher wrote questions and made detailed notes; 4) the creation of memos, where interesting thoughts, questions and potential categories were explored. Memos included direct quotes from the transcriptions; 5) following the memo writing, the researcher utilized open and axial coding in an effort to discover categories, and the relationships between them; 6) memo building and refining occurred continuously throughout the process.

After each individual session was coded, the data will was re-examined as a whole data set and re-coded utilizing the techniques described above. Continually coding each individual data set, then re-examining the whole data set as each piece was added allowed the researcher to utilize constant comparison analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Constant comparison occurs when the researcher consistently compares new data against an existing data set, asking questions to determine what patterns are emerging, being

confirmed, or being tested. It also helps to establish when a saturation point has been achieved within the data.

Finally, the researcher again approached the data, this time focusing on thematic analysis techniques to identify themes with respect to recurring ideas, things that were stated with force, or repeated verbiage. Using thematic analysis in this manner helped identify two overarching themes and organize the categories and concepts within these emergent themes.

Some of the categories and concepts that emerged during the open and axial coding phases included "contributor to the relationship," "gender-role expectations," "approval seeking," "self-talk," "relationship challenging behavior," "relationship strengthening behavior," "male sous chef," "breadth of discussion topics," "physical play," "moments of tension," and "executive control." When thematic analysis was employed with an eye towards the whole data set, the researcher developed two broad themes which seemed to encompass the majority of the existing categories. Those were "defining one's role" and "constructing the relationship." Those themes, categories, and concepts are all discussed below.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

The dinner session data proved to be by far the more productive data set in terms of analysis. The opportunity to view individuals within their own homes, without a researcher present, was a unique one. Although there was a camera present, many participants stated that they actually "forgot it was there" after they began the session. Thus, the participants felt comfortable and likely acted in ways very similar to their normal patterns of interactions, reducing the potential for collecting misleading data. The interview sessions that took place following the dinner sessions were less fruitful, but still helpful in clarifying data and checking perceptions.

During the dinner sessions, the four couples created sushi, spaghetti, chicken mozzarella, and quiche, respectively. The couples names (which have been changed to protect confidentiality), cohabitation status, length of relationship, and respective dishes are as follows: Jen and Tom, not cohabitating, dating three months, sushi; Maria and Cody, cohabitating (albeit for less than a week at time of dinner session), dating two years; spaghetti. Liz and Jack, cohabitating, dating three years, chicken mozzarella; Amy and Scott, cohabitating, dating five years, quiche.

After careful analysis, the data demonstrated two broad themes: "Defining One's Role" and "Constructing the Relationship." These two themes demonstrate that many of the categories which emerged from the data dealt with participant's attempts to define

their roles in the relationships, or were focused around building a particular type of relationship.

Within each of these themes, several categories were identified, and are discussed below. Additionally, the author posited that task delegation and food choice might be two particularly important concepts to better understand developing relationships in the food preparation context. While the task delegation concept provided some interesting data for interpretation, food choice did not appear to consistently represent something meaningful to the participants. Both are also discussed below.

Defining One's Role

This theme reflects the individual's need to define their role both within relationship and the cooking context. The researcher identified two categories that described the different ways in which participants sought to define their roles: 1.) Gender expectations, and 2.) Task delegations.

The first category discussed below deals with the ways that couples defined their roles in relation to some gender role expectations.

<u>Gender Expectations</u>

As discussed in the introduction, women have traditionally been considered the primary caregivers within the home, and men have functioned as "providers" (De Vault, 1991; Charles & Kerr, 1988; Meah & Jackson, 2013). Researchers have also posited that men and women have a sense of awareness that they are expected to function in certain ways in the cooking context—women as being responsible for preparation and execution of meals, and men on the periphery, if at all (of course, the design of this project required

the men to be present). Several concepts emerged from the data that demonstrated the gender role expectations (the woman as the caring provider and responsible for the execution of meals) were possibly affecting the ways partners sought to define their roles in the cooking process.

In the dinner sessions, there were interesting ways in which women seemed to be seeking to be viewed as a caring provider who put her partners ahead of her own, a stereotypical view of a traditional woman's role. This concept occurred in all four-dinner sessions and was labeled *approval seeking*. In these scenarios, the female partner sought the approval of her partner for some aspect of the meal she was working on, assuming the role of the caring provider as she worked to create a meal with her partners needs, likes, and preferences at the forefront of her efforts.

Direct quotes supporting this concept include when Jen was making sauce for the sushi. She made of point of asking Tom to taste it several times, saying, "Ok, taste this. How's this for spice? More mayo? Is that too spicy? A little spicy?" to which Tom responded "A little, on the end…too spicy." Jen responded, "Yeah, I made sure not to mix all the mayo, so…ok, try this." Tom then declared the sauce "Perfect." Here, you see Jen working to obtain Tom's approval on the sauce, wanting to ensure she was meeting his needs. Maria, working on a salad while Cody focused on cooking the meat for spaghetti sauce, asked if she could toss the dressing on the salad. He responded that he might like to take some to work tomorrow, to which Maria responded by stating "I don't have to toss it! Here, I'll just leave it, then, babe, I'll put all the extra veggies in separate baggies for you can have a yummy salad for lunch tomorrow." Liz and Jack, while working on a chicken mozzarella dish, had the following exchange. Liz: "What's your

thought about cream cheese being used in sauces?" Jack: "As far as taste?" Liz: "As far as taste and texture." Jack: "I guess I just see it kind of as a substitute for alfredo." Liz: "But, do you not like it? I won't use it!" Jack: "No, I like it."

Of course, it's probably reasonable to expect partners in developing relationships to want their significant other to enjoy a meal they worked together to create. However, the forcefulness of the interaction stood out. It appeared to be very important to obtain the specific verbal approval for these items. In this case, it seems the women are seeking to define their role as a caring and giving partner, which fits with traditional concepts about the woman's gender role. She is concerned with her partner's preferences and puts his satisfaction at the forefront of her actions

A second way in which partners demonstrated an attempt to define their roles based on some gender expectations occurred when the specific attention was paid to the way the flow of the cooking process was managed. The kitchen has historically been a women's domain. In all the scenarios, it seemed evident that while the men were present, the women were still in charge of the successful completion of the meal and the men functioned as an assistant who was there to help ensure that happened. This concept was called the *male sous chef*. In a professional kitchen, the executive chef is charge of the overall development and execution of a meal. The sous chefs function like an assistant, helping complete tasks assigned in order to have a successful meal.

Jack provided the concept as an in-vivo code (a phrase taken directly from the dialogue in the data, Strauss & Corbin, 2008) when he said in his follow-up interview "I'm usually the sous chef, cutting vegetables and grating cheeses or washing dishes. I think that's my role because my significant other does so much of the planning and

preparation and execution, I just try to help where she needs me." Amy echoed that sentiment about her significant other, stating that "Most dishes that are more than one or two steps, I have to handle the process and the planning" and "It works best when I give him jobs to focus on." The women were responsible for the overall execution and successful outcome of the meal. The men were assigned specific tasks for completion. Another example that depicted this occurred when Jen said to Tom "Ok, so how long will the rice take? You should put it in the fridge now. We need to know when to start the oil. Timing is everything!"

Another way the researcher observed the women controlling the flow and process was in the way the women engaged in self-talk–that is, talking quietly to themselves as they assessed the course of the meal and the next steps. Both Liz and Amy could be heard saying to themselves, "Ok…now what…?" while Jen said several times throughout the prep "Let's see…we have…" and Maria twice assessed the situation with an "OK…so…"

Both the men and women seem to be seeking to better define their roles in this concept–Jack wants to be seen as a helpful, attentive partner who is able to take direction. The women, assuming responsibility for the execution of the meal, appear capable and organized, able to care for a family.

The two concepts above detail different ways in which we see partners defining their roles according to some sort of gender role expectations. At first, it might seem that these two concepts don't fit within the same category, because they portray the women in the scenarios in somewhat competing perspectives. The behaviors discussed in the approval seeking section tend to portray the women in a more subservient role. The

discussion relating to the male sous chef concept depicts the women as the dominant

partner in the dinner sessions. It is interesting to consider the two ideas coinciding–the

approval seeking behaviors exhibited by the women, with the simultaneous

understanding that the overall execution of the meal is their responsibility. It seems

counterintuitive. However, because both of these concepts described are related to ways

in which partners sought to define their roles that were affected by traditional gender

roles, they both belong squarely in this category. Task delegation, discussed below, also

touched on some gender expectations, but was not nearly as firmly rooted in gender role

expectations as the two concepts discussed above.

Task Delegation

Task delegation refers to the ways couples delegated tasks and how those

strategies were used to help define their roles in the kitchen. Although not all couples

employed the same strategies, it was apparent that the delegation of tasks consistently

functioned as a way to demonstrate their strengths and define their role as an important

contributor to the relationship. This particular category, posited by the researcher as

potentially being important prior to undertaking the study, was rich with data in all four

dinner sessions. Additional data was gathered during the follow-up interviews.

Interestingly, each couple employed a slightly different strategy and justification

for how they managed their task delegations. Jen and Tom didn't take time to discuss

their tasks at all during the dinner session. It was seemingly pre-arranged who would be

responsible for what. When Jen was questioned about task delegation during the follow-

up interview, she noted that they had made sushi together once before, and thus had

established a strategy for completing the meal that worked for them. It involved Tom

cutting the fish and preparing the rice, while Jen focused on sauces and vegetables. Jen said she felt that worked for them, because Tom was more experienced in sushi preparation and had a better feel for how to cut the fish and cook the rice. She also noted how she preferred to focus on sauces, because it involved a more ongoing process of testing and adjusting seasoning. Sauces and rice were the only two things that were actually "cooked" during this session. The strategy employed to guide task delegation in this session could be described as experience and preference–tasks were divided according to who had the most experience with certain aspects, with attention also paid to preferred jobs.

Of all the couples, Maria and Cody utilized and expressed a style of task delegation that was affected by some gender expectations. During the dinner session, Cody was responsible for cooking the meat and onions, then adding the pre-made jarred sauce. Maria was responsible for cutting vegetables, preparing bread, making a salad, and cooking the pasta. Cody and Maria both noted in their follow-up interviews that Cody was generally responsible for cooking meat, especially when a grill was involved. Maria said she thinks he is better able to season meat, and interestingly, they both said that grilling was "Duh, a man's job" (Cody) and "… meat is maybe a more manly job?" (Maria). However, this couple was also the only one to note that Cody was actually responsible for preparing as many or more meals as Maria did. It's difficult to know if Cody is responsible for meat because he grills more. However, strategies employed to guide task delegation in this setting could be described as experience.

Liz and Jack use pre-cooked chicken for the chicken mozzarella dish, so no meat preparation occurred within their context either. However, the style of work in the dinner

session and their follow-up interviews indicated a clear tactics consistently employed to delegate tasks–they very much employed the executive chef style. Liz said this about their work styles, "In the kitchen, I tend to want to be in charge. Even when we're grilling or doing meat, Jack will usually ask me to check it before he says it's done. I think that's because the kitchen is kind of my realm…I love to share it with him, but I kind of want to maintain…oversight, I guess." Jack echoed her sentiment, saying, "I just try to help where she needs me." The strategy employed by the couple to manage tasks in the kitchen could be described as executive chef—one individual manages the process and delegates tasks to the other as they see fit.

Amy and Scott employed a mixture of the above tactics to delegate tasks in the kitchen. In the dinner session, they prepared the quickest meal (a quiche took them 14 minutes to get into the oven) and the only things "cooked" were some bacon and spinach, which meant there wasn't an abundance of data. Notably, Amy mentioned in her follow-up interview that Scott tends to handle most types of meat preparation (again, with special attention paid to grilling— "especially grilling"). However, in the dinner session, Amy was the one responsible for working at the stovetop and cooking the bacon, and actively shooed Scott away from what she interpreted as her role, saying "Get away from my bacon!" to which Scott responded "I need something to do!" and Amy replied "You haven't even cut your tomatoes yet." Scott: "I wasn't instructed to cut tomatoes" Amy: "You were, you just weren't listening." When questioned about that particular interaction in the follow-up interview, Amy briefly discussed how the kitchen had sometimes been a site of tension in their relationship. She said, "Scott cooks best when he's alone. He's gotten better since we've started dating, but when we first got together, he was really

frantic in the kitchen. We've figured out how to manage it. He likes a more active role, so grilling meats works for him. I'm a little more patient and don't mind doing things that require multiple steps. It works best when I give him jobs to focus on." Here, it seems there is a combination of preference and executive chef task delegation styles at play.

Above, there are four dinner sessions detailed. The couples seemed to utilize a combination of three tactics to manage their task delegations: experience, preference, and executive decision-making.

The delegation of tasks consistently functioned as a way for partners to define their roles as equal contributors operating on equal footing in the kitchen. Couples in these scenarios were also negotiating task delegation in strategic manner that allowed them to cement their roles as providing something valuable to the relationship.

In each dinner session, the men assumed active roles and were genuinely engaged in the process. There was no indication within any of the data that any of the male partners were unwilling or uninterested in taking an active role in the food preparation context. While two couples did include a traditional gendered task (the man grills) for a justification regarding their styles of task delegations, in both situations, they defied other traditional divisions of labor in their food preparations. In Cody's case, he was generally responsible for more of the food preparation as a whole than Maria. In Scott's case, Amy used a preferred task scenario to justify his grilling—he needs to be kept busy.

In the follow-up interviews, all the participants indicated they enjoy cooking together, and view it as a way to strengthen their bond as a couple. However, in each dinner session, there were moments of tension that arose between the couples. The section below will discuss several ways in which the researcher posits that working

together in the kitchen provides couples a unique opportunity to build their relationship in various ways.

Constructing the Relationship

The categories below reveal the ways in which couples appeared to build their relationship though interaction. The first two categories in this section demonstrate couples' efforts to build a strong bond, and the third category reflects those instances where interactions challenged an existing dimension of the relationship. Categories include 1.) Breadth of topics, 2.) Physical play, 3.) Moments of tension.

Breadth of Topics

This theme describes the wide *breadth of topics* broached and covered by partners involved in the dinner sessions. Topics of discussion ranged from light-hearted to quite serious, from terminal diseases suffered by family members to the upcoming Winter Olympics; from friends who were recently released from incarceration to household projects. One couple spent a few minutes have a fairly serious discussion about their relationship status how they both assessed they were past "the honeymoon stage" of their somewhat new relationship. Another had an in-depth discussion about their financial goals.

It seems that the food preparation context and kitchen space may perhaps be especially conducive to broaching a wide variety of topics due to the fact that both partners are engaged in tasks which require some level of attention. The tasks offer a buffer between their partner and themselves, allowing partners to bring up topics they are otherwise too uncomfortable to discuss. In the kitchen, one has a distraction, a reason to

change the subject, a task to focus one's attention on if one becomes uncomfortable. The

researcher posits that couples in developing relationships may feel more comfortable

broaching topics which are sensitive to them when working together in the kitchen. This

finding could be related to the idea posited by Cramer et al. (2011) that food is "often

linked to emotion and memory or serves as a source of comfort" (p. xii). Interestingly, the

couple that had been dating for the least amount of time also covered the widest range of

topics and disclosed more personal information than any other couple. That supports

Knapp's (1984) assertion that couples in the "intensifying" stages of developing

relationships tend to disclose personal information more frequently.

It is reasonable to assume that couples who use the kitchen and cooking as an

opportunity to discuss serious topics may feel a connection to the cooking process as an

activity in which they strengthen their relationship through talk and disclosure. In the

follow-up interviews, several participants made statements which supported this idea. Jen

said, "When we cook, it's a time for us to be together and talk. About our day or just

about life and general. We enjoy it." Maria said, "We enjoy cooking! For us, it's a time to

talk about things and make something together."

Physical Play

A second relationship strengthening behavior observed was a non-verbal way of

interacting—the occurrence of *physical play* in the kitchen. All four couples engaged in

aspects of physical play in the space, exhibiting various types of flirting behaviors that

renewed and confirmed their attraction to their partners. Examples include Cody

playfully poking at Maria with a wooden spoon, Amy and Scott pretending to jostle for

the best position at the countertop for prep work, and Jen and Tom play wrestling over a glass of wine.

Existing research shows a positive link between relationship satisfaction and the rate at which the couples participate physical activities they find exciting (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna & Heyman, 2000). If "physical activities" is understood to include the cooking context, it makes sense that couples who enjoy cooking together (and this is how all the participants described themselves) would find themselves feeling more satisfied in their relationship and more likely to engage in flirtatious and playful activities in the kitchen.

While the researcher did not broach the "physical play" topic during follow-up interviews, interpretation of the data suggests physical play demonstrates a desire to strengthen and build the relationship and renew feelings of attraction.

Moments of Tension

Relationships were both challenged and strengthened in *moments of tension*. By "moments of tension," the researcher refers to obstacles or issues that arise in either conversation or tasks that need to be navigated in order for the discussion or work to move forward. In each of the dinner sessions, these moments occurred. Jen and Tom's moment centered on the preparation of the rice and the length of time it required. Maria and Cody argued briefly over how to heat the bread and how to serve the salad. Liz expressed frustration with Jack's slow deliberation over what type of pasta to serve with their chicken mozzarella. Amy was visibly annoyed with Scott when she interpreted that he wasn't listening to her directions and was intruding upon her tasks.

These moments of tension challenged the relationships by exposing existing differences in working and decision-making styles. Perhaps working together in the kitchen space might compound some of those existing issues. Amy pointed out in her follow-up interview that she and Scott found the kitchen to be a place of tension at the beginning of their relationship. However, she also clarified that they were able to find a way to work together in the space which they found enjoyable.

These moments of tension were resolved quickly, primarily by the woman making an "executive decision." Jen said, "Tom, it's fine—it's only our second time, it's ok if it's not perfect. We'll just go with it." Liz actually used the term "executive decision" when she grew frustrated with Jack's deliberation.

Interestingly, the women asking for an opinion or decision regarding a component of the meal, and then challenging her partners' contribution preceded three of the four moments of tension. Furthermore, two of the *approval-seeking* moments discussed in the role confirmation section occurred within two minutes of these moments of tension. While the moments of tension were both generated and resolved by the women, they quickly employed a strategy to soothe any residual tension with an approval-seeking interaction. In this case, the women who were firmly in control of the overall meal, deferred to their partners for approval on something.

Ultimately, that's what also makes these moments ones in which the relationship is strengthened. The resolution of the issue proved to be more important than the conflict, as it came quickly and thoroughly in each situation. In all, the moments of tension exposed differences in the partners' working styles and could have led to confrontations, thus presenting a challenge to the relationship, but in each case were quickly resolved by

the women, then followed-up by effort to soothe residual tensions, ultimately leading to

an interaction that seemed to build a stronger relationship.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

This study aimed to examine ways in which couples in developing relationships interact while they work together to create a meal. The findings in this study support the notion that the kitchen is a unique site in which meaningful communication takes place, as put forth by Cramer et al. (2011). This study develops the concept that couples in developing relationships interact in the kitchen in specific ways which shape their connection to each other as well as their role in the relationship. The researcher discovered that many of the interactions that occurred while working together to create a meal were focused on the partners' attempt to better define their role in the process as well as the relationship or focused on building a successful relationship.

The interactions that were focused on further defining roles were sometimes affected by some gender role expectations. De Vault (1991) and Charles and Kerr (1988) conducted research that indicated that women felt they were primarily responsible for being the preparer and server of food in the home. More recent research showed an evolving division of labor in the home, with men sharing some of those duties (Kemmer et al., 1998). Participants used tactics like approval seeking and task delegating to define how they wanted to be viewed by their partners. This study indicated that some existing gender role expectations were at play when partners were working to define their roles, but ultimately the data reflected a desire to be seen as an equal contributor and important

partner in the relationship. This supports the notion that the strategies for managing the division of labor within the home are changing, and the role expectations that perpetuate the traditional stereotypes of the kitchen as a woman's domain are shifting.

The interactions that depicted efforts to build the relationship were focused on constructing a solid, successful and happy bond. Specific types of relationship-building interactions that occurred included the breadth of topics discussed in the space and the presence of flirting, or physical play during the process. While participants didn't overtly say that the kitchen was where they discussed hard or personal topics, the researcher posits that the amount of disclosures and the breadth of topics discussed in the dinner session indicate that to be true. The physical play that occurred indicated efforts by partners to renew and confirm their attraction to each other. While relationship satisfaction was not studied in this context, the presence of the flirting and play seem to support findings that state that couples who work together at activities they find exciting tend to report being more satisfied in their relationships (Aron et al., 2000). While some moments of tension arose that challenged the strength of the relationship, the efforts to resolve the moments of tension came quickly and were effective and ultimately served as an opportunity for the couple to work through a conflict, strengthening their bond.

Questions for Further Analysis

There were several additional considerations identified by the author that might lead to interesting opportunities for further lines of questioning. Those are discussed below.

One question for further research might be "How do couples who don't enjoy working together in the kitchen interact while they prepare a meal together?" Every

respondent in this study indicated they enjoyed spending time with their significant other in the kitchen. How would the interactions be different if participants did not enjoy the process? Studying this could give researchers more insight into strategies employed in developing relationships to negotiate conflict.

Another for future researchers to explore deals with the length of relationship vs. length of time spent preparing the meal. A question for future study might be: "Do couples spend less time in the kitchen together as their relationship length increases?" This is because researchers observed the following pattern: Jen and Tom, together for only three months, spent nearly two hours preparing their meal together. Maria and Cody, together for just over two years, spent about 45 minutes on their meal. Liz and Jack, together for nearly 3.5 years, spent about 30 minutes working together. Finally, Amy and Scott, together over five years, spent under 15 minutes preparing their quiche. It would be worthwhile for scholars to further explore this pattern, especially with respect to relationship satisfaction. Does satisfaction decline as the time spent together in the kitchen declines? Do couples that have been together a long time and still spend a lot of time working together in the kitchen report higher satisfaction? These more quantitative research-oriented questions would be useful for understanding more about the types of communication that take place in the kitchen context.

A third area for further exploration is the interesting juxtaposition presented by the notion that women primarily controlled the flow of work and felt responsible for overall successful execution of the meal, but all engaged in approval-seeking behaviors, while their male counterparts did not. As discussed above, the study supported a shifting division of labor within the home. How strategic were these approval-seeking moments?

Interpersonal communication scholars would be interested to know more about the tactics employed by partners in relationships to soothe moments of tension. How aware are partners of their efforts? Are they strategic? A more thorough study of these interactions could lead to the development of additional interpersonal communication theory, and the cooking context seemed to be a site where these tactics were especially apparent.

A final area for further exploration involves food choice. One aspect of the food preparation context posited by the researcher as potentially being important prior to undertaking the study dealt with food choice. In the introduction, the link between impression management and food consumption and food choice was discussed. However, in the context of this study, participants didn't offer strong, meaningful data that supported any links between food choice and impression management. Three of the couples said their food choice was based on convenience, and one couple mentioned that they enjoyed the interactivity of their particular choice. One of the couples also added that they were focused primarily on the healthful aspects of their dish. Therefore, the idea that food choices might represent an opportunity to manage impressions or identities within the kitchen didn't emerge in this study. However, research strongly suggests that people use food as a tool to manage the impression they make on others. This could be because this particular research setting was not conducive to explore such a concept. In follow-up interviews, Jen said this about the significance of food to her and her relationship. "I love to cook, but cooking is also very personal to me. I'll cook for my friends and family, but it will take me awhile before I'll cook dinner for a guy. For me, I feel a little vulnerable when I deliver the end result to someone." Based on that sentiment, it's reasonable to assume that Jen may actively attempt to manage her

impression via what she chooses to cook for someone. Perhaps a research experiment more specifically geared towards exploring this single concept could yield more fruitful results. Special occasions, first meals, etc. may be a better setting for exploring this idea.

<u>Limitations</u>

Several aspects of this research project presented limitations. While patterns were apparent within the data set, additional couples for study could have added to the existing themes. In addition to being small, the sample size included all white, heterosexual participants. Also, the age range of participants included only 20 and 30-somethings. That presents a potential limitation as well, as members of different generations have vastly different experiences and expectations for behaviors in this context. However, it's important to note that the study examines the richness of specific interactions and is not trying to make generalizable claims, so the impact of the above limitations is diminished.

A second limitation revolves around the question of the veracity of the claim that the kitchen provides an especially unique site in which to observe these behaviors. While the author demonstrated that notion by discussing appropriate research supporting the claim, it would be helpful to design further testing that seeks to more specifically examine how unique these experiences are to this particular space, or to further develop a model that demonstrated this.

A third limitation deals with the concept of "developing" relationships. While the author clearly defined this term for the purpose of the study, there are several potential pitfalls to the approach embraced here. One is the suggestion that all relationships are always "developing," despite arbitrary qualifications like "engaged" or "married." Would the sample have yielded drastically different results for married couples? Is there truly a

distinction to be made between someone who has been dating for three months and gets married in year three vs. someone dating for ten years but is yet to engaged? Is one relationship still developing, while the other is not? Indeed, for the purpose of this study, three of the four participants had been dating for multiple years. It would have been more useful to limit the sample to participants who had been dating for a specific timeframe, as opposed to using relationship status as a qualifier.

Conclusion

This study developed an understanding of the ways in which couples in developing relationships interact while they work together to prepare a meal. Couples engaged in behaviors that sought to better define their roles as partners, while also taking advantage of the opportunities to build their relationship together.

Findings support the idea that the kitchen is an especially meaningful site in which unique communication takes place. Because of the emotional and physical connection to food, couples are able to use the kitchen site and cooking process as an interactive site that is particularly suited for helping them define their role and build their relationship. The presence of food in this particular context offers both a distraction and a vehicle for couples to talk, flirt, and build a strong bond. The necessity of task delegation is an opportunity for both to cement their role as an important contributor to the relationship. Women used approval-seeking tactics to define their role as caring and giving. Men were able to demonstrate their willingness to help and ability to take directions while women took the lead. Working through minor conflicts in this context presented an opportunity to demonstrate that both partners cared more about the success of the relationship than they did being about being right.

Scholars had not previously approached this topic. The work contributes to interpersonal communication literature, as well as the growing body of food-related communication research.

In addition to adding to the scholarly body of research, there are two reasons the study is significant: First, because the study represents an opportunity for couples in developing relationships to better understand what motivates their actions in the cooking context. A better understanding of motivations in this context can lead to more satisfying interpersonal relationships in this context. Secondly, because the findings support the notion that cooking represents a unique lens to study the richness of human interactions. Understanding the potential of cooking and food as a lens for study will open up additional research avenues that can lead to better understandings about crucial topics such gender, power, class, and more.

It's true that the work it takes to create a meal together is not mundane. In this study, that work presented opportunities for couples to better define their roles in their respective relationships. The kitchen space also offers a site where couples have unique opportunities to build their relationship together. This study implies that food, while vital for nourishment and growth of individuals, also represents an opportunity for couples in developing relationships to both nourish and grow their bonds.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment E-Mail

Hello,

My name is Megan Boatman and I am a graduate student working towards my MA in Communication at Boise State University. I am conducting a research study about how couples in developing relationships interact while they prepare a meal together.

I am emailing to ask if you and your partner would like to participate in the study. Participation will include one video-recorded dinner making session with both partners present (about one and a half hours) and one follow-up interview with each of you (about 30 minutes). The dinner and interview sessions will take place on separate days and both will be scheduled in advance. I'll provide all the recording equipment and some general guidance prior to the dinner session.

Participation is completely voluntary and your identities will be kept confidential in any written reports. If you want to not answer a question or withdraw your consent at any time, you may do with no repercussions.

Please send me an email (meganboatman@u.boisestate.edu) if you are willing to participate.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me personally as well.

Thank you for your help.

Megan Boatman

Communication Department

Boise State University

APPENDIX B

Dinner Prompt

Greetings,

Thank you very much for your participation in this study.

The first portion of the study is the "dinner session." Below you will find some general instructions for completing the dinner session. Please don't hesitate to contact me at any time if you have questions or comments. My contact information is below.

Remember, participation is completely voluntary and your identities will be kept anonymous in any written reports.

The Dinner Session Instructions

Together we will select a date for the dinner session. Keep these things in mind.

One or two days before: Together, please discuss what meal you will cook together during the dinner session. Please do this to ensure you have all the necessary ingredients on hand.

The meal can be anything you want, but it should be something you can work together to create. Please avoid choices like pre-frozen meals or take and bake items. The dish should be primarily made by hand. Supplementary items like pre-made marinades, salad dressings, condiments, etc. are fine.

The day of: At a pre-agreed upon time, the researcher will come to the home kitchen to collect the consent forms and set-up the recording equipment. At this point, both partners should be present. Once the forms are collected and the camera and is set, the researcher will depart and the dinner session can begin.

Couples should attempt to work and interact as naturally as possible and if possible, ignore the camera.

Two general questions will be provided by the researcher prior to the dinner session and are simply to help guide the conversation. Feel to answer them with as much or as little detail as you'd like.

Question 1: Talk a little bit about the dish you are preparing. Why did you decide to make this particular dish?
Question 2: What was dinnertime like in your family, growing up?
Question 3: Does food hold any special significance in your relationship? Do you have special dishes, places, or memories surrounding food?

Couples should continue to record their interactions until the dish is completed and plates have been served. Once you are ready to sit and eat, please turn off the recording device.

Megan will retrieve the recording devices the following day. Thanks!

APPENDIX C

Interview Script and Questions

"Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.

The purpose of this interview is to get your feedback about the dinner session that was conducted earlier this week. The general purpose of my study is to learn more about how participants in developing romantic relationships interact while preparing a meal together. The information gathered will be used to better understand the ways in which partners in relationships relate to each other in that specific scenario.

The underlying assumption that we are working with is that the act f breaking bread – of preparing and consuming a meal with someone is – is significant. It can bring people together, strengthen existing bonds, forge new relationships, and soothe a conflict. Studying how people interact and then reflect on their interactions in this setting might lend us a better understanding of how participants in developing relationships knowingly and unknowingly attempt to communicate themselves via food and cooking.

We will watch the dinner session together, and then conduct the interview. The interview itself will take about a half an hour. We will videotape the discussion to make sure that it is recorded accurately. I will also take notes. Remember, you can decline to answer any question or ask to stop at any time. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?"

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

TONE SETTING (EACH RESPONSE WILL BE PROBED FOR MORE DATA)
1. What was mealtime like in your family?
2. How often do you and your significant other cook together?
3. What's mealtime like in your relationship?
4. Tell me a little more about any special significance food has to you, and/or your relationship.

FOCUSED (AGAIN, EACH RESPONSE WILL BE PROBED FOR MORE DATA)
1. How did you decide what to make during the dinner session?
2. Why did you choose to make that particular dish?
3. What does that dish mean to you?
4. How did you decide who would do what, task-wise?
5. Do you have "normal" jobs in the kitchen? What are they? Why?
6. Do you prefer to do certain tasks more than others? Which ones? Why?
7. Dinner session specific questions. Ex: Can you tell me why you chopped the vegetables while she cooked them? She made a joke about your cooking at one point – what did she mean by that? Etc.
8. Follow-up questions, anything to add?

APPENDIX D

Consent to be a Research Participant

INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: I Bake, He Grills: Relationships in the Kitchen
Principal Investigator: Megan Boatman   **Co-Investigator:** Dr. Heidi Reeder

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

➢ **Purpose and Background**
You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about how participants in developing romantic relationships interact while preparing a meal together. The information gathered will be used to better understand the ways in which romantic partners relate to each other in a specific scenario. You are being asked to participate because you are currently involved in a developing (exclusive, but unmarried) romantic relationship, and between the ages of 21 and 35.

➢ **Procedures**
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to consent to being video-recorded while you and your partner prepare a dinner together. The researcher will provide all the necessary equipment and technology. The researcher will be present at the beginning of the session, then leave, and collect the recordings at a later date. You will be given some general instructions prior to beginning the dinner recording. (See attached.)

Additionally, you will be asked to participate in one brief follow-up interview following the dinner session. The interview will last approximately thirty minutes. During the interviews, you will watch the dinner session with the researcher, then be asked about your interactions with your partner during the dinner session. Questions may generally relate to food choice, task delegation, rituals, expectations, and values. The interview will be audio-recorded and the researcher may take notes as well.

Direct quotes from the dinner and interview sessions may be be used in the final publication to support any findings. Although direct quotes may be used, names and other identifying information will be kept confidential.

➢ **RISKS**
Some of the questions asked may make you uncomfortable or upset. You are always free to decline to answer any question or to stop your participation at any time.

> ➢ **BENEFITS**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide may help interpersonal communication scholars better understand the role of food and food preparation in developing relationships.

> ➢ **EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team, and the Boise State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications that result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is complete and then destroyed.

> ➢ **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

You will receive no payment.

> ➢ **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

> ➢ **QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you should first contact the principal investigator at megangodwin@u.boisestate.edu or (208) 310-9324.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Boise State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the board office between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday, by calling (208) 426-5401 or by writing: Institutional Review Board, Office of Research Compliance, Boise State University, 1910 University Dr., Boise, ID 83725-1138.

Documentation of Consent

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.   I have received a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Study Participant	**Signature** of Study Participant	Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date