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Department of Human Nutrition
The University of British Columbia
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Date: May 23rd, 2003
Food-Related Decision-Making and Activities of Younger, Childless, Dual-Earner, Heterosexual Couples

Most studies of family food practices were conducted over a decade ago and focused on families with children where women were economically dependent on their husbands. According to Statistics Canada, however, families without children constitute a significant proportion of Canadian families, many of whom are dual-earner.

The purpose of this study was to explore the food-related decision-making and activities of younger, childless, dual-earner, heterosexual couples living in Vancouver. A qualitative research design was used. Data was collected from each of the partners via one-week food diaries and semi-structured, audio-taped interviews, and analyzed via iterative process methods commonly used in qualitative research. Constructivist assumptions about the social world were used as resources for analytical decisions.

The three main areas of interest were food provision, health and nutrition, and commensality. In all areas, couples demonstrated a diversity of patterns. The theme communicated by both women and men was equality in food provision, even though some gender differences about gender-role ideals existed. The strategies for achieving equality varied. The two most prevalent strategies were the "specialization" (with the substrategies "traditional trade-off and "role reversal") and "sharing it all" (with the substrategies "rotating tasks" and "each their own").

With regards to health and nutrition, each participant's healthy eating approach was shaped by their unique life-course experiences. Upon cohabitation, participants' healthy eating values and approaches were re-examined. Healthy eating negotiations varied among couples, such that some couples developed both congruent values and
approaches, other couples developed congruent values but maintained different approaches, and one couple had both different values and approaches.

In a broader context, food was a significant part of the identity of some couples, but for others it was not. These findings differ from previous findings about families with children. Therefore, childless couples differ from families with children in at least 3 different food-related areas. The implications of these findings are that, with regards to research, we need to focus food-related research on families other than the nuclear family with children. Childless couples also showed differences among themselves, indicating that in practice settings practitioners can avoid generalizing food experiences by asking clients specific questions about their own, every-day experiences with food at home.
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1. Significance of Research Area

Family food habits are a topic of interest to researchers in many disciplines including nutrition, sociology, anthropology, family studies, and women's studies because people's food habits are dynamic processes influenced by an interaction of many biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors (Kittler & Sucher, 1998; Wetter, Goldberg, King, Sigman-Grant, Baer et al., 2001). The individual household structure and composition, that is the family unit, is often at the centre of these interactions (Kittler & Sucher, 1998). For this reason, research in the past has taken many directions in examining family food habits. For example, those interested in gender roles (i.e., sociologists, anthropologists, family and women's studies researchers) have examined family food habits through a discussion of power and gender issues in patterns of food preparation as these are thought to reflect the relationships between members of a household (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Murcott, 1982; Murcott, 1983;). Because household food work has traditionally been a woman's domain, it is thought to be a potential site for inequality (Bittman & Lovejoy, 1993; VanEvery, 1997). On the other hand, those interested in understanding how family members influence each other's food choices (i.e., nutritionists) also centre their discussion on family food habits with the aim of finding links with health (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991). Furthermore, those interested in the social reproduction of the family (i.e., sociologists, anthropologists, and family studies researchers) study family food habits in order to understand issues of commensality (eating or sharing food with others), including what
eating together means to family members (Kemmer, Anderson & Marshall, 1998; Sobal, 2000; Sobal, Bove & Rauschenbach, 2002; Thom, 2000; Valentine, 1999).

Although the above-mentioned directions have contributed greatly to understanding family food habits, they have some limitations. Conclusions made about family food habits are based on food-related studies that were mostly conducted in the 1980's and focused on a particular type of family: heterosexual nuclear families with children, where the research participants were women who were economically dependent on their husbands (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991). Some important findings came from these studies with respect to both gender roles and health issues. The studies showed that while women were primarily responsible for food provision and that health was considered to be an important issue in meal preparation (as the women wanted to ensure that their children learned about and practiced healthy eating), the women were deferential to their husband's and children's tastes when it came to the family's food choices.

Although significant, these findings can not be generalized to all types of families, as other types of families have been shown to report different patterns of food provision and consumption (Kemmer et al., 1998; Thom, 2000). Compared to heterosexual nuclear families with children, little is known about the food related decision-making and activities of families or couples without children, including childless couples (Craig & Truswell, 1988; Kemmer et al., 1998; Kemmer, 2000). From the few studies conducted, a more egalitarian pattern with respect to gender roles seems to be the practice in childless families. Although there still is a propensity for wives to do most of the food provision work, the husbands in childless families seem to share more of the work than husbands in
nuclear families (Craig & Truswell, 1988; Kemmer et al., 1998). Moreover, women in childless couples tend to be less deferential to their husband's tastes than women in families with children (Kemmer et al., 1998). Some, however, argue that the frequency with which husbands prepare meals decreases with time (Craig & Truswell, 1988) and that this may be because the gender issues with respect to domestic labour in childless couple families are yet to be determined.

Nutrition and health are also issues that differ in importance between families with children and childless families such that nutrition seems to be more important in families with children than in those without (Canadian Facts and National Institute of Nutrition, 1997; Thom, 2000). Whereas couples with children worry about the health of their children and therefore prepare healthier meals, childless couples seem to worry less about nutrition.

Researchers have begun to realize the need to study all the particular types of families of today's society to adequately conceptualize issues such as inequality, commensality, and health concerns. They have also begun to realize that the nuclear family with children is no longer the most widespread type. Families composed of childless couples, empty nesters, single-parent households, gay and lesbian households and one-person households, are increasingly becoming more prevalent in our society and therefore deserve attention (Craig & Truswell, 1988; Helmick, 1978; Kemmer et al., 1998; Kemmer, 2000; VanEvery 1997).

According to Statistics Canada, families without children constituted 36.5% of all families in 2001 (an increase from 34.8% of total families in 1996). In addition, families without children constituted 41.2% of all married couples and 54.2% of all common law
couples (married couples and common law couples represented 84.3% of all families in 2001). Together, 47.7% of married and common law couples had no children living at home in 2001 (up from 40.7% in 1996) (Statistics Canada, 1996; 2001). Moreover, 63.6% of all husband-wife families (married and common law couples) were dual earner families, a trend that has been increasing in recent years (Statistics Canada, 1998).

In the Census data, husband-wife families were divided into married couple families with and without children at home, and common-law couple families with and without children at home. A further subdivision of families without children was not made. Families without children, however, are not a homogeneous group. Statistics Canada does not as of yet differentiate between childless couples (couples who have never had children) and empty nesters (couples whose children no longer live with them). Therefore, official statistics on the number of childless couples living in Canada do not exist. One study classified families without children according to their spending patterns which seem to vary depending on their life stage (Barr-Telford, 1994). The three classification groups that emerged were younger couples (where the husband is less than 45 years old), middle-age couples (where the husband is between 45 and 64 years), and older couples (where the husband is 65 years or older) (Barr-Telford, 1994).

1.2. Emerging Questions

Past research examining family food habits, therefore, presents a paucity of information about families other than heterosexual nuclear families with children. This points to several important gaps in the research literature. Firstly, although previous research has answered some questions regarding this type of family, many of these
questions remain unanswered for families without children, including childless couples. For instance, research has shown that gender inequality in terms of food-related activities exists in families with children, but findings remain ambiguous for childless couples. In addition, previous research has found that preparing nutritious meals is an important issue when making food choices in families with children, as parents want to model healthy eating for their children. What the impact of nutrition is on the food choices in families where there are no children, however, still remains to be answered.

Secondly, another important aspect of research that currently lacks clear information is the question of food-related decision-making and activities of dual-earner childless couples. Food-related research on nuclear families with children has mainly dealt with women who were not working outside the home. However, statistics show that dual earner families constitute a large proportion of husband-wife families (Statistics Canada, 1998), and that this trend is increasing. Childless couples are more likely to be dual earners, as there is less impetus on the woman to fulfill caretaking roles in the home. The question of how food-related decision-making and activities are managed in dual earner childless couples also remains to be answered.

Thirdly, couples belonging to the younger type, as a life-stage in the life-course, have been neglected in prior food-related research. How differences in lifestyles change with new life-course experiences, including becoming part of a couple, have not been explored. There is almost no data on how childless couples negotiate issues such as gender roles in food provision and food choice.
1.3. Research Approach

As a way of describing my research approach for this study, I have adapted Maxwell's interactive 5-component model of research design (Maxwell, 1996). His model emphasizes the interrelatedness of the research design components, that is the purpose, research questions, conceptual context, methods, and quality or rigour (referred to as 'validity').

Table 1.1 summarizes the five components of the research design for this study. The purpose, research questions, and conceptual context components are discussed in this chapter, while the methods and quality components are discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

1.3.1. Purpose and Questions

Since much of our knowledge of food-related decision-making and activities in families comes from research that has dealt with families with children, this study aimed to contribute to our knowledge of these issues in families without children. Emphasis was placed on gathering information about gender roles in food provision, as well as on the nutritional and social context in which the study participants made food choices.

One of the major limitations of previous research has been the focus on interviewing only the women in the families, which was why this study included both partners of each couple (women and men, as the couples were all heterosexual). This allowed the development of a more holistic view of the gender roles in the food-related decision-making and activities. Owing to the paucity of related research in recent years, this study provided more current data on the changing patterns of family food habits.
### Table 1.1: Research Design Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose: (Chapter 1)</th>
<th>-To explore the food related decision-making and activities of younger, childless, dual-earner, heterosexual couples living in Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Research Questions: (Chapter 1) | 1. What is the nature of integration of partners' ideals and practices regarding gender roles in food provision into a couple context  
2. How important is healthy eating when making food choices and what is the nature of integration of individual food choices into a couple context  
3. What is the role of food in shaping couples' identities |
| Conceptual Context: (Chapters 1-4) | -Qualitative research assumptions  
-Constructivist paradigm and related assumptions  
-Structural, personal, and interpersonal theories about gender roles in household work  
-Theories about values, within the context of health behaviour  
-Literature on food provision, food choice, and commensality |
| Methods: (Chapters 2 and 3) | -Food journals  
-Individual interviews  
-Both partners within each couple  
-Common analysis methods used in qualitative research |
| Quality (Rigour): (Chapters 2 and 3) | -Triangulation of both sources of data and methods  
-Inclusion and discussion of alternative interpretations (negative cases)  
-Peer debriefing  
-Transcript assessment by two people  
-Audit trail  
-Comparison with other findings in literature |
Broadly, the purpose of this study was to explore the food-related decision-making and activities of younger, childless, dual-earner, heterosexual couples living in Vancouver. The three main areas of interest were food provision, food choices, and commensality. Many themes emerged during preliminary analysis, but because I chose to write a "paper-format" thesis, I focused my analysis on the following 3 research questions:

1. What is the nature of integration of partners' ideals and practices regarding gender roles in food provision into a couple context?
2. How important is healthy eating when making food choices and what is the nature of integration of individual healthy eating approaches into a couple context?
3. What is the role of food in shaping couples' identities?

1.3.2. The Conceptual Context

Below is an outline of the assumptions I made while collecting and analyzing data. In line with the "paper-format" thesis, I did not discuss the specific procedures I employed in the study here as is more typical in methods chapters. The particulars around selection and recruitment of couples, and collection and analysis of the data, are presented in the methods sections of the papers in chapters 2 and 3. Rather, I outline:

1. Why I chose to use qualitative methods; and
2. What my theoretical assumptions were during the process of data collection, analysis, and writing of the results.
A researcher's theoretical assumptions influence the outcome of any particular study so that even if the methods are similar, another researcher with different theoretical assumptions can produce different results. It is therefore imperative that each researcher's assumptions are explicitly presented as part of the research process. The assumptions stated below by some researchers are ones I have used in this study.

1.3.2.1. Qualitative Research: Purpose and Methods

"Qualitative research begins with question; its ultimate purpose is use. To inform the questions, the researcher collects data - the basic units or building blocks of information. Data are images, sounds, words, and numbers. When data are grouped into patterns, they become information. When information is put to use or applied, it becomes knowledge"

(Rossman & Rallis, 1998:5).

The purpose of qualitative research is to depict the complex nature of humans by describing individuals' perceptions of their own and others' experiences within the social context where they occur (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Henwood, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Maxwell, 1996; Patton, 1990). Questions in qualitative research are, therefore, usually broad and seek to understand why something occurs, what certain experiences mean to participants, and how these experiences influence subsequent behaviours.

As pointed out by many qualitative researchers (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 1995; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Smith and
Deemer, 2000), human behaviour cannot be understood without understanding the framework within which people interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions. The aims of qualitative research are to understand the meaning or "cognition, affect, intentions, and anything else that can be included... as participants' perspective," context; and process of phenomena or events, identify unanticipated phenomena or influences, and to develop causal explanations (Maxwell, 1996:17). Similarly, the aims of qualitative research methods to identify, document, and know the world views, values, meanings, beliefs, and thoughts of persons, while embracing the multiple "realities" that exist were in line with my aims to learn from participants and gain an understanding of childless couples' perceptions about food-related decision-making and activities.

Patton (1990) described ten characteristics of qualitative research that I considered as strengths for choosing it as a method of inquiry for this study. Rossman & Rallis also offered eight similar characteristics representative of qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Following both Rossman & Rallis, and Patton, I chose to use qualitative methods because they are naturalistic, holistic, dynamic, context sensitive, empathic, and because they involve thick description, personal contact, unique case selection, and a flexible design (the definitions of each of these terms are presented in Table 1.2).

Although the methods used in most qualitative research are similar, qualitative research as an inquiry uses more than a single perspective. Perspectives range on a continuum about subjectivity and objectivity, as well as a continuum of political stances about the social world (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). These encompass many areas of
### Table 1.2: Qualitative Research Characteristics (adapted from Patton, 1990)

<table>
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<td>1. Naturalistic - do not manipulate or control situations; instead observe naturally occurring events</td>
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<td>2. Inductive - categories and theories emerge from the data</td>
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<td>3. Holistic - aim to get the overall perspective, including the specific and unique context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thick description - collect data with a great deal of detail, confirmation of ideas with participant quotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Personal contact - share the experience, not trying to be objective outsider, gain insight by reflecting on experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dynamic - constant shifting with the changing phenomenon and context, realize things may unfold differently than expected (go with the flow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Unique case selection - not as concerned about generalizability (although generalization may occur; researcher describes context and reader decides if their context is similar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Context sensitivity - emphasize the social, historical, and physical context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Empathic (also known as inter-subjective) - trying to take a view of other person via introspection and reflection; neither subjective (researcher's bias), nor objective (no bias); how does reality appears to participants, and also reporting own feelings and experiences as part of the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Flexible design - not always specified completely before research; emergent - needs to unfold; ideas changing and developing over time; iterative (cycle back and forth from parts to whole); if feasible, use multiple methods</td>
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</table>
research, and as Denzin and Lincoln pointed out,

"Qualitative research... crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matter.
A complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions
surround the term qualitative research" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:1).

The perspective researchers choose for their study is grounded in shared assumptions and understandings about social science and the social world, embedded in a paradigm. A paradigm (in this case an inquiry paradigm) is defined as a set of basic beliefs typically answered in terms of ontological ("What is the nature of reality?"), epistemological ("What is the nature of the relationship between the knower/the inquirer and the known/knowable?") and methodological ("How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?") questions (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Researchers choose to use a particular paradigm depending on both their purpose in doing the research and their theoretical or intellectual assumptions about the social world (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). These intellectual assumptions in turn influence the outcome of their studies.

The following is an outline of my own theoretical assumptions in conducting this study. My position is similar to Seale's (1999), which describes research to be:

"founded on a pragmatic acceptance... as a collection of craft skills,
driven by local, practical concerns, such as the expectations which
particular audiences may have. At the same time, pragmatic social
researchers can use philosophical and political debates as resources
for achieving certain mental attitudes, rather than a set of unnecessary
principles from which all else must flow, creating unnecessary obstacles to flexible and creative inquiry. In this sense, social scientists can be as pragmatic in their scientific thinking as we all are in everyday practical consciousness, as we prefer to bracket out deeper existential or ontological questions in order to get on with life" (Seale, 1999:26) [emphasis added].

Why this seems to be a reasonable attitude towards research and assumptions is because current social science research is characterized by an “interbreeding” of various paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) and an erosion of strict boundaries between paradigms. As Seale (1999) noted, some positivists borrow from idealist and constructivist paradigms, while some constructivists use realist ideas and elements. We seem to be coming to the realization that all research is interpretive, and that we have methods suitable for different kinds of understandings (Schwandt, 2000). In addition, what seems to be becoming an important question about current studies is not whether they are scientific, but whether they provide useful knowledge (Kvale, 1996).

In describing my assumptions here, I focus on my theoretical assumptions; that is, the paradigms that influenced my thinking. My discussion here centres mainly on constructivism (and its ontological and epistemological assumptions) as the most dominant paradigm that influenced this study; however, constructivism itself draws upon (or shares) certain beliefs with other paradigms and perspectives I discussed.

I do not discuss the methodological assumptions of constructivism, because they overlap with qualitative methods in general. The basic premise of qualitative research methods emphasizes knowledge created through discussion (i.e., in interviews) in order
to understand. In essence, constructivists, like other qualitative researchers, use methods by which they watch, listen, ask, record, and examine (Schwandt, 1994).

1.3.2.2. Theoretical Assumptions: Constructivism

The dominant paradigm from which I have drawn in this study is the constructivist paradigm. Constructivism's most basic assumption is that human beings construct knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994; Schwandt, 2000); that "we invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience" and that we "test and modify these constructions in the light of new experiences" (Schwandt, 1994:125-6). In addition, constructivists maintain that "we do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth" (Schwandt, 2000:197), so that the historical and social contexts play an essential role in how we construct knowledge. These assumptions have been a resource in this study in my explanations of participants' interpretations of ideas such as gender-role ideals and healthy eating.

The cultural and intellectual backdrop that has shaped the relative nature of constructivism (and some other paradigms) is postmodernism. Postmodernism questions and rejects the fundamental assumptions of previous intellectual thoughts (although some disagree that it actually rejects the assumptions), that is the ideas that there can be an ultimate truth (modernism) and that the world as we see it is the result of hidden structures (structuralism). Postmodernism also questions the idea that the world can be understood in terms of grand theories or metanarratives, and emphasizes instead the multiple and situation-dependent ways of life (Burr, 1995). In line with this thought, I
have aimed to represent the diversity of patterns present in the food-related areas studied,
without attempting to generalize each couples' individual experience.

As with qualitative research in general, constructivism aims to understand lived
experiences from the point of view of those who experience them. It proposes that
knowledge is created dialectically by an interaction of the researcher and the participants
(Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994). But unlike some qualitative research,
constructivism has relativist qualities in that it acknowledges that multiple social realities
exist, so that knowledge is relative and context dependent (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln,
1994; Schwandt, 1994). Being relativist in nature, constructivists do not seek to find “the
truth” or “the reality.” Instead, constructivists admit to representing only “a truth” and “a
reality.” The represented truth, though, is real to the participants.

It is important to note here that unlike some researchers who attribute an
ontological characteristic to relativism, I believe that constructivism cannot be seen as an
ontological, but an epistemological and a methodological claim (Schwandt, 1994Craig,
1998; Schwandt, 1994). As noted by Craig (1998), "what is important about
constructivism is the emphasis on the construction of knowledge: constructivists do not
emphasize the construction of the world, but the construction and acceptance of
representations of the world" (p. 627). Constructivists are therefore concerned with how
knowledge is constructed by people.

In terms of epistemological assumptions, constructivists support a transactional/
subjectivist epistemology (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), in which findings are a
creation of the process of interaction between researcher and participants (Guba, 1990).
One of these assumptions on an epistemological level is social constructionism, a
conception of "the social construction of reality" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The focus in social constructionism is on interpreting and negotiating meanings of the social world. Common characteristics of social constructionism include taking a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge through anti-essentialist and anti-realist assumptions; being concerned with historical and cultural specificity; focusing on interaction and processes; and believing that knowledge is sustained by social processes, that language is a prerequisite for thought and a form of social action, and that knowledge and social action go together (Burr, 1995). Where constructivism adds to social constructionism is by being aware that social constructions are incomplete, pluralistic, and at times contradictory, but that this insight can be used to analyze socially constructed facts (Henwood, 1996).

Appreciating relativism helps us realize the "demise of the methodical solution to the problem of criteria" (Smith & Deemer, 2000:879) because all knowledge is theory contingent. Relativism's claim is that we do not have an external referent we can compare our diverse views to, and that judgements about plausibility and credibility, proposed by some researchers as validity criteria (Hammersley, 1990), are also social judgements (Smith & Deemer, 2000). However, relativists are still proponents of the need to engage in dialogue in order to justify assessments that allow us to differentiate good from bad, and important from unimportant, research.

What these researchers caution us to do is to be aware that everything is an interpretation and nothing is fully transparent; that our interpretations can be reinterpreted or modified (in a practical matter, in context dependent situations); and that we can only partially articulate our understandings (Smith & Deemer, 2000). Therefore, I believe that
my interpretations can be limited in transferability since my findings are limited in points of reference, language, and a particular social context.

However, this does not mean that the results of this study are not of value. One interpretation of this relativist dilemma given by Smith & Deemer is that "the point is to examine and fully discuss why we construct the world that we do... a discussion that is practical and moral, framed by contingent social and historical circumstances" (Smith & Deemer, 2000:886). "That we all must live with uncertainty and contingency does not mean that we can dismiss commitment and abandon judgement" (Schwandt, 1996:59). The benefits in the end are that by sharing our interpretations, we let our judgements interact with the judgements of others, and this allows us the possibility of finding similarities and a shared understanding (Smith & Deemer, 2000).

1.4. The Thesis Road Map

The main findings of the study are presented in chapters 2 and 3. In discussing the findings, I chose to present them in a paper-style rather than the typical thesis-style format. Therefore, instead of a separate chapter with literature review, the relevant background literature for each topic is presented within each article-style "paper" in chapters 2 and 3. The background information on the methods used in the study is also built in within the two papers.

The focus of chapter 2 is to understand how partners integrate their ideals about gender roles in food provision into their everyday life routines as a couple. Since equality emerged as an ideal for all participants, I further questioned what equality meant to each of them and how their perception of equality was negotiated with their partner's
perception of equality with respect to food provision tasks such as purchasing food, preparing meals and cleaning up afterwards.

Chapter 3 includes findings dealing with research question 2. Specifically, in trying to analyze the data, I aimed to understand: 1) how each participant valued healthy eating when making food choices, 2) how each participant's value of healthy eating compared with his or her partner's, and 3) how discrepancies in approaches to healthy eating were negotiated as a couple.

Chapter 4 serves as a discussion chapter, integrating the findings from chapters 2 and 3 about food-related decision-making and activities of the couples who participated in this study. I discuss the relevance of the findings and offer some suggestions for future research, as well as pointing to some of the implications for future practice.

1.5. References


CHAPTER 2: Achieving Equality in Food Provision: Gender-Role Ideals and Strategies in Younger, Childless, Dual-earner, Heterosexual Couples

2.1. Introduction

An egalitarian couple relationship, "one which is no longer tied to traditional beliefs about gender roles" (Lindsey, 1997:185), has been associated with various marital benefits including satisfaction, quality, and well-being (Coltrane, 2000; Rosenbluth, Steil, & Whitcomb, 1998; Shelton & John, 1996; Steil, 1997). Recognized to be a process of dynamic negotiation between partners (Felmlee & Greenberg, 1999; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996), relationship equality has been characterized as having the qualities where partners are entitled to equal status, accommodation and attention to the other, and evidence of mutual well-being exists (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996).

Unfortunately, clear definitions about food provision equality do not exist. In addition, very few studies actually ask participants what equality means to them and how they translate their ideals into strategies for achieving equality in their relationship. The focus of this paper, therefore, was on the relationship between couple ideals and strategies for achieving equality in food provision. Since very little information exists about ideals in food provision, the literature discussed below relates to general ideals about relationship equality emphasizing two domains: the workforce and housework, followed by literature regarding food provision practices. Finally, some theoretical orientations in describing why current patterns prevail are discussed.
2.1.1. Ideals Regarding the Workforce and Housework

Research about equality ideals has focused on two domains: the workforce and the household. Trends regarding advancement toward equality outside the home have been relatively positive. Attitudes, behaviour, and the pace of change toward equality seem to differ between genders, nationalities and cultures (Bittman & Lovejoy, 1993; Jansson, 1995; Scott, Aldwin, & Brown, 1996), but generally, there seems to be an agreement towards egalitarian attitudes and a strong support for women’s participation in the labour market (Bittman & Lovejoy, 1993). Women are much more prepared than men to reject traditional gender role attitudes (Bittman & Lovejoy, 1993; Scott et al., 1996). Men are less enthusiastic when asked whether they believe there should be as many women in important positions in government and business as there are men (Bittman & Lovejoy, 1993). In addition, men are less likely to believe that a woman who works for pay can be just as good a mother as one who does not, and are more likely to believe that a woman’s employment may have negative effects on family life (Scott et al., 1996).

In contrast, trends regarding advancement toward equality in the home have been less positive as ideals regarding unequal gendered division of labour still prevail in household work, especially in food provision (Harnack, Story, Martinson, Neumark-Sztainer & Stang, 1998; Layte, 1999; Sullivan, 2000). In a review of the literature, Sullivan (2000) found that although change in the past twenty years has included an increase in men’s participation in household work, a reduction in gender inequality, and an increase in egalitarian couples, this change has been slow and domestic labour is still predominantly unequally divided between genders.
One of the reasons for the even slower progress towards equality in household work has been due to the challenges of the notion of housework as "work." Considering housework as actual "work" through the years has been of a precarious nature but has more recently been seen as an issue worth delving into. Some of the factors contributing to this recognition, according to Goodnow and Bowes, include influences by changes in paid work, as well as shifts in marriage and expectations of close relationships (Goodnow & Bowes, 1994).

To assess equality, researchers have typically used measures of decision-making power and division of labour. Couples themselves assess equality in both similar and different ways, depending on the situation. When asked about other couples they use the same assessments of decision-making power and task division as researchers do, but for their own relationship they use mainly subjective characteristics about their relationship and each partner (Rosenbluth et al., 1998). Knudson-Martin and Mahoney argued that despite many having egalitarian ideals where they discuss their relationship in terms of equality, most couples practice the "myth of equality" by re-interpreting inequality into an ideal of equality (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998). Conversely, Bittman and Lovejoy (1993) claimed that couples use similar language to justify or mask inequalities in the division of labour at home. Both studies argued that in order to successfully move toward equality, couples must have a clear picture of what an equal relationship entails and that both partners must use conscious and open negotiation to work through issues (Bittman & Lovejoy, 1993; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998).
2.1.2. Practices in Food Provision

Food provision (the planning, decision-making and actual labour in food purchasing, preparation and clean-up) has historically been considered as women's work. While some have argued for the benefits of this assumption, others have argued for a change. Some researchers believe that food-related housework has a positive impact on women's feminine identities and influence over other members of the family. Preparing food is thought to be a way in which women define themselves and relate to others (Counihan, 1988; Furst, 1997). An essential part of traditional womanhood has always been the self-sacrificing dedication to home and family, which brought her security, psychological affirmation, and to some extent, influence, by having her children and husband need her. By giving them food, a mother and a wife was also giving them morals, values, and culture (Counihan, 1988). For this reason, the ideal family represented in literature and the media for many years has been the one where the husband's main responsibility was to economically provide for the family as the breadwinner, while the wife's responsibility was to run the home and provide meals as a homemaker (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Murcott, 1986).

Other researchers have argued that woman's responsibility for food provision can only be a disadvantage for her. They argue that even economists' praise of women's "talent for planning, skilful budgetary management" during World War II food shortages (Tanner, 1999:235) has had both positive and negative consequences. While women gained social status and prestige by having food (that they prepared for their families) become an important element in nutrition, their increased importance and improved
position confirmed the gender-specific roles in housework that had been valued for years (Tanner, 1999).

Even though women were once referred to as "gatekeepers" of food in the sense that they were thought to control food channels into the home, they are now more appropriately referred to as being "responsible" for food provision (McIntosh & Zey, 1998). The use of the term responsibility now acknowledges other family members' influence in the decision-making around food and, to an extent, women's deference to the other family members' preferences (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991). Charles and Kerr's qualitative analysis of women from English nuclear families with at least one preschool child is an illustration of the responsibility women hold for food provision. Their study found that while women were responsible for the provision and serving of food, they gave precedence to their husbands' and their children's tastes over their own. They sacrificed their own preferences to please the other members of the family and adjusted their preferences to fit with the rest of the family. When a husband (or a child) disliked a particular food, wives tended not to serve that food often. Similarly, husbands' preferred foods were prepared and served most often at meals (Charles & Kerr, 1988).

The same findings of husbands' food preferences taking precedence over the food preferences of women themselves were noted in DeVault's study with thirty households, all of which contained children. The women in her study also gave their partners' and children's preferences greater importance when cooking a meal. They rationalized that their husbands were deserving of 'good food' after a long day of hard work, using the term 'good food' to mean food that their husbands liked.
Although these studies have shown that women report partner's involvement in food provision tasks, many researchers repudiate these comments and interpret the lack of men's participation, or the small involvement as inadequate (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Counihan, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Murcott, 1983). Some women justify their partners' lack of participation in food provision tasks by discussing their level of incompetence in these tasks. They thought that if they left food provision up to their partners, they would shop inefficiently, leave a mess in the kitchen after cooking, or just not be able to prepare anything on their own (Counihan, 1988; Murcott, 1983). Some even believe their partners' health would be jeopardized if left to cook for themselves (Murcott, 1983).

Although these studies have been of significance, they have three limitations. Firstly, because most of the women interviewed were economically dependent on their husbands, these studies had not taken into account the increased participation of women in the labour force. Sixty percent of the women in Charles and Kerr's study had given up work outside the home after the birth of their children and were therefore financially dependent on their husbands. Similarly, only half of the women in DeVault's study in the USA, which found similar results with respect to gender division of labour, were working outside the home. The women at home had usually worked for pay before becoming mothers, but chose to stay at home at the time of their children's birth (DeVault, 1991). Secondly, these studies included only couples with small children at home. In contrast, studies where women worked outside the home and/or had no children showed different results. Warde and Hetherington's study, for example, included participants of which 81% of the women interviewed were working outside the home. The gender division of labour with respect to food-related activities was noted in their
study, but to a lesser extent than in the previous studies (Warde & Hetherington, 1994). Eleven percent of the men in their study prepared meals and 5% shared in food preparation, compared to the 5% of men preparing meals in the Charles and Kerr study. Overall, 25% of the cases where the woman was working full-time outside the home reported that the male partners prepared the last meal. This pattern is further supported by studies of newlywed and cohabiting couples (Craig & Truswell, 1988). Craig and Truswell’s study on newlywed couples where most of the women held full-time jobs also noted that although it was the wives who took major responsibility for food provision, husbands also played a significant role in food provision (Craig & Truswell, 1988).

Thirdly, these studies are now dated as most were conducted over 10 years ago and do not account for changes in patterns since then. Kemmer et al's recent study of newly cohabiting couples found that women were responsible for buying and preparing food in only a small majority of the cases, and that when compared to previous studies, the women they interviewed were less deferential to their husbands’ food choices. In addition, although a link between women and nurturing was observed, no gendering of power was identified (Kemmer, Anderson & Marshall, 1998).

2.1.3. Theoretical Orientations to Housework Ideals and Practices

Diverse theoretical directions have been taken in an attempt to answer the question of why some traditional ideals and patterns prevail despite some couples embracing more egalitarian ones. In their book *Men, Women and Household Work*, Goodnow and Bowes (1994) made distinctions between structural, personal and interpersonal factors.
According to their synopsis, *structural factors* emphasize features of institutions or social structures and their effects on particular patterns, such as the patterns of paid work and of household work. In terms of household work, for example, structural factors such as (early or late) working hours may influence how patterns of division of labour with regards to food preparation develop between couples. Similarly, household technology, as suggested by Goodnow and Bowes, may be considered as time-saving for preparation of food (although this may not be the case).

*Personal factors* emphasize both surface and deeper characteristics of an individual. Surface characteristics include age, education, and broad nature of experiences. Deeper characteristics include personality, goals, attitudes, expectations of a relationship, definitions of a good marriage or sharing, and ideals of housework. Goodnow and Bowes pointed out that these characteristics do not determine patterns but, combined with other factors, act as a framework for people to be open to change and to negotiate. In terms of household work, Goodnow and Bowes gave examples of these other factors, such as the influence of the man's initial level of competence at household work on his contribution, the individual's sense of underlying contract (expectations) with a partner, and feelings about the home.

Finally, *interpersonal or relational factors* emphasize the way two people match each other. These factors may focus on either 'resource pragmatic' or 'interpretive' explanations. The relative resource theories have as their core the assumption that household decisions are made based on pragmatic negotiations about productivity (Primeau, 2000) and focus on issues such as relative bargaining power, competence, capacity to earn money outside the home, and time available for each partner. The
interpretive (or social constructionist) theories take into consideration assumed social and cultural norms when explaining gender assumptions about work and sharing (Primeau, 2000), such as the extent to which partners share the same expectations about these issues. While neither of the two explanations alone has been able to fully explain existing patterns, a study by Sanchez and Kane (1996) investigating ideals of housework fairness for women and men concluded that both are required and meaningful in explaining current patterns.

Although we are beginning to uncover some ambiguities about food provision patterns, and changes in these patterns, there is still a paucity of knowledge about a number of issues. For example, we still do not have a clear definition of equality in food provision, nor do we understand the disjuncture between what people report as equality and what they actually do in practice. We know that food provision patterns are not the same in each life-stage, but we do not understand how couples' food provision ideals and practices are related at each stage. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to learn how couples themselves associate their ideals with their practices and how they integrate them into their everyday routines. I chose to focus on younger, childless, dual-earner, heterosexual couples, because they have been neglected in previous research despite their increased prevalence in North America (Barr-Telford, 1994; Bureau of the Census, 1997; Statistics Canada, 2001). My aim in this paper was to present what participants' ideals for gender roles in food provision were, and what they perceived their role to be, with regards to food provision, as well as to present how these ideals were related with actual couple strategies for ensuring equality in food provision. I operationalized 'gender role ideals' as participants' "expectations, standards, hopes and beliefs that provided
points of reference and comparison by which [they] judged and evaluated" (Furst, Connors, Bisogni et al., 1996:252-253) gender roles in food provision.

2.2. Methods

2.2.1. Research Design

My research questions at the broader level were aimed at trying to understand what certain experiences meant to participants and how these experiences influenced subsequent behaviours or decisions (Portney & Watkins, 2000). By allowing the data to come from a group of couples themselves, I was able to capture the depth of information required to understand what their ideals of equality in division of labour were and how these ideals influenced their food provision practices. Given the nature of these questions, I employed a qualitative research design (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995). My assumptions followed the constructivist paradigm which assumes that people's ideals and behaviour are constructed through their interaction with the social environment (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

2.2.2. Characteristics and Recruitment of Couples

Because my aim was not to establish a random sample from a population but rather to identify a specific group of people (Mays & Pope, 1996), I used purposive sampling methods to locate childless, dual-earner couples between the ages of 20 and 40 years. I also used inclusion criteria that couples had lived together, either through cohabitation or marriage, for at least one year, in order to ensure that daily patterns had stabilized. I posted recruitment notices (Appendix 1) around Vancouver, and through
snowballing methods used initial participants and colleagues as contacts to reach other eligible couples. During the screening of interested couples (Appendix 2), I allowed some diversity to stream through by accepting participants with a range of employment hours and work schedules. The participating couples signed consent forms (Appendix 3) at the beginning of the study and received a 'thank you' note (Appendix 4) and gift certificates in the amount of $50 per couple upon completion. All procedures for the study were approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver (Appendix 5).

2.2.3. Data Collection

Knowing that one of the major limitations of previous research has been to focus on gathering data from the women in the families only (Kemmer, 2000), I collected data from both partners of each couple. Each of the partners in the couple completed a one-week 'food-related decision making and activities' journal (food journal) and participated in an individual, in-depth interview.

The purpose of the food journals (Appendix 6) was not to record exact amounts of food and drink consumed, but to provide an opportunity to become familiar with participants' daily food-related decision-making and activities in a more contextual form. Couples were asked to comment about aspects of food provision at home such as who prepared, who cleaned up after the meal, as well as to comment about the decisions made around the meal (for example, where, with whom, and what time of the day the meal was eaten, and how the decision was made to have the particular food). They were also asked to comment on meals outside the home, or any food purchasing trips they made that
I focused on food issues around grocery shopping, meal preparation and clean-up because I was interested in comparing partners' individual ideals and practices and understanding how these were integrated into decisions and negotiations regarding the division of labour. In addition, the food journals helped me to modify and revise the interview guide outline to individualize each of the interviews.

All interviews were conducted at a location convenient for the participants. The interview guide (Appendix 7) included topics such as a typical week (including whether the week of the food journal was a typical one); descriptions of typical grocery shopping trips, meal preparation and clean-ups; views about gender roles; and changes that have occurred between various transitions such as childhood, living alone and living together. The semi-structured interviews were conducted separately with each of the partners, lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In order to avoid having partners discuss the interview questions, I made the effort of arranging interviews for the two partners on the same day (5 couples) or one to two days apart (2 couples).

2.2.4. Data Analysis

I analyzed the data from both the food journals and the interviews by using various methods commonly used in qualitative research (Grbich, 1999; Hammersley, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The main types of analysis were the preliminary analysis, thematic analysis and coding (Grbich, 1999). Preliminary analysis of food journals and interviews was done as deemed necessary to identify gaps in information and write notes about emerging
concepts and themes. The constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2000) was used to check emerging concepts across participants and couples. These emerging themes were examined further through coding the data into segments and reorganizing into planning matrices. Initial codes were broad segments (such as 'gender roles,' 'meal preparation') but were later subdivided, and through a number of revisions, condensed. Some of the later and more defined segments included: 'gender role perceptions,' 'gender roles during childhood,' 'gender role practices,' 'enjoyment of cooking,' 'meal preparation decision-making,' and 'meal preparation division of labour.' These were further segmented into point form categories to synthesize participants' responses. At the same time summary memos were written about the emerging themes across couples. Codes, memos, and themes were refined by regularly checking and comparing them back to the food journals and transcripts (Connelly & Yoder, 2000).

2.2.5. Strategies to Enhance Rigour

To enhance the rigour of the study, I employed strategies dealing with transferability and credibility in qualitative research, which are comparable to reliability and validity in quantitative research. I used triangulation methods by having collected data from both food journals as well as interviews and from both partners in each couple. Initial transcripts were assessed with my supervisor and peer debriefing took place with colleagues conducting other qualitative studies. Although final results were not shared with the participants, having triangulated data (food journals and interviews) from each participant and again from the two partners within a couple, and using questions in the interviews such as "Did I understand correctly that you...?" were a form of member
checks. A journal audit trail and summaries were written describing my thought processes used to interpret the data (Portney & Watkins, 2000).

2.2.6. Couple Description

Seven couples (14 participants) took part in the study. All participants were Caucasian and between the ages of 20 and 39, had completed at least high-school education and had been living with their partner for at least one year. Individuals and couples varied by occupation, and length and type of cohabitation (Appendix 8). Pseudonyms are used to maintain participants' confidentiality.

2.3. Results

What follows is my interpretation of the participants' ideals of gender roles and practices in food provisioning in the context of a couple. I first focus on describing the simultaneous similarities and diversities in ideals about gender roles in food provision present within this group. I then follow with illustrations of the different strategies couples had negotiated, with the aim of maintaining equality in food provision. A summary of the findings is provided in Figure 2.1.

2.3.1. Gender Role Ideals

The theme communicated by both women and men when asked about their perceptions of gender roles in food provisioning was equality, but some gender differences in ideals existed. For their ideal of equality, all of the men and only some of the women seemed to adopt an egalitarian view where all tasks are shared equally by
partners. Some women, on the other hand, seemed to believe that equality can be achieved by using somewhat traditional division of labour.

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Figure 2.1.: Achieving equality in food provision: interplay between gender role ideals and strategies

2.3.1.1. Men's Gender Role Ideals

The men in this study were more unified in their ideals about gender roles in food provision, resonating mainly egalitarian beliefs. Most believed that partners should be "equals in making decisions (Frans)" and that the labour should be divided in such a way as to ensure "equity at work, making sure that, you know one person isn't doing way more than the other (Christofer)." Furthermore, barring the mentioning of some biological
differences between women and men, most men were in active pursuit of avoiding compliance to traditional gender role patterns, because they "don't feel there is any benefit of them (Frans)" and the relationship would be considered anomalous if they did comply to traditional gender role patterns. As Christofer pointed out about his relationship with Claire, "if both of us are, you know like totally sticking to the traditional gender roles at one particular instant, I'll be like, "Wait a minute, this is weird, what's going on here?" like "Is it 1952 all of a sudden?"

Instead, the men I interviewed explained that their patterns had developed according to "how people are predisposed to wanting things a certain way (Ewan)," or according to skill, but not according to the "[traditional] norm (Ewan)." Gavin, who believed that the division of labour in his home "has nothing to do with it [gender roles]", also reported that, "I make breakfast food really well and she makes salads really well and that's about it... I think it's about making good food really in the end... we enjoy it a lot better when it's done good." Furthermore, Bojan wrote into his food journal entry that he and Bobi make breakfasts according to their "preparation specialties" so that "certain breakfasts Bobi makes and certain ones I always make. Scrambled eggs with a bagel is one of her preparation specialties."

In summary, the men did not differentiate between tasks in food provision and believed that the division of labour should be negotiated to allow for most practical and beneficial solutions for both partners.
2.3.1.2. Women's Gender Role Ideals

In contrast, the women's responses regarding gender roles were more diverse, ranging from egalitarian to traditional ideals. On the one extreme of a continuum were Claire and Amelie who, as most of the men, believed that despite some gender differences, they were part of a couple whose food provision practices should be and were associated with egalitarianism. Claire, for example, believed that food provisioning labour "should be balanced, I think it should be equal" between two partners. In terms of her own food provision practices with Christofer, Claire's explanation was that although "it goes through phases where he does more and I do less, and then it will bounce around where I do more and he does less... eventually I think it works out to be even." Therefore, she achieved balance as well as believed in equality.

Further on the continuum were Bobi and Felicity who believed that it was not necessary that all tasks be shared between partners for the division of labour to be equal. They believed that their relationships were ones where equality was practiced because each partner contributed with tasks they liked. On the other hand, Emma believed that ideally the food provision work should be equally divided between partners, but realistically it was not. Emma reported that "I feel like it should be equal... But it's not and I don't know any couples or families that I know in which it is equal, it's usually more the women." Without using gender as a factor in their patterns, she illustrated the roles each is more likely to do. She explained that while her partner Ewan was better at certain tasks such as taking the garbage out, taking the recycling to the depot, and loading and unloading the dishwasher, she did more of the tasks such as cooking and cleaning the
In contrasting their feelings about certain tasks, she elaborated why cleaning was rewarding for her but a detestable task for Ewan.

"I think for me there is a sense of reward, because I like it when it's clean and tidy. He doesn't really care, he doesn't notice that it's messy or dirty. So, it doesn't have a positive effect, there is no positive outcome in the end. For me there is -- "Kitchen clean, the floors are vacuumed, it's dusted, the wash is done, ah [a sigh of relief]!" And he just kind of goes, "Uh, what a worthless day!"

On the other extreme of the continuum were Denise and Grace who believed that traditional gender roles do exist and should be celebrated. Denise was a proponent of having specific gender roles in the relationship. As she explained, there are certain tasks associated with men that she would rather not do. For example, the car was Daniel's responsibility because "he usually drives us and he usually takes care of it, like if it needs a mechanic or whatever. That's his role in our family, and I don't want that role, so I am quite happy to give it to him." Conversely, she felt that there are tasks that she did not want to share or assign to Daniel, in particular the task of cooking. She believed that with practice Daniel could be a good cook "but I just don't want to give him the chance to practice more, because I enjoy doing it."

Cooking in particular was seen as a task distinct from other mundane household tasks by the women who favoured traditional gender segregated division of labour. There was a tendency for these women to adhere to the ideology that cooking, although not the
kitchen as a whole, is a woman's domain and that equality can be reached by having women cook and men balance this with clean-up or some other task. Grace associated women with cooking and men preferring to work with their hands in a "rough" way. She later clarified why cooking is a natural part of women's "instincts" only.

Grace: Women tend to like cooking and baking more than men do...

Women become mothers and mothers want to feed their young and stuff. When you're a mother, you have that sort of, I don't know, I get a warm feeling from, like, cooking and watching people eat it.

SvR: And you don't think men do that?

Grace: No, I think they can. I think they do that, but I don't think it's as distinct, like, as much related to them as it is to women.

This pattern of women having a special relationship with cooking was apparent for all the women interviewed, but especially women with traditional gender-role ideals. Women in general were more likely to put more thought into the planning of food provisioning tasks such as food purchasing, meal planning, and preparation. They were also more likely to notice food items missing in the house and plan food purchases for long periods of time. The men, on the other hand, were more likely to admit to being at a loss in organization and preparation of purchasing food and thinking more for specific meals at a time when purchasing foods.
That cooking was more than just a task was also noted by Bobi who in her food journal wrote that she appreciates that Bojan "knows when to just let me get down to work in the kitchen" because cooking is a "great stress relief for me." Cooking was her passion as she would, every time before grocery shopping, go through cookbooks to find recipes to experiment with for the next couple of weeks. Bobi was often referred to as the "list maker" in the family as she was more likely to initiate or completely write the grocery list so that she was more involved in the organizing and planning of these grocery shopping trips.

2.3.2. Strategies Utilized to Achieve Equality in Food Provisioning

Practices

Despite these gender differences in ideals about gender roles and cooking, there was a propensity for both women and men to discuss striving to maintain equality in food provision. Yet, strategies for achieving equality varied between couples, suggesting that the meaning of equality was interpreted in a variety of ways and depended on how each couple had constructed its meaning. Two overarching strategies for achieving equality prevailed, one where couples shared and the other where couples traded-off the food provisioning tasks, each with its own variations.

2.3.2.1. Sharing it All

Some couples were able to bring the sharing of tasks into all aspects of food provision. The main characteristic of this practice was that although attention was paid
that the number of tasks were equally divided, specific tasks were delegated with a more flexible approach so that each partner would at one time or another contribute to all tasks.

For six of the seven couples, purchasing food was almost always a shared task, and for some it was the only shared task. Sharing in the sense of both preparing a meal together or both cleaning up, however, was not seen in any of the couples. Sharing of the food preparation and clean-up work was done mainly through two strategies, the 'rotating the tasks' and the 'each their own' strategy.

Claire and Christofer shared the responsibility for all food purchasing, meal preparation and clean-up by rotating the tasks each would do over time. Similarly, Ewan and Emma also rotated meal preparation and clean-up duties, although they utilized the 'each their own' strategy described below for food purchasing. The rotating of tasks was usually explained in terms of situational context such as time availability, working schedules and individual preferences at the particular time.

Claire and Christofer, for example, were usually both involved in the preparation of a meal beginning from the decision-making process prior to the actual preparation.

*Usually there's a couple of different things I can make, just judging by the ingredients that we have, things that I can make. And then... I'll consult her and see what she feels like. That's usually a big part -- make sure that

"Ok, if I make this, will you eat it? Do you feel like eating that?" It's like -- make sure, find out the best thing to make...*
Similarly, Claire also explained that she and Christofer "talk about what we're going to have, what we have to eat, and what we could make with what we have." Sharing the meal preparation tasks began prior to the preparation, with the mutual decision-making about what was going to be eaten. Furthermore, they emphasized that the division of labour equalized over time as well, because although they divided the number of tasks each was to do such that "if I cook, she'll do the dishes, whereas if she cooked, usually I'll do the dishes," there was no specialization. Instead, they maintained fluidity in the specific tasks each would do as "often times we'll cook together too, so Claire and I will chop a few things, or I'll chop a few things and she'll do the bulk of the cooking, or I'll do the bulk of the cooking." Who was going to cook was decided depending on factors such as work schedules. For example, during the times when Christofer arrived home first, he collected meal ideas, discussed them with Claire upon her arrival and began to prepare dinner, because Claire does not like to cook as soon as she walks in the door. At other times, Christofer worked later and they exchanged the tasks. Both were very considerate of each other in that they each paid attention to make sure that one of them does not do much more work than the other. Christofer did both the preparation and clean-up one evening and commented in the food journal that he "felt bad that I hadn't managed to get time to do the dishes the day before so I beat Claire to them tonight." In summary, Claire and Christofer agreed that "if you spanned it [division of labour] over a year, it'd be 50/50."

Anthony and Amelie utilized another variation of the 'sharing it all' strategy where they often each did their own food provisioning. Because of their different food habits, they typically chose to purchase, prepare and eat different foods. Because such occasions
also occurred on some of the days they were completing the food journals, Amelie explained that Anthony makes healthy vegetarian dishes that she generally does not find very appetizing and prefers to prepare her meals herself. One night, for example, while Anthony cooked whole-wheat pasta for himself for dinner, Amelie instead defrosted and cooked herself a steak. In order to maintain equality when preparing their own meals, each washed their own dishes they used. Amelie also entered "I washed my own dishes" in the clean-up section of the food journal.

The "each their own" strategy seemed to be how they believed themselves to be maintaining equality in food provisioning as a whole. This strategy seemed to also work well for them when purchasing food. Even though they typically both preferred to go together on weekly grocery shopping trips rather than on their own, each would select their preferred foods from the grocery shelf and add them to the shopping cart.

2.3.2.2. Specialization

The second type of practice couples utilized that represented equality was specialization. Although these couples also paid attention that each completed an equal number of tasks, delegation of these tasks lacked fluidity. Namely, while food purchasing was often a shared task, each of the partners typically specialized in either cooking or cleaning-up. The two main strategies for the specialization practice were the 'traditional trade-off' and the 'role reversal' strategies.

The general rule for equality here was that if one cooked, the other would clean up after the meal. However, in couples where women held more traditional gender-role ideals, there seemed to be a general pattern where the woman was known as the cook and
the man was left with cleaning to balance the equality scale. Although some variations in fluidity of these patterns existed between couples, Bobi and Bojan, and Daniel and Denise used this 'traditional trade-off' strategy for achieving equality. Grace and Gavin tended to follow this pattern too, but also made use of the 'rotating of tasks' strategy discussed earlier. Felicity and Frans in contrast, had developed a specialization style where the traditional roles were reversed. To illustrate the two specialization strategies, I will describe Bobi and Bojan's and Felicity and Frans' patterns in more detail.

Bobi and Bojan's strategy for the division of labour typically began with the mutual decision-making while driving home from work that was noted in couples who rotated the tasks. As Bojan explained, the decision-making process "starts out by saying, 'So what do you feel like having?' and then she says 'I don't know' and I say 'I don't know' and we eventually compromise on something" and as Bobi added "by the time we get home, we've decided what we are going to have for dinner."

In their food journal entries, however, a pattern became clear that Bobi prepared dinner almost every night while Bojan only prepared dinner when Bobi was out for the evening. He, instead, cleaned and washed the dishes every time. Bojan later confirmed this pattern in our interview in that although they both decided what they were going to eat for dinner, Bobi usually prepared it and he was the "dishman." The division of labour also became clear in Bojan's description of their typical dinner preparation pattern,

*I'll start first, I'll clean the kitchen, make sure she has a clean working space to start with. And then she'll start messing it up (both Bojan and interviewer are laughing) and chopping like crazy and pulling everything*
out and getting everything ready and I'll follow around behind her cleaning everything.

Bojan would also do the dishes after the meal was consumed. Both Bobi and Bojan called this strategy a "great system" through which they believed themselves to be maintaining equality. Their individual relationship with cooking seemed to be at the root of why the labour was divided in such a way. Both believed that the reason why Bobi always cooked and Bojan always cleaned was Bobi's greater love for cooking. Bobi's suggestion for a probable answer was that "my love of cooking trumped his. He likes cooking too, but I love cooking more." Bojan offered a similar reason in his food journal stating that "I enjoy it [cooking], but I think she really enjoys it."

In the case of Frans and Felicity, Frans did the majority of food purchasing and dinner preparation, a similar pattern to what in the literature has been defined as a role reversal (Brown and Miller, 2002) of the traditional gender-role pattern for the division of labour. This was a compromise favoured by both partners and was based on two factors. Their working schedules constituted one of the factors in that Frans typically finished work first and had more time to drive to the grocery store on his way home and then prepare dinner before Felicity arrived home. As Felicity explained, because of their working schedules, the best compromise was for Frans to cook and for her to clean-up.

Frans usually prepares everything. Cause, like, if I had to prepare dinner every night, I don't think we'd eat 'til 7 every night, and that's just way too late for both of us. So he usually cooks and I usually clean up.
The other factor they needed to negotiate was Felicity's propensity to dislike cooking, something that she had made clear to Frans at the beginning of their relationship. In our interview, Felicity said, "I told him, like, I don't really cook, that's not my thing." This was not an issue for Frans because he preferred going to the grocery store every day and enjoyed cooking. Therefore, Frans and Felicity seemed to believe that after consideration of their work schedules and individual preferences, having divided the food provisioning work so that Frans did most of the cooking and Felicity did most of the cleaning up was the best strategy for them to ensure equality and both be satisfied with the patterns.

2.4. Discussion

In this paper, I presented information about the integration of individual gender role ideals into practices as a couple. My interpretation was that gender roles in general were described by using equality between partners as the ideal division of labour. However, descriptions of ideals about gender roles with regard to food provision in particular varied more among the women than among the men. The men in this study were more unified in their beliefs that all decisions and tasks in the relationship should be shared equally. The beliefs of the women, on the other hand, were more varied. While some believed that all of the food provision tasks should be shared equally between partners, others believed that cooking is a woman's task, and that the other tasks could be allocated accordingly, to ensure equal division of labour in the total number of food provision tasks.
In discussion of their practices, most of the women and the men believed themselves to have an equal division of labour in food provision, but because interpretations of equality varied between couples, these varying interpretations in most cases influenced the types of strategies each couple had implemented in practice. While some couples always did the same tasks by specializing in these tasks, other couples shared them all by rotating them on different days or each doing their own food purchasing, cooking, and clean-up. In general, the couples where women held onto more traditional ideals, that is that the woman is naturally in a more intimate relationship with food, believed themselves to be practicing equality because the women cooked and the men cleaned-up. They believed this to be equal trading off of tasks.

Men's involvement in food provision in this study was congruent with studies suggesting that men are becoming more involved in these aspects of household work (Kemmer et al., 1998; Sullivan, 2000; Warde & Hetherington, 1994). While a potential explanation may be that the couples in this study were dual earner couples and most participants had completed schooling beyond high school, such patterns have also been noted in couples of different socioeconomic status (Sullivan, 2000). The most important factor couples mentioned was making sure tasks were equally traded-off between them, which for them ensured each was doing an equal amount of work. Sharing in the sense that tasks were done together was not reported frequently here, however, nor in previous studies (Goodnow & Bowes, 1994). Interestingly, although trade-off was used to ensure equality in terms of doing an equal number of tasks, neither women nor men discussed using this strategy in terms of time spent doing these tasks.
The results from this study demonstrated that in terms of food provision, how ideals about equality are constructed and amalgamated into practice by couples is dependent on a complex integration of factors. Even participants themselves used a combination of theoretical approaches, such as the structural, personal and interpersonal factors. On the one hand, some women tended to have more traditional views about food provisioning than men, suggesting that although women overall have more egalitarian ideals (Bittman & Lovejoy, 1993; Laitinen, Hogstrom & Rasanen, 1997; Scott et al., 1996), in terms of food provisioning, they still hold firmer traditional beliefs. One of the more observable reasons was that women seemed to have a more intimate relationship with food and cooking than men. They were more likely to think about food during the day before dinner, whereas men were more likely to think about it only before the start of dinner preparation. They were more willing to put in extra effort in order to prepare what they wanted, whereas men were happier to prepare dinner quickly by using ingredients that were already at home. The feeling of expressing nurturance with cooking, noted in earlier studies (Charles & Kerr, 1988, DeVault, 1991; Murcott, 1982), was also prominent for the women in this study who reported traditional ideals. Since the traditional ideals of women were related to the task of cooking only, rather than with food provisioning as a whole, they were more likely to prefer taking on the role of the food preparer as theirs and using the role of cleaning up as the leftover task for the other partner. Cleaning up for these couples was consistent with research that has found it to be a less gender-segregated task (Twiggs, McQuillan & Ferree, 1999) and was used to divide food provisioning work into two balanced (or equal) tasks. Some have argued that women's altruistic dedication to the home and the family, as enacted through providing
meals for family members, has had a positive impact on women's feminine identities (Counihan, 1988; Furst, 1997). Others attribute women's and men's differences in beliefs due to the different ways of socialization for women and men (Myers & Booth, 2002). Clearly though, attitudes about equality were not enough to directly influence equality in practices, at least not one type of equality; as shown in this study, equality was interpreted in different ways by couples and individuals within each couple. That attitudes do not directly affect behaviour has been noted in previous studies of household work (Layte, 1999; Primeau, 2000), suggesting that rational pragmatic explanations about patterns are not sufficient to explain these patterns and that they therefore must be seen through cultural lenses.

On the other hand, some couples did offer explanations for their patterns that would fit predominantly with resource pragmatic theories as they justified their practices. Frans and Felicity, for example, reasoned that the main preparer of dinner was typically Frans because he was the person who came home from work first and therefore had more time to do the preparation and because he enjoyed cooking, while Felicity did not. Their sharing of tasks exemplified the role reversal strategy, the opposite of the traditional gender segregated division of labour where the woman cooks and the man cleans. For them, tasks were not allocated according to culturally constructed masculine and feminine attributes but according to time availability and individual preferences. That individual characteristics play a role in patterns has been noted previously in a study by Huston and Geis (1993). Through their study findings they supported the idea that marital interaction is reflective of varying combinations of ideological and personality traits. They argued against the oversimplification of characteristics into only "traditional" and
"egalitarian" dimensions and believed that using explanations of either ideology or personality alone was inadequate.

Therefore, to explain couples' constructions of equality and practice in food provision solely in terms of dichotomies of gender role ideals (i.e., traditional and egalitarian) does not fully capture the many constructions and practices about equality existent for couples. Moreover, to explain the same in terms of couples' attempt to finding practical solutions to the food provision responsibility does not resolve these issues either. In my presentation and discussion of this research about equality, I therefore have taken a combination of theoretical approaches; interpretive or social constructionist theories (that take into consideration assumed social and cultural norms when explaining gender assumptions), relative resource theories (that have as their core the assumption that household decisions are made based on pragmatic negotiations such as economic productivity and time availability (Primeau, 2000), and theories that acknowledge the influence of an individual's personality (Huston & Geis, 1993). I believe that constructions of equality ideals and practices reflect combinations of values that vary in salience between both individuals and couples.

2.5. Implications

I first need to bring attention to the fact that because of the small sample size, I could not possibly allow for all the heterogeneity inherent in this group. For example, I did not include in this study same-sex couples or couples of different ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, as is common in much qualitative research, this exploratory study was limited in both size and consequently in diversity of couples. Further research should explore
these same issues with a larger sample as well as including couples of more diverse educational, occupational, racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

My gender may also have been a source of limitation by impacting the results of this research. Social desirability may have been a factor during the interviews with the men to some extent. Because of our gender differences, the men may have been more prone use socially desirable discourses in their responses about equality as an ideal for division of labour in food provision.

Nevertheless, some important implications can be drawn that might be a starting point in understanding couples' gender role ideals in terms of both the relationship in general and food provision in particular, and how these interact with practices in food provision. This study pointed to variable definitions of equality by couples. It therefore seems essential that, although criteria for equality are provided for couple relationships in general (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996), criteria are also lucidly provided for equality in food provision. In order to do this, we must begin by understanding the criteria that couples themselves employ.

Understanding how couples construct and negotiate meanings of equality may help practitioners on several levels. Equality has been shown to be related to marital stability so that an increase in equality is suggestive of an increase in marital stability (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998). However, as Brown and Miller (2002) report, both partners must have egalitarian ideals for shared food provision to take place. Therefore, practitioners should have a sense of these complexities from the perspective of the couples in order to help them negotiate and understand equality in such a way that would be beneficial to them. To do this, they must ask specific questions, such as the food
provision questions suggested by this study. For example, family and marital practitioners should ask questions regarding the nature of ideals for division of labour (i.e., in food provision) in order to understand the complexities of social context as an influence on ideals seem. As noted in this study, women's ideals about food are particular, as when it comes to cooking, some women are reluctant to abolish traditional gender role ideals. Although we have suggested some reasons why this might be so, research into understanding these intricacies needs to continue.

Another important question practitioners should ask clients about is to relate how they think their actual practices in the family context compare to their ideals. As noted in this study, actual practices may be related to an ideal in various ways. Therefore, asking this question may clear up confusion and discrepancy between the practitioner and client and may help in targeting the issues that need to be dealt with. For example, although in most breadwinner-homemaker families, interventions have been targeted to the women, this may not be a proper strategy for dual earner, younger, childless couples. For this group, practitioners need to consider including men as their targets as well, as the present study suggests that men in these couples are also involved in food provision.

Further research should be conducted to co-examine changes in the patterns seen in this study with changes in life-stage. This study indicated that patterns noted in nuclear families with children where the husband was the breadwinner and the wife a homemaker cannot be generalized to all families. Other similar studies with participants of different life-stages have found different results, suggesting that changes in food provisioning occur with changes in life-stage (Craig & Truswell 1988; Kemmer et al., 1998; Laitinen et al., 1997; Valentine; 1999). Therefore longitudinal studies with couples going through
successive life-stages would immensely aid in our understanding of the dynamic
negotiations with changes in life-stage.

2.6. References

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3.1. Introduction

This study was about healthy eating in families without children. My focus was the integration of individuals' styles of healthy eating prior to cohabitation or marriage into a 'couple healthy eating approach' for younger couples who are childless and dual-earner. Before presenting findings from this study, below are discussed findings from the literature regarding healthy eating, both at the individual and the commensal level (commensality is eating and sharing food with others); some limitations of previous studies; and finally how the current study aimed to answer some of the questions left unanswered in the literature.

3.1.1. Individual Healthy Eating Perceptions: Diverse Interpretations

Although healthy eating is an important factor in the food choice process of people in both North America (Bisogni, Connors, Devine & Sobal, 2002; Devine, Connors, Bisogni & Sobal, 1998) and Europe (Kearney, Gibney, Livingstone, Robson, Kiely, et al., 2001; Lennernas, Fjellstrom, Becker, Giachetti, Schmitt, et al., 1997), perceptions of what constitutes healthy eating vary between groups of individuals and between individuals within groups. On a group level, higher age, higher level of education, higher socioeconomic status, and female sex have been positively associated with both self-described healthy eating and with enacting behaviours according to dietary guidelines suggested by health professionals (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Johansson, Thelle,
On an individual level, people interpret healthy eating in a variety of ways (Chapman & Beagan, in press; Falk, Sobal, Bisogni, Connors & Devine, 2001; Povey et al., 1998). In Chapman and Beagan's (in press) study, women expressed three different perspectives on healthy eating: a 'traditional' perspective that emphasized eating meat, potatoes and vegetables; a 'mainstream' perspective that emphasized increasing fruit and vegetable intake and decreasing fat intake; and an 'alternative' perspective that emphasized the role of toxic effects of food and issues such as cancer and the immune system. According to Falk et al's study (2001), people's perceptions of healthy eating differed by themes and by complexity of definition. The seven predominant themes that people focused on in their study were balance, low fat, weight control, nutrient balance, natural, disease management, and disease prevention. The range of individuals' perceptions varied from having one to several themes predominate. Similarly, Povey et al's (1998) study also found that people interpret healthy and unhealthy eating in various ways. While some mentioned themes about healthy eating as eating healthy foods, or avoiding unhealthy foods, others focused their interpretation on more explicitly defined themes such as eating natural foods, fresh foods, foods containing vitamins, foods containing fibre and eating a balanced diet.
3.1.2. Factors Affecting the Diversity of Individual Healthy Eating Interpretations

Why perceptions of healthy eating vary may be better understood by taking into consideration that people's food choices are the result of a dynamic process that is influenced by an integration of many biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors (Wetter, Goldberg, King, Sigman-Grant, Baer, et al., 2001) and that this process is dependent on the person's experiences over her or his life-course (Bisogni, Sobal & Falk, 1996; Devine et al., 1998; Furst, Connors, Bisogni et al., 2002; Paisley, Sheeshka & Daly, 2001). According to Furst et al's model (1996), food choice is a dynamic process determined by a unique relationship between the person's life-course, influences, and a personal food choice system. In their model, life-course experiences generate and shape a set of food choice influences such as a person's ideals, personal factors, resources, social and food contexts. Some of these influences are more salient to some people in particular food choice situations than others. The influences experienced over the life-course in turn lead to the development of personal food choice systems consisting of value negotiations and strategies for making food choices. The most common value negotiations, defined as "the weighing and accommodation of values salient to a person in a particular situation" (Furst et al., 1996:257), include sensory perceptions, monetary considerations, convenience, health and nutrition, quality, and managing relationships. The person finally over time develops habitual strategies or personal food systems to enact the food choice. Some of these involve categorizing foods and eating situations, prioritizing conflicting values for specific eating situations, and balancing prioritizations across personally defined time frames (Connors, Bisogni, Sobal & Devine, 2001). These personal food
systems are modified with new life-course experiences (Bisogni et al., 2002; Connors et al., 2001; Furst et al., 1996).

Healthy eating perceptions and practices are also dynamic food choice processes that are shaped and modified by new life-course experiences (Devine et al., 1998; Falk et al., 2001; Paisley et al., 2001). People apply the information they learn from experiences into their definitions and management of healthy eating. People's approaches to healthy eating are diverse depending on their experiential and informational sources stemming from their life-course experiences. From these sources, people classify both foods and eating situations as either healthy or unhealthy and employ strategies such as substituting, avoiding, comparing and limiting certain foods in order to create a set of rules and behaviour patterns for healthy eating (Falk et al., 2001).

In a qualitative Canadian study, Paisley, Sheeshka and Daly (2001) observed the changing status of fruit and vegetables over the life-course of study participants. While fruits and vegetables were considered to be foods of low status when participants were children, due to many social, cultural and economic factors, fruits and vegetables came to be considered virtuous and associated with health (Paisley et al., 2001).

Devine et al also showed that past life-course experiences influence people's current fruit and vegetable choices. They found that certain life-course transitions act as salient influences in constructing a fruit and vegetable trajectory for each person. They defined trajectory as a "person's persistent thoughts, feelings, strategies, and actions as she/he approached food choice" (Devine et al., 1998:363). Two of the more salient life-course transitions for their participants were role changes and health events (Devine et al., 1998).
3.1.3. Healthy Eating Perceptions at the Commensality Level

In addition to studying food choices at the individual level, another important area for study is commensality or sharing food with others (Sobal, 2000), as food choices at the commensal level seem to require negotiation and accommodation (Kemmer, Anderson & Marshall, 1998). Managing relationships seems to be of significant value for people having commensal relationships with others (Furst et al., 1996), sometimes at the cost of healthy food choice considerations (Connors et al., 2001). Especially in families with children, parents often give priority to and accommodate the needs of the children when making food choice decisions (Connors et al., 2001; Paisley et al., 2001). Paisley et al (2001), for example, showed that couples' fruit and vegetable choices were based on attempts to construct couple food norms and practices within a context of social changes. Being a couple was seen as a commensal opportunity to try new fruits and vegetables and change their parenting strategies towards their children's food choices within a framework of balance.

In studying commensality in relation to healthy eating, emphasis has been placed on families with children. Research on these families has typically focused on the significance of family meals for children's development of healthy eating practices, as well as for couple food choices. Some important findings of these studies are that family meals are important for the development of children's healthy eating habits (Gillman, Rifas-Shiman, Frazier, Rockett, Camargo, et al., 2000; Koivisto, 1999), and that health and nutrition play a greater role in families with children than in families without children because parents attempt to model healthy eating to their children (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991). These studies have also shown that women tend to influence their
partner's food habits more than the other way around (Schafer, Schafer, Dunbar & Keith, 1999), but that the mother is not always the one who should be targeted in health and nutrition interventions because other members of the family may be more influential in bringing about a healthy eating change (De Bourdeaudhuij, 1997).

3.1.4. Limitations of Studies Regarding Healthy Eating at the Commensality Level

While significant, the above findings can not be generalized to all types of families. By focusing on individuals or families with children, we may fail to see how food choices and practices are re-negotiated and re-produced with each successive life-stage (Valentine, 1999) and that meanings and value negotiations can change with each of these stages. In a recent pilot study, Burke et al (1999), illustrated the potential to achieve health-related behaviour changes by conducting a health promotion intervention in couples who have recently adopted a shared lifestyle. They underlined both the beginning of cohabitation as the transition point where individual food choices and practices are re-examined in a couple context and the support and encouragement partners may give each other. Their participants also emphasized the importance of having a 'couples-based' as opposed to an individual-based intervention (Burke, Giangiulio, Gillam, Beilin, Houghton, et al., 1999).

Furthermore, Kemmer et al (1998) noted that the transition from being single to cohabitation or marriage is one of these life-stages where individual food choices and practices are re-negotiated both in terms of a new life-stage and also into the context of a couple. The fact that the couples did not consider health to be an important factor
informing their food choice complements the findings that families with children place more emphasis on healthy eating than families without children (Thom, 2000).

Much of the knowledge about family food choices comes from research that has dealt with nuclear families with children, even though we know that differences in how food choices are made between families with children and families without children exist (Kemmer et al., 1998; Thom, 2000). Despite the increasing prevalence of these types of families in North America (Bureau of the Census, 1997; Statistics Canada, 2001), information about the role of healthy eating in making food choices in families without children is scarce. Furthermore, how individual healthy eating approaches are integrated in families without children is lacking.

Therefore, this study aimed to contribute to our understanding of some questions about healthy eating in families without children. Being cognizant of the heterogeneity in lifestyle patterns that exists in families without children (Barr-Telford, 1994), in this study I aimed to explore the process of integration of healthy eating approaches in one increasingly prevalent type of family, that is younger, childless, and dual earner couples. These results will help us understand the extent to which participants valued healthy eating when making food choices, how their value compared with their partner's value of healthy eating, and how they negotiated discrepancies in approaches to healthy eating. I operationalize the phrase 'healthy eating approach' to refer to a person's meanings and definitions of, as well as practices regarding, healthy eating.
3.2. Methods

3.2.1. Research Design

Given the exploratory nature of the study, and the need noted by others to use qualitative methods for studying changes in food behaviour (Wetter et al., 2001), a qualitative research design was chosen. Qualitative methods allow us to study how food choices and practices occur in people's everyday lives by asking for their perspectives and being specific to the people, context, and time of study without using a preconceived framework (Connelly & Yoder, 2000). My position was situated within the constructivist paradigm whose assumptions are that people's perceptions are associated with their behaviour and are constructed through an interaction with the social environment (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

3.2.2. Couple selection

In accordance with the purpose of our study, I sought couples who were childless, dual-earner, and between the ages of 20 and 40 years. I also used an inclusion criterion that couples had been living together, either through cohabitation or marriage, for at least one year in order to ensure that their daily food patterns had become more regular and formalized. A sample size of six to seven couples was chosen to both achieve a saturation of themes and, as is typical of a small scale qualitative study, have a feasible amount of data for a master’s project (Kvale, 1996).
3.2.3. Couple recruitment

Couples were recruited through purposive sampling methods and ongoing sampling decisions were made to ensure variability between them. I posted recruitment notices (Appendix 1) in various establishments around Vancouver and utilized snowball sampling methods by using participants and colleagues as contacts to reach other eligible couples. Each of the participating couples were screened (Appendix 2) and asked to sign consent forms (Appendix 3). At the end of their participation, each couple received a 'thank you' note (Appendix 4) and a $50 gift certificate as a token of appreciation for taking part in the study. Approval for conducting the study was granted by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the University of British Columbia (Appendix 5). Pseudonyms were used to keep participants' names confidential.

3.2.4. Data collection

Each of the partners completed a one-week 'food-related decision-making and activities' journal (food journal) and an individual, in-depth interview. I used the food journals (Appendix 6) to get a glimpse of the food choices and practices participants were making in a typical week as well as an aid in preparation of individualized interview guides. While couples were not required to record exact weights or volumes of the foods they consumed as in a food record, they were required to record more contextual information about influences on their food practices. I asked them to comment about their food decisions, with an emphasis on why they made the particular choices in that particular situation. Participants recorded each food event entry by writing about when and where the food event took place, and what and with whom the food or drink was
consumed. If the food or drink was consumed at home, they were asked to record the preparation and clean up process. Participants were also given space on the page to reflect and write about their thoughts about making the food choices. Each of the partners within a couple completed the food journal, because I was interested in comparing partners' decisions and seeing whether food choices and practices differed between times when individuals ate with and without their partners. Having the completed food journals was helpful during the interviews in that I could turn to specific eating events from the food journal, use them as examples, and discuss them in more detail.

After analysis of the food journals, I conducted separate tape-recorded, semi-structured interviews with each partner. In order to avoid having partners discuss the interview questions, I made the effort of arranging interviews for the two partners on the same day (5 couples) or one to two days apart (2 couples). All interviews were conducted at a location convenient for the participants. Using both data from the food journals and the interview guide (Appendix 7) as the basis for the interviews, I asked participants to share the process of making decisions about food choices and practices in many different situations. The interviews ranged in length between 45-90 minutes and were later transcribed verbatim.

3.2.5. Data analysis

Data were analyzed through iterative procedures by undertaking ongoing preliminary analysis, thematic analysis, and coding (Grbich, 1999). Preliminary analysis of the food journals and interviews was done as deemed necessary to identify gaps in information and write notes about emerging concepts. The constant comparative method
was used to check emerging concepts across participants and couples (Charmaz, 2000). Emerging themes were examined further through various methods commonly used in qualitative research (Grbich, 1999; Hammersley, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). For example, both the food journals and the interview transcripts were coded into segments discussing a particular topic (such as 'healthy eating meaning,' 'health and nutrition concerns,' and 'evolution of patterns'). This served the purpose of noting and collecting examples of relevant phenomena as a way of identifying constructs and subsequently reorganizing the data for further analysis. The segments were organized into planning matrices and then subdivided and analyzed.

Particular attention was paid that segments and further subdivisions contained quotations from participants in order to ensure the authenticity of the codes used. The planning matrices were revised numerous times and condensed into point form categories. Patterns and themes emerging were noted and organized by writing summary memos. To refine the codes, memos, and summaries and ensure that emerging themes reflected the data, I regularly checked back and compared my analysis with the data in the food journals and transcripts.

Strategies were employed during the gathering and analysis of the data to ensure the highest possible level of "reliability" and "validity" that can be achieved in qualitative research (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as proposed by Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was used by collecting data from both partners in each couple, as well as by using both food journals and interviews as sources of data. Initial transcripts were assessed by 2 researchers. Peer debriefing took place with other
colleagues conducting qualitative studies. I also kept an audit trail and wrote summaries to give a clear description of my thought processes used to interpret the data.

3.2.6. Couple Description

Seven heterosexual couples (14 participants) between the ages of 20 and 39 participated in this study. All were Caucasian and had at least high-school education. Participants varied in occupation from those in retail and service, to artisans and professionals. Length of cohabitation and marriage for the couples varied from 1 to 5 years (Appendix 8).

3.3. Results

Entering a cohabitation represented a transition point in the life-course of participants where they were faced with renegotiating their individual healthy eating approaches to develop a couple healthy eating approach. Partners who were able to shift their individual approaches so that they as a couple had congruent values and approaches to healthy eating had a simpler negotiation process, were more satisfied with their compromise, and were able to motivate and support each other in enacting healthy eating behaviours. On the other extreme were couples who were less able to negotiate a satisfying solution; reaching a compromise in those cases was a larger process. In addition, some couples fit somewhere in between the two extremes. I will describe how this process played out for each couple by first describing the couples who had developed congruent values and approaches to healthy eating (n=3). I will then describe situations
where couples had similar values but different approaches (n=3). Finally, I will present the situation of the one couple with a divergent approach to healthy eating (n=1).

3.3.1. Couples with Congruent Values and Approaches to Healthy Eating

The negotiation process in couples with congruent healthy eating values and approaches was simpler than in the rest of the couples participating in this study. These couples found it easy to come to a compromise as few healthy eating practices needed to be negotiated. The differences typically involved specific foods, which were almost never the cause of disagreements.

Both Claire and Christofer valued both healthy eating and commensality when making food choices. The concept of health and nutrition was an important component in that both reported themselves to be "conscious" of it when making food choices. In addition, both felt that an important part of making those food choices was that the other would be able to enjoy the meal with them.

Because for both partners healthy eating primarily meant consuming vegetarian and natural foods, most of the time they were able to consume and enjoy the same foods. The need for compromise rarely occurred and was mainly to do with specific foods in question. For example, Christofer's definition of healthy eating did not require eating fish while Claire had a number of food allergies. They had negotiated a compromise by each consuming the foods the other could not have when not eating together. As a result, Claire purchased and prepared salmon when Christofer was not home for dinner. In return, Christofer ate potatoes and other foods Claire was allergic to when she was not around. In addition, eating out together was seen by both as an opportunity for each to
enjoy foods they chose not to eat together at home. As Claire explained, "if we go out, I typically will order a dish that has fish in it... and he won't." At home, however, their ability to eat together and to be able to share the same meal was more important to them than eating the food the other could not. In fact, preparing different foods for a meal when eating together at home was a hassle, because as Claire explained, "making two separate meals... just doesn't make sense."

Negotiating their individual healthy eating approaches was rarely a problem for Grace and Gavin as well, because of the congruence in values placed on healthy eating. Healthy eating was not a priority when choosing foods for either partner because at this stage in life they were more concerned about cost. Their eating approach consisted of choosing foods mainly based on affordability. Gavin explained that he and Grace were "two people that don't really want to spend money on groceries" and plan the trip to the grocery store based on, as he wrote in his food journal, a "fixed price" in mind. He often skips lunch at work because he would rather spend that money on doing something with Grace. Grace also emphasized the cost issue when she talked about choosing food. When asked why she still purchases foods with preservatives even though she thinks these foods are unhealthy she responded that it was because "it's cheaper. Organic food is really expensive unfortunately... If we had more money we'd go, like, shop organic all the time but we don't." Congruently, although Gavin reported having learnt quite a bit about nutrition from the knowledge his father had passed on to him, he also explained that "it's really expensive to be that healthy." While both expected to be making changes in a few years when they have more money, for the time being eating healthy for them was not high on the list of priorities.
The following description of Bobi's and Bojan's experiences illustrate that even partners who enter cohabitation or marriage with different food experiences and healthy eating approaches can achieve congruent values and approaches to healthy eating and use them to motivate and support each other in enacting healthy eating behaviours.

While some participants considered that they began learning healthy eating practices while eating with their parents, family meals were not thought of as being healthy by Bobi. The meals she remembered having with her family as a child were "very much meat and potatoes, very much rice and hamburger, like little on the vegetables" and were often made using packaged foods. Because she believed that her "parents have very unhealthy eating habits," Bobi had strived to change her own approach to food. Since living away from her parents over the past years, she had developed an interest in cooking and along with that believed she had learned quite a bit about nutrition. As a consequence, Bobi believed her eating habits to be very different from when she was a child and that by the time she started living with Bojan, they had improved and become healthier.

Bojan, on the other hand, came into the marriage with a "college days" approach to eating as "when I was a university student on residence...I used to eat whatever I want." This was in a way a continuation of his food experiences as a child, as his mother used to prepare mostly fried and fatty foods at home. He did note, though, that he was able to implement a somewhat healthier eating approach after graduation, once he was living by himself and had money to make changes in his approach to eating.

It was within the marriage, however, that Bobi and Bojan made a mutual decision to implement their current healthy eating approach which came as a result of a weight
gain for both. Bobi reflected on the time when they made this decision as a time when "we felt like we were gaining weight, we were totally out of control with our eating habits, we weren't paying any attention to our health!" Their aim of losing weight led to placing a higher value on healthy eating which consequently led to a healthy eating approach that emphasized decreasing their fat intake. The congruence in their healthy eating approaches became apparent in how each defined healthy eating. Bojan defined as his focus in healthy eating "cutting down on fatty foods... cutting out grease whenever possible " and "watching fat content on certain foods." Similarly, although Bobi defined healthy eating first in more general terms such as "balanced eating," she compared many of the foods while completing her food journal according to their fat content. This was illustrated when she was comparing different kinds of snacks and commenting that "brownies are not exactly as healthy as no-fat yogurt" (emphasis added).

With only few differences in approaches between the two, both were welcoming of each other's influences, so that Bobi was influenced by Bojan in consuming more meat and he in turn consumed more vegetables because of her. In general, however, their attempt to have a healthy lifestyle by losing weight and being active was considered to be a team effort, so that even joining a morning running program was done together. This way they were able to motivate and support each other by caring for how the other felt. Bobi elucidated that she eats "better food because she is paying attention to what he eats as well" and because she was "concerned about his health as well as my health." Likewise, Bojan truly felt the benefits of having Bobi as an influence on his eating practices only after, as a result of busy schedules, he and Bobi had to spend a few days eating separately. He noted this realization in his food journal by writing that "I am
missing eating with Bobi as I tend to eat better when we eat together." In our interview, he also talked about the benefit of participating in a running program together, as "having another person... makes it so much easier. I probably wouldn't still be running if Bobi and I weren't doing it together."

3.3.2. Couples with Congruent Values but Different Approaches to Healthy Eating

Couples in this study where the negotiation process involved congruent healthy eating values but different approaches involved compromises in order to accommodate the individuals' different approaches to healthy eating. Although in comparison to the couples with congruent healthy eating approaches these couples made compromises in healthy eating practices on a slightly bigger scale, disagreements were reported as infrequent, easily circumvented through negotiations they had worked out together.

Both Daniel and Denise believed that healthy eating was an important aspect of food choices, but their approaches to healthy eating differed slightly. The value placed on healthy eating by both was such that they considered it to be part of a healthy lifestyle where healthy eating was one component, and physical activity was another. Both exercised a few nights of the week and on these nights time for dinner was always used to accommodate the physical activity schedule. On the other hand, exercise was used by both to compensate for eating more food.

Indeed, they made some of the changes mentioned by couples with congruent values and approaches to healthy eating. Namely, Denise described how she has increased her meat consumption and started eating smaller meals since living with Daniel, while he in return reported an increase in the variety and amount of low-fat foods
since Denise was on a diet. Even so, their approaches were slightly different. Where couples with congruent values and approaches to healthy eating preferred to eat the same foods when together, Denise and Daniel sometimes consumed two varieties of the same type of food, distinguishing the two on the basis of the fat content. Even though both emphasized decreasing fat in their definitions of healthy eating, Denise's definition was more rigorous. For example, in one of her food journal entries, Denise differentiated between "her" popcorn and "his" popcorn and elaborated in our interview on the difference stating that in their family the low-fat popcorn was known as hers, while the regular fat popcorn was known as Daniel's popcorn. When at the grocery store, they each picked out their granola bars and as Denise described, "he has his granola bars and I have my granola bars. Mine are low-fat and his are - doesn't matter how much fat, - it's like 'I like these ones'."

Although both Frans and Felicity reported that healthy eating was an important part in making food choices and both were attempting to eat this way, their approaches were different. Frans believed that at this stage in life, it was essential that he changed his previous unhealthy eating habits into "a healthy balance" because he felt they were responsible for his weight gain since university. For this reason, he had turned to eating healthier which meant choosing a variety of lighter and fresher foods.

Frans considered his current approach to be much healthier when compared to his approach while he was in university and while he was living alone. During his childhood, healthy eating in his family "was important but it wasn't something that was put forth." In addition, while living alone, he often frequented fast food restaurants for meals. Even during cohabitation, he thought there were some deterrents that prevented him from
having as healthy a lifestyle as he would have liked. For example, his working conditions
and hours did not allow for much physical activity, something that he had done
frequently during university. He had been happy to be able to make some changes when
living with Felicity, changes that he was not able to make while living alone. He
considered the beginning of their cohabitation a "fresh start for me" since he found it
"very hard to cook for just one person" and "buy portions that for just one person" at the
store. He believed that living alone was "what led me to have really bad eating habits."
Therefore, for him, his improved healthy eating approach of preparing dinner at home
and choosing healthier foods when eating out was a change nutritionally from where he
had been.

Frans' current healthy eating approach, however, was not healthy enough for
Felicity who felt that his food choices were still too unhealthy for her most of the time.
Reflecting back on the past year, she did not think that she "would've eaten as much take
out [food] as we do, cause ... I would've never ordered this much" if Frans had not
influenced this. She would prefer to be eating even healthier, which meant eating more
vegetables and salads than they were eating at the time. She felt a change would be
necessary before she would be happy with Frans' healthy eating approach, but for now
she was going along with Frans' choices most of the time because he purchased and
prepared the meals. For the time being, however, Felicity valued being able to eat
together with Frans more than suggesting even healthier changes.

Ewan and Emma also had congruent healthy eating values but different
approaches in dealing with it. Even though Ewan and Emma entered their marriage with
different healthy eating approaches, they showed us that despite these differences,
partners can accept each other's individualities and still encourage each other to have healthy eating behaviours.

Ewan attributed the pattern of his previous food behaviour to his frequently-touring lifestyle as a musician and a playwright, as well as his lack of knowledge about nutrition.

_I work in music so sometimes I'll be traveling and eating in restaurants because I am not staying in anything but motels one night after another... Part of it was, on tour, I had no clue for instance that bacon would have enough fat — that 3 strips of bacon was your daily allotment of fat._

He also admitted that this type of food behaviour originated from his childhood food experiences as his family ate mostly _"hamburger-type meals."_ Later in life, he consumed mainly vegetarian-type foods because he socialized with many vegetarians friends, but never gave food the attention it deserved until he met Emma and started learning from her about nutrition.

Emma, on the other hand, had been emphasizing eating healthy and exercising from much earlier. The importance of nutrition in her food practices was a consideration that originated from her childhood food experiences with her parents. Although Emma felt she now knew more about nutrition than her parents knew when she was a child, _"eating healthy and eating a balanced diet, that was always part of our family meals._

Ewan's decision to establish a healthier eating approach was partly due to his weight gain that he associated with life-stage, and partly due to the new nutrition
knowledge he gained from Emma. Why he had "learned to cut back and been aware more of... fat content or calorie content of meals" and why he was now "aware that certain daily, you know allowance for certain types of foods before they can become, I don't know if detriment is the right word, but less healthy I suppose" was "a huge influence from Emma." Even when touring now, Ewan reported that he was "definitely making a conscious effort to eat foods that felt a little lighter" and searching for "not canned," but "fresh vegetables." Ewan's new definition of healthy eating was having "one decent meal in the day" that included vegetables. He felt that vegetables balanced out and "replenish[ed]" what other foods such as starches could not and made him feel like he was "doing better."

Ewan's definition of healthy eating was not completely congruent with Emma's because her definition of healthy eating was more specific and included eating not one but three orderly healthy meals every day. Although she thought of herself as "not fanatical about it [healthy eating]," she did use strategies such as varying foods from day to day, using foods with few preservatives as much as possible, choosing oils such as olive and flaxseed rather than hydrogenated oils and choosing lower-fat foods when possible. There certainly were compromises when eating together such as the consumption of meat which was more of Emma's preference. Emma had learned about more vegetarian-type meals, while Ewan increased his consumption of meat. While believing that he had now developed a taste for it, he still held that he never liked it as a child and he still tended to first "think about Emma's needs with that, because... red meat seems to hit the spot for energy and for subsistence and for feeling good about herself."
Their different approaches to healthy eating were further militated by their working schedules. Both believed that having different healthy eating choices was partly to do with the different nature of the work that they did because "*they tend to dictate what we do specifically.*" Emma's approach was more regimented than Ewan's partly because she had "*a regular job that requires breakfast at a certain time in the morning, lunch at a certain time of the day... so dinner needs to be ready at a certain time of the day, as well.*" In contrast, Ewan's meal patterns were more fluid sometimes leading him to skip meals. Lunch, for example, was "*not a pattern or a consistent approach at all*" but was worked out according to rules other than the time. As a corollary, they often ate separately and at different times, a compromise that allowed for Emma's need for regimented meal patterns and Ewan's need for fluidity.

### 3.3.3. Couples with Different Values and Approaches to Healthy Eating

The one couple in this study with both different values in healthy eating and employing different approaches toward it seemed to require the most negotiation when making food choices. Because of the discrepancy in both values and approaches to healthy eating, tension and conflict about food choices were more frequent than in the other couples and could not be easily circumvented. Nonetheless, this couple had also worked out negotiations that they implemented on a daily basis, albeit the compromises were on a much greater scale than the rest of the couples.

Coming from different healthy eating values and approaches had required quite a bit of negotiation for Anthony and Amelie to find some common ground when making food choices. Anthony came to a decision to become vegetarian through a "*strange*
progression" over the course of some time during university. He first decreased his meat intake because, as a university student on a budget, he found it an expensive food to purchase. Later, after reading some nutrition books he realized that he never really enjoyed eating meat as a child either and decided that "there is really no nutritional need for anyone to eat meat." Consequently, he slowly started further removing meat from his diet until he finally ceased to eat it. As he expressed below, this transition to vegetarianism was a positive life-changing experience for him that had enforced the maintenance of his healthy eating approach ever since.

After I did that [became vegetarian], I started losing weight and feeling more fit, having more energy, waking up earlier, being able to go to bed later, going with less sleep... My grades improved... everything just turned around. My whole life changed, so I continued with it, and I've gone with it since then.

These experiences led Anthony to develop a specific criteria for healthy eating such as "number 1, a lot of fruits and vegetables to consume," "2, other dishes that are prepared to be relatively low in fat" and "staying away from meat." In addition, both in his food journal and in our interview, Anthony stressed his preference for whole-wheat and natural foods as a nutritious choice rather than "the white stuff."

Healthy eating for Amelie, on the other hand, was not such a strictly-controlled set of rules. Health and nutrition were important considerations for Amelie as well, but not to the same extent as they were to Anthony. In describing one of her breakfasts in the
food journal, Amelie wrote that she usually aimed "to get 3 food groups." While at the grocery store she chose to purchase "drink boxes that contain real juice and try to stick with healthier granola bars that do not contain chocolate chips, marshmallows etc." But healthy eating for Amelie was also about going "back to the way I used to eat with my parents... meat... starch... vegetable." Healthy eating was also about exploring different options and being adventurous. She liked to experiment when cooking with different types of foods, but felt limited because of Anthony's narrow definition of healthy eating.

Their incongruent healthy eating approaches were often a potential cause of tension because Amelie did not place the same value on health and nutrition as a factor in her food choices. On the one hand, Amelie admitted that Anthony had been the major influence in the changes she had made to eat healthier. She noted in her food journal that she always tried "to have a vegetable with dinner" because "Anthony (as a vegetarian) thinks I don't eat enough fruits and vegetables." On the other hand, some of the other suggestions such as eating less meat she had found to be a "struggle" and felt that usually "what I'm proposing [to eat] isn't healthy enough for his... standards." She had attempted herself to become vegetarian, but as Anthony explained, "she has that desire to eat meat."

Anthony's healthy eating approach was clearly problematic for Amelie and too limiting. She described that "he first became a vegetarian and then he wanted to become vegan and not eat dairy at all. And I just said "that's just ridiculous." As a compromise, Anthony had modified his healthy eating approach by being vegan 4 days of the week and consuming dairy foods with Amelie the rest of the time, while Amelie had been able to compromise by preparing and eating meat on her own and eating some of the
vegetarian dishes Anthony prepared. For this reason, preparing and eating taco-style wraps with a "soy product that looks (and tastes) like ground beef" had become a frequent choice for dinner because, as Amelie wrote in her diary, "we try to make food without meat - but that I will still enjoy."

3.4. Discussion

This study aimed to further our understanding of people's food choices by illustrating the integration of individuals' approaches to healthy eating into the context of being a couple, as a particular transition point in the life-course. My emphasis was on how values about healthy eating are associated with what Furst et al (1996) called 'managing relationships' value negotiation in the context of cohabiting and married couples. I demonstrated that although each participant's healthy eating approach shaped and was shaped by their unique life-course experiences, their approach needed to be renegotiated and modified upon cohabitation. Negotiations varied among the couples such that each couple used strategies to fit their own particular needs.

Previous studies reported that differences in people's perceptions about healthy eating reflect differences in geographic location (Martinez-Gonzalez et al., 2000), age, educational level, and to a somewhat lesser extent, gender (Martinez-Gonzalez et al., 1998; Povey et al., 1998) and individual factors (Bisogni et al., 2002; Furst et al., 1996). This study augmented our understanding of food choices by illustrating that people do approach healthy eating in various ways and that each person's approach is shaped by her or his unique past and present experiences. For example, both Emma's and Bobi's healthy eating approaches were influenced by their childhood food experiences during family
meals, but while Emma's approach was an extension of her childhood family meals modified according to new health and nutrition information learned, Bobi had developed a whole new approach since then. One factor involved seemed to be that Emma's current definitions of healthy eating were more congruent with her family's practices as a child than Bobi's current perceptions.

In addition to past experiences, participants' healthy eating approaches in this study were closely associated with their current emphasis in definitions of healthy eating. As reported previously, reported healthy eating interpretations were diverse (Falk et al., 2001; Povey et al., 1998). While some participants approached healthy eating through an emphasis on vegetarian foods (which may or may not have included fish in the definition), others placed emphasis on low-fat foods with or without a combination of exercise, or natural or organic foods with a combination of cost. Furthermore, as noted in previous studies as well (Falk et al., 2001), healthy eating was not even a priority for one couple and therefore food was not given much thought in terms of health.

Therefore, people's approaches to healthy eating are, as food choices are, "an integration of the person's sense of self with daily food activities, in addition to viewing eating as a reflection of a person's knowledge, attitudes, or socio-demographic characteristics" (Bisogni et al., 2002:135). Although I did not specifically focus on this aspect in this study, participants' emphasis in definitions seemed to reflect some of their personal ideologies. Previous studies have also contributed reasons for particular food choices to individual identities and philosophies both in terms of food and other aspects of life (Bisogni et al., 2002; Linderman & Sirelius, 2001).
The importance of the family and household as an influence on food choices beyond the individual has been shown in previous studies (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991; De Bourdeaudhuij, 1997; Gillman et al., 2000; Henson, Gregory, Hamilton & Walker, 1998; Kemmer et al., 1998; Valentine, 1999). Henson et al (1998) in their study concluded that we should consider the family as a "process of collective determination of food consumption patterns" (Henson et al., 1998:196), because negotiation among the family members is an essential aspect in making food choices for the family. Furthermore, Devine et al (1998) included changing roles as being one of the major transition points in life-course for changes in food choice. I also emphasize the importance of cohabitation and marriage as part of this major transition point for changes in healthy eating approaches by illustrating some of the different ways healthy eating approaches can be modified depending on the partners' congruency in values and approaches to healthy eating. Partners may choose to amalgamate their understandings of healthy eating into a couple approach resembling that of Bobi and Bojan or they may choose to have distinct approaches as did Anthony and Amelie. I showed that couples with congruent values and approaches to healthy eating can influence each other by motivating and supporting healthy eating behaviours. On the other hand, incongruent approaches to food in general and healthy eating in particular, may cause tension and influence partners' food behaviours negatively. Staying cognizant that healthy eating approaches resemble less a dichotomy and more a continuum of possibilities in approaches, I illustrated that there exists a middle ground where partners influence each other but to differing extents and with different effects. Therefore, both partners' influences and the consequences of these influences on a person's healthy eating approach can vary. Partners may encourage or
deter improvement of healthy eating behaviour, or both encourage certain behaviours but
deter others in variable forms.

Furthermore, the influence towards healthy eating does not necessarily have to
come from the woman in the family. A striking difference of this study from previous
research is the impact of gender on healthy eating values. Previous research has found
that women tend to be more concerned with healthy eating than men (Charles & Kerr,
1988; Schafer et al, 1999) and that women are usually the ones trying to get their partners
(and children) to eat more healthfully (deBourdeauhuij, 1997; Schafer et al, 1999). In this
study, however, the men were often the ones influencing their partners to eat better, while
some of the women were the 'meat, potatoes and vegetable' eaters.

In contrast to families with children where healthy eating is perceived as
important for the benefit of the children (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991), childless
couples deal with healthy eating in different ways. First, in this group, healthy eating was
not valued by all. While most participants described healthy eating as having a high value
in making food choices, Grace and Gavin admitted that healthy eating was not main
priority for them. Second, for the couples who valued healthy eating, reasons were
different. While some emphasized weight loss as the benefits of healthy eating, others
emphasized vegetarian values and changes in life-stage (ability to enact healthy eating).

Structural factors were reported by many participants as greatly influencing their
healthy eating approaches. Most reported that when they had been students, they had
found it difficult to improve food habits, and most had felt that at that stage in life,
healthy eating could not be a priority. In terms of financial ability, becoming employed
brought the means to make healthier changes, but other factors deterred this such as lack
of time to exercise and costs of cooking for just one person. Cohabitation/marriage, along
with life-stage, was thought by most couples as contributing to alleviating some of these
difficulties and facilitating a change to healthier eating.

Cohabitation/marriage was therefore a time when personal food choice systems
based on value negotiations and strategies needed to be re-examined and re-negotiated in
light of a new social framework where "managing relationships" (Furst et al., 1996) may
become a higher value than previously. Paisley et al (2001) showed that, as a couple,
partners make an effort to develop food norms together and that individuals may benefit
from their partner's healthier habits. This had happened in Bobi and Bojan's case. They
both developed a new healthy eating approach together and felt that they were positively
influenced by the other in conforming to healthy eating. For Frans and Felicity, however,
a healthy eating benefit was not felt and healthy eating was traded for the opportunity to
be able to eat together. Felicity valued healthy eating and would have liked to eat
healthier foods than what Frans prepared but being able to eat with him was more
important than voicing her opinion to make the changes. In some cases, the effort to
develop mutual food norms was substituted for two distinct food norms that were
occasionally brought closer together. For Anthony and Amelie, the social aspects of
eating the same foods together were less important on most days because each had their
own values and approaches to healthy eating. On most weekends, however, they made
the effort of compromising in their food choices.

Healthy eating as a value seemed to also be influenced by the couples' stage in
life. Many participants felt they were more able to eat healthily now that they were in a
couple relationship than in their previous living arrangements. Frans, for example,
explained that he was more able to choose healthy foods now because cooking and purchasing food for one was more expensive and often wasteful. Anthony also reflected that purchasing and preparing food was expensive when he was a student. While most felt that healthy eating was a priority now, Grace and Gavin did not because their emphasis in making food choices was on cost of food. Taking into consideration their demographic situation, their different approaches to food choices may be due to differences in age and socioeconomic status (compared to the other participants they were the youngest couple and had the lowest income). Unlike the other couples, they did not feel to be in a stage in life where they could afford to make changes in their food habits to eat a healthier diet. Caplan et al (1998) showed that both age and socio-economic status as part of social and cultural contexts influence food choice. In their study they noted that concern about food and health increases with age and life-stage, and that those with lower incomes struggle more to save money that could be spent on food for other needs (Caplan, Keane, Willets & Williams, 1998).

3.5. Implications

As is common in qualitative research, this exploratory study was limited in both sample size and diversity of couples. More studies should be conducted exploring the same issues with a larger sample, and more diverse groups in terms of age, education, occupation, race, ethnicity, and culture, including geographic location, to learn whether the findings from this study reflect patterns in couples elsewhere.

Taken as preliminary findings, an important implication of this study is considering the impact of cohabitation as a transition point in changing food behaviour,
giving further support to perspectives that variations in food choices depend on more than just differences in consumption patterns and differing knowledge of nutrition (Bisogni, 2002; Devine et al., 1998; Falk, 2001; Furst, 1996; Wetter et al., 2001). Since people perceive positive attitudes and beliefs about nutrition (Povey et al., 1998), it may be more fruitful to focus on the motivating and enabling factors when making changes in healthy food approaches, such as considering the role of a partner in changing food behaviour. It may be that partners and spouses need to be encouraged to be involved, to motivate and support partners in their decisions, and motivate them in enacting food choice changes.

When considering the impact of cohabitation on changing food behaviour, we must be careful not to group together all types of cohabitation situations as the influences of partners on food behaviour differ between couples. Practitioners need to ask appropriate questions in order to understand their clients' interpretations and tailor messages to their specific needs. For example, nutrition educators should ask questions about: a) how food decisions are made by clients (i.e., what the factors affecting their food choices are), b) what influence other family members have on these food choices, c) the extent to which healthy eating is of value when making food choices for both the client and the other family members. These questions will help focus areas that need to be targeted for nutrition education.

3.6. References


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CHAPTER 4: Discussion and Conclusions about the Role of Food for Childless Couples: Integrating Food Provision and Food Choice Findings with New Commensality Findings

4.1. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore issues of food provision, food choice, and commensality in one of the types of families that has been neglected in previous research, namely couples who are childless, younger, and dual-earner. My specific research questions dealt with understanding the a) integration of partners' ideals and practices regarding gender roles in food provision, b) shaping of food choice values and integration of these into healthy eating approaches of the couple, and c) role of food in a broader sense in shaping and reflecting couples' identities.

I described findings relating to the first two research questions in detail in chapters 2 and 3. In this chapter, I will first present findings about my third research question. In order to develop a better understanding of the broader role of food in these couples' relationships, I will integrate findings from chapters 2 and 3 with (new) results about commensality patterns. Then I will compare the findings about these childless couples with findings from the literature about families with children.

4.1.1. The Significance of Food in the Couple Relationship

A common characteristic that couples shared was that all experienced some changes regarding their food patterns upon cohabitation, so that this was a transition point in the life-course. Whether they had moved in together as a cohabiting or a married couple, the couple had the opportunity for re-examination of previous food ideals and
values. Inevitably, the changes were in the form of a compromise reached by negotiation of individual ideals and values of each partner both in terms of their interpretations about food and being a couple.

The extent to which food played a significant role in the lives of the couples in this study depended on how each of the two partners had constructed what it meant to be a couple. Specifically, each couple had defined ways to deal with food-related decision-making and activities that were meaningful and satisfying to them (albeit, in a couple of cases one of the partners was more satisfied than the other). While for some of the couples food played a major part in what couples do together, for others food played a lesser part or, as in one case, food was typically more of an individual concern. Furthermore, couples emphasized different aspects of food that were important to them, that were not necessarily interpreted the same way by other couples. As a way of presenting these individualities, I will describe to what extent food played a part in the relationship of each couple, while at the same time integrating the food provision and healthy eating findings from chapters 2 and 3.

Food played a significant role in the everyday relationship of Bobi and Bojan, and Claire and Christofer. A common theme for both of these couples was that both interpreted their relationship as one where food was used to represent togetherness. They had managed to come to identify with and value food in similar ways, such that food was seen to aid in their construction of what, for them, being a couple meant. In chapter 3 we saw that Bobi and Bojan had implemented a plan where by changing their food habits together, they had improved their lifestyle. Similarly in the same chapter we saw that
Claire and Christofer had developed similar ideologies about food where they both valued vegetarianism.

Commensality was valued highly by both couples. Eating together was seen as something that couples can do to maintain a happy relationship. As Claire reflected about her meals with Christofer, she said that she eats the majority of her meals with him so "it [food] does play an important role in our relationship, because we do like cooking and we try to cook a certain amount together and we like sitting down and talking and eating together." That commensality was valued highly in their relationship was also emphasized by Christofer. He explained that for the two of them, communicating with each other and catching up with their daily happenings was a natural part of life, and how they dealt with daily events. Food played "a central role in a lot of ways" and was an essential component of their relationship.

*Often times with dinner, it's at the end of the day and we haven't been together for the whole day, so we'll kind of fill each other in on what happened and what we are thinking about and just daily things. It's one of the more... it's one of the times we can touch base, you know, and talk about things...just catching up with each other and talking about... life.*

In addition to the food choice and commensality aspects, food provision was also seen as a part of what couples have to deal with together, "as a couple." For example, both couples went on major food purchasing trips together because, as Bojan commented in his food journal, this was part of "playing house." Bobi also followed this idea in
explaining that dealing with food was "part of the whole domestic thing." But, as we saw in chapter 2, this was the aspect of food where these two couples showed some divergence in ideals about what being a couple means. In the case of Bobi and Bojan, a couple could negotiate a division of labour by each doing specific tasks, this definition still meant for them that they were preparing a meal together. Claire and Christofer's definition included more sharing by rotating all of the food provision tasks over time.

For others, though, the commensality aspect of food did not seem to play as big a role in their relationship every day, but was occasionally used to maintain a "good marriage." For Daniel and Denise, for example, commensality was not important on a daily basis as they usually watched TV as they ate or ate while rushing to do other activities. Occasionally, however, food played a bigger role, as during their "dates." Denise explained that she and Daniel "date" occasionally in order to maintain their relationship.

*We figured that to have a good marriage, you have to date, you have to not get stuck in a rut so much, so we'll try and maybe go to a different restaurant or something and make it seem more official.*

Denise explained that the reason for these occasional dates is their symbolic significance. "*It's the things like when we were dating, the, like the memories attached to it... it's more significant memory-wise.*"

On a daily basis, however, food was for them a small part in a busy lifestyle. Most of their meals consisted of quick preparation snacks and the two did not always eat
the same foods. As with Bobi and Bojan, Denise's and Daniel's construction of the meaning of a couple also allowed for traditional patterns in food provision where typically Denise cooked and Daniel cleaned.

Similarly, in the case of Ewan and Emma, commensality did not play a big part in the relationship every day, even though Emma would have preferred it that way. Ewan described that because of family issues, commensality had been a negative experience for him during childhood. But because it meant a great deal to Emma, he was willing to compromise at times and eat together. For Emma, on the other hand, commensality was important, because it was what she had always known even with her family as a child. Not eating together "didn't fit the marriage ideal" she had grown up with and for this reason, she needed adjustment upon marriage. But Emma recognized that she and Ewan had different life-course experiences regarding commensality and different preferences.

_I think that's where it's [her experiences] different from Ewan's family._

_He always felt like it [eating together with the family] was an unpleasant experience, so he just kind of, I think he's carried that feeling with him into this relationship. And he just kind of can't really stand small talk that often goes on over dinner conversation. He just kind of zones out and would rather be watching the news or working than having a conversation over dinner that's meaningless._

But food for Ewan and Emma played a role in expressing respect for their individual preferences and experiences by accommodating each other. They
compromised by eating together on occasions, recognizing both Emma's need to eat together and Ewan's past experiences. In terms of food choices, Ewan had learned more from Emma than the other way around, but this enabled them to have similar food choices so that both valued healthy eating even if they did not always eat together. They also used food as a way of experiencing new things together. For example, they had previously taken cooking classes together. Their ideal for food provision included each purchasing foods when able and rotating the tasks of cooking and cleaning depending on their schedules.

As in Denise's discussion earlier, Grace also did not attribute much significance to food, except on occasions such as going out to eat for their birthdays. But when Grace was asked to compare eating alone with eating with Gavin, her response did not include a discussion of an importance of commensality.

_Not much changes... The only thing that would change is if we
were out for dinner. Eating alone, I make it and eat, I put the dishes away.
With Gavin, we make it, we eat it, we put the dishes away... It doesn't really
change much. We're usually hungry when we eat, so we just shut up, eat
our food and go back to doing things._

What was also different about Grace and Gavin was that their food-related decision-making and activities lacked a regular pattern. This however, reflected their stage in life. In addition to being the youngest couple interviewed, they also had the lowest income. In planning to move to a different city, their concern was to save enough money, so that this
took precedence over matters with food. Because of these changes, healthy eating was low on the list of their priorities and so were their patterns with regard to food provision, although, as shown in chapter 2, Grace's ideals with regards to food provision were of a traditional nature.

Frans and Felicity and Anthony and Amelie were couples where some tension existed because of major discrepancies in beliefs as to what role food should play in their relationship. As Christofer stated in his quote above, Felicity pointed out that meal time with Frans was a leisurely time, time for catching up, noting that commensality was an important aspect in her relationship with Frans. Frans also made similar statements in his interview. Felicity was even more specific about the types of conversations that occurred during meals together. For example, she differentiated between having "a big conversation" that happens outside of meal time, and talking "like just - couple" while eating together. She explained what couples converse about over meals in the following quote:

I don't think we really sit down and have a conversation [while eating],
because if I want to sit and have a conversation, I'll sit and have a conversation with him... when we eat, the news might be on, we talk about work, like just - couple, silly things that might have happened. Uhm, or just kind of what we're gonna do tonight or this weekend, but not a big conversation.
However, discrepancy occurred between the two in terms of both food choices and food provision work, in that Felicity was not happy with either of the two current patterns they held. Although she was expecting a change in the near future, she had not communicated this to Frans.

Whereas in Frans and Felicity's case, this tension was not resolved, Anthony and Amelie had worked out a pattern that corresponded with their construction of a couple. In their case, the discrepancy around the significance of food was most obvious. Anthony simply put it as "I think of food as fuel... she thinks of food as a pleasurable experience." He was rarely willing to compromise his food choices to a level that would jeopardize his healthy eating values. For this reason, commensality was often a point of tension for Anthony and Amelie. Anthony admitted that eating together would probably be more important for him if they had more similar food choices. As he recalled, they were eating together more often during the time when Amelie attempted to become vegetarian.

_I think we were_ [eating together more often when she was vegetarian]...

_Maybe it would actually_ [be more fun to prepare meals if she was still vegetarian]. _I might actually take more interest in preparing things that are more exciting, a little more intriguing to the taste buds, if I knew that she would sit down and enjoy it with me._

Because they had such discrepant constructions of what couples should do, Anthony and Amelie used a strategy of "each their own" in most food-related decision-making and activities. Each picked their own foods at the grocery store, made their own food choices,
and prepared and cleaned their meals on most days. Because commensality was important to Amelie, though, they ate the same foods on some weekends.

4.1.2. Childless Families versus Families with Children: The Differences

Food-related studies have often centred around the importance of family meals (Bossard, 1943; Charles & Kerr, 1988; Counihan, 1988; Counihan 1992; DeVault, 1991; Murcott, 1982; Murcott, 1983), as it has been argued that patterns of food preparation and consumption reflect the relationships between members of a household and that food contributes to the social reproduction of the family (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Kemmer, 2000). In comparison with previous studies of families with children, some important differences were noted for the childless couples in this study. The most obvious is the multiplicity of experiences for childless couples in three general aspects of food: gender role ideals and practices, healthy eating values and approaches, and commensality patterns.

The first distinction between families with children and childless couples that this study points to is the area of gender roles in food provision. Studies with families with children have typically found traditional gender role practices, where the woman has been responsible for food provision. These women were typically economically dependent on their husbands; they were either homemakers or worked part-time (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991). The childless couples in this study had a common ideal of equality, regardless of whether they held traditional or egalitarian views. Most participants described the ideal gender roles with terms such as "equality," "equity at work," "making sure that one isn't doing more work than the other," and that "each has a
say." In addition, most participants believed that this was attainable and that they, as a couple, had achieved this. Discourses about equality have also been noted in previous studies, as well (Bittman & Lovejoy, 1993; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998; Scott, Aldwin & Brown, 1996). In practice, however, what became apparent is that this ideal was interpreted in a variety of ways and that strategies used to achieve this ideal were numerous. The two major categories I presented were the "sharing it all" and the "specialization" strategies, but even these had their own variations. These strategies are similar to what has been noted in the literature (Brown & Miller, 2002; Goodnow & Bowes, 1994). What is significant here, however, is that all believed their strategies represented and were defined as equality in food provision. This was true even for the women who held more traditional views that cooking is woman's domain.

In chapter 2 we also saw that discourse about equality in food provision needs to recognize the social, cultural and historical context about women's ideals of a close relationship with food in general, and cooking in particular. That women have felt more strongly about cooking and food in general than men has been shown in previous research (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Counihan, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Furst, 1997).

The reasons for this pattern are complex. Some suggest differences in gender socialization patterns as an explanation for this pattern (Myers & Booth, 2002). Others note that this relationship may not be disadvantageous to women as previously thought, as it may be beneficial for a woman's identity (Counihan, 1988; Furst, 1997). From a viewpoint of those who advocate equality between partners, however, women's closer relationship to food is looked upon as a disadvantage for women. The social discourse today is that we should be in search for equality (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996;
Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998; Steil, 1997). However, it seems that the meaning of equality is not quite clear or well defined by researchers. Furthermore, equality in food provision has not been defined. This might be why each couple in this study interpreted equality in the context of their own structural, personal and interpersonal factors, so that reasons given for current patterns included both pragmatic solutions (relative resource theories) as well as personal characteristics of the partners (interpretive theories). As noted in chapter 2, I believe that explanations can be found using both relative resources and interpretive theories, but not with one or the other.

A second distinction between families with children and childless couples relates to healthy eating values and approaches. Issues regarding healthy eating have been shown to be consistently important to families with children. Women have thought it to be important to cook and model healthy meals for their children (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991). In these studies, the importance of the concept of a “proper meal,” viewed as a key indicator of a “proper family” has been noted (Charles & Kerr, 1988). Women prepared ‘proper meals’ consisting of meat, potatoes, and vegetables in order to model healthy eating for their children. In this study, I noted differences for childless couples in that healthy eating was not valued by all. While most participants described healthy eating as something they valued highly in making food choices, Grace and Gavin admitted that healthy eating was not a priority for them. Furthermore, for the couples that did value healthy eating, reasons were different from reasons given by families with children. Some reasons given by some of these childless couples was the consideration of healthy eating as a part of change in lifestyle (health and exercise); for others it was emphasis on vegetarianism as part of healthy eating.
In chapter 3 we also saw that congruence between partners in values about healthy eating varied between couples. In the majority of cases, partners came into the relationship with incongruent values regarding healthy eating, but these became more congruent with time because in addition to other positive changes (i.e., current life-stage benefits), partners were able to influence, learn from each other, and compromise during cohabitation. However, Anthony's and Amelie's situation illustrated that congruence is not always the case for couples, because their values toward healthy eating remained highly incongruent even after four years of marriage. Moreover, although for most couples values regarding healthy eating became more congruent with duration of cohabitation, this did not always result in corresponding congruence of their approaches to healthy eating. While some couples had implemented an approach that valued healthy eating highly and was based on “team work” with similar definitions and practices of healthy eating, others had implemented individual approaches. Some of the more salient factors for different approaches that emerged for these couples were incongruence in interpretations of healthy eating between partners, as well as restrictions such as structural (work) patterns.

A striking difference of this study from previous related research is the impact of gender on healthy eating. Previous research has found that women tend to be more concerned with healthy eating than men tend to be (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Schafer et al, 1999) and that women are usually the ones trying to get their partners (and children) to eat more healthfully (deBourdeauhuij, 1997; Schafer et al, 1999). This was not the case in this study. In fact, the men were often the ones influencing their partners to eat better, and some of the women were the 'meat, potatoes and vegetable' eaters.
The final distinction between families with children and the childless couples in this study is about the significance of food in the relationship. Family meals in families with children are seen to hold the members of the family together, represent a form of family interaction, and reproduce the idea of "home" and "family" for both parents and children (Bossard, 1943; DeVault, 1991). The food is consumed by the family as a family, that is with the family sitting together around the table, talking to each other and enjoying both the food and each other's company (Bossard, 1943; Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991). Although previous studies have reported high significance of food in the construction of the family (Bossard, 1943; Charles & Kerr, 1988; Counihan, 1988; Counihan 1992; DeVault, 1991), the extent to which food played a role in the everyday lives of the couples who participated in this study varied. For some, food played a significant role in their relationship and was an essential component in their construction of their couple identity. For others, on the other hand, food played a lesser role in their relationship. Furthermore, for some couples, food played only a minor or an occasional role in their relationship because food was not an essential component in the construction of their couple identity.

Therefore, the experiences with food varied between couples. While the pattern in families with children, according to the literature, is more general in terms of the importance of food, this was not found in this study of childless couples. Recognizing that these patterns may change with new life-course experiences, food was not important for the social reproduction of all of the couples.
4.2. Limitations

As is common in qualitative research, this exploratory study was limited in both size and diversity of couples, which therefore, might have influenced my representation of these couples. Because of the small sample size, I could not allow for all the heterogeneity that might be present in this group of younger, childless, dual-earner couples. The couples in this study were all heterosexual, Caucasian, and lived in urban settings. Further research should conduct similar studies with families that were not represented here such as homosexual and lesbian couples, and couples of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, although I aimed to recruit couples of all socio-economic backgrounds, the diversity in my sample was limited in terms of both education and occupation. Therefore, although I aimed to adequately represent the couples in this study, caution must be taken in the transferability of these results to similar couples in different geographic locations, as the food experiences of other couples elsewhere may be quite different. They can be used, however, to inform further research or nutrition education efforts.

Another possible limitation that needs acknowledgment is my gender as it may have impacted the results of this research. Social desirability may have been a factor during the interviews with the men to some extent. Because of our gender differences, the men may have been more prone use socially desirable discourses, especially in their responses about equality being the ideal for division of labour in food provision.
4.3. Conclusions

The food experiences of younger, childless, dual-earner, heterosexual couples who participated in this study must be understood within the wider context of their daily lives. Structural, personal, and inter-personal factors influenced their ideals regarding gender roles and values regarding healthy eating and which in turn influenced the pragmatic day-to-day decisions and activities regarding food. Participants constructed their identity as a couple through food by using current social discourses such as ideals about equality and values about healthy eating. Interpretations of these ideals and values varied between couples and sometimes between the partners of a particular couple. Each couple ended up in a unique place that they considered to be a compromise for their current situation. There was not one single 'right' way of doing things, nor one single way of negotiating to reach a compromise. Furthermore, these patterns were not seen as static, but were expected to change over time. Most couples reported expecting changes to occur with changes in other aspects of their lives. The most frequently mentioned changes expected to change their current food-related patterns were work (e.g., changes in work hours) and life-stage (e.g., previous changes from being a student or living alone to cohabiting and future changes such as having children) patterns.

Understanding the food experiences of childless couples is relevant because statistics indicate that families without children are increasing in prevalence (Statistics Canada, 1996; 2001). Moreover, studies have shown that knowledge about nuclear families with children may not be generalized to other types of families (Kemmer, Anderson, & Marshall, 1998; Kemmer, 2000; Valentine, 1999;). In particular, families
without children are shown to have different food-related concerns from families with children (Thom, 2000).

4.4. Implications

This study's insight into these younger, childless, dual-earner, heterosexual couples' experiences with food provided implications for both food-related research and practice. Childless couples differ from families with children in at least 3 different food related areas. The implications here point to the need to begin focusing food-related research on families other than the nuclear family with children. Seeing that all of the men were involved in food-related areas to some extent and some of them valued healthy eating more than their partners, their contribution needs to be credited by including their (and other family members') perspectives in studies, as well.

Childless couples also showed differences between themselves. We therefore need to be aware of the multiplicity of patterns couples can show with respect to the aspects of food studied here. Interpretations of current social discourses such as ideals of equality and values about healthy eating varied between couples, and sometimes between the two partners within a couple. Practitioners can avoid generalizing food experiences by asking clients specific questions about their own, every-day experiences with food at home. Asking clients appropriate questions about their ideals, values and practices is essential in order to understand their views and tailor messages to their specific needs. For example, family and marital practitioners should ask questions regarding clients' a) ideals for division of labour and b) how they think their actual practices compare to their ideals. Nutrition educators should ask questions about: a) how food decisions are made
by clients (i.e., what the factors affecting their food choices are), b) what influence other family members have on these food choices, c) the extent to which healthy eating is of value when making food choices for both the client and the other family members.

Although an important implication of this study is considering the impact of cohabitation as a transition point on changing food-related patterns, more research should be conducted to examine changes in patterns with changes in life-stage. I have given some further support that food-related patterns noted in nuclear families with children where the husband was the breadwinner and the wife a homemaker cannot be generalized to all families. Other similar studies suggest that changes in food provision occur with changes in life-stage (Craig & Truswell 1988; Kemmer et al., 1998; Valentine; 1999). Therefore longitudinal studies with couples going through successive life-stages would immensely aid our understanding of the dynamic negotiations with changes in life-stage.

4.5. References


Appendix 1: Recruitment Notice

Childless Couples Needed!!!

To Participate in a Study Regarding their Food-Related Activities!

Purpose of Study: to explore the food-related activities of younger, childless, married or cohabiting couples living in the Greater Vancouver Area. Information gathered from the study will serve the purpose of aiding in future nutrition education interventions and policy changes for this group.

Criteria for Participation:
Couples must meet the following criteria:
- must be between the ages of 20 and 40 years
- must be childless
- have been living together for at least 1 year
- both are employed full-time
- may be of any ethnic background, any socioeconomic status, or any sexual orientation

Gift certificates: $25 for each participant with an option between dinner at a restaurant or CDs from a music store.

Contact Information: if you are interested in participating in the study or would like to request some further information, please feel free to contact Svetlana either via email at, svetristovski@hotmail.com, or via telephone at

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Appendix 2: Screening Guide

Screening Guide

• Interested Volunteer: ______________________

• Age: ______
• Partner's Age: ______
• Occupation: ________________ Full-time_____ or Part-time_____ 
• Partner's Occupation: ________________ Full-time_____ or Part-time_____ 
• Living Together through Cohabitation or Marriage: ________________
• Length of Time Living Together with Partner: ________________
• Children from Present Relationship: ________________
• Children from Previous Relationships: ________________
• Plans to have children in the near future (within a year): ______
• Ethnic Background: ________________
• Partner's Ethnic Background: ________________
• Contact Telephone Number: ________________
• Contact Email Address: ________________
Appendix 6: Food journal (sample page)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Time:</th>
<th>Meal/Snack/Food Purchasing:</th>
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<th>Location of Meal/Snack/Purchase:</th>
<th>With Whom Consumed/Purchased:</th>
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<th>What was Consumed/Purchased:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation:</th>
<th>Clean-Up:</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Other Comments (Context, reflections/feelings, concerns...):</th>
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</table>
Appendix 7: Interview Guide

Interview Guide:
Food-Related Activities of Childless Couples
Living In the Greater Vancouver Area

A. Opening:

Before we proceed with the interviews, I would like to thank you for completing the one-week food diary for me. I am very grateful that you were so kind as to let me take a peak into your daily dealings with food. It was a pleasure for me to read through it.

B. Interview Topic Areas:

Today, I would like to get into a greater detail regarding your food-related activities. I have a few questions that we can talk about, many of which deal with the food diary, but that is by no means all that we have to talk about. Feel free to discuss anything you feel it’s important to you.

Let's begin by discussing a typical week for you.

- whether food diary represents a typical week.

1. Food Purchasing: Describe a typical grocery shopping trip.

    - division of labour/decision-making
    - when/where
    - frequency/any smaller trips
    - grocery list/who writes it/influences
    - evolution of food purchasing patterns
2. Meal Preparation and Clean-up: Take me through a typical preparation of a meal.

- meal planning
- division of labour (cook, serve, clean table, wash dishes)/decision-making
- frequency/influences
- evolution of preparation and clean-up patterns
- enjoyment of cooking/meaning

3. Food Consumption: Tell me about your meal patterns and the foods you consume.

- meal patterns (types of/what constitutes each of: breakfast, lunch, dinner)
- food choices(frequently consumed)/influences of eating habits
- evolution of consumption patterns
- enjoyment (favourite foods)/meaning

4. Food Context-Commensality: Describe to me what it means for you to eat with others.

- eating alone versus eating with partner
- eating with others
- eating out
- evolution of commensality patterns
- enjoyment/meaning/change in eating b/c of social context
5. Health Issues: What does 'healthy eating' mean to you? Do you worry about nutrition?

- good foods versus bad foods
- follow any special diets/allergies
- use of any supplements (if yes, why)
- any changes in food habits as a result of health concern(s)
- evolution of health concerns

6. Transition from being single/with parents to cohabiting/marriage. Tell me about the differences in your food-related activities between being single and cohabiting/being married.

- tradition in family during childhood
  - division of labour patterns
  - atmosphere during meal times/family meals
- transition into cohabiting/marriage
  - changes and differences from when first moved in together
  - view on gender roles
  - would presence of children change patterns

This concludes our interview. I would like to thank you for participating in my study, and ask you if there is anything you said in this interview that you would like me to keep confidential? I would be happy to keep parts of our conversation private. (Ask participant for choice of gift certificates/feedback/questions).
# Appendix 8: Couple Description

## Table 1: Description of Study Participants\(^1\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couples' Names</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Length of cohabitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>5 years (4 married)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelie</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>law intern</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobi</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Canadian/Dutch</td>
<td>1 year (1 married)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bojan</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>retail, part-time student</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>early childhood educator</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>1.5 years (cohabiting)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Christofer</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>pottery maker/teacher</td>
<td>Canadian/British</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>intellectual property manager</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>3 years (3 married)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>lab technician</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewan</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>musician/playwright</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>4 years (4 married)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>dental hygienist</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frans</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>stock broker</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>1 year (cohabiting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicity</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>retail manager</td>
<td>Irish/British</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>salad preparer</td>
<td>Welsh/Swedish</td>
<td>1 year (cohabiting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gavin</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Busser</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Pseudonyms substituted for participants' names