

Mount Saint Vincent University
Department of Applied Human Nutrition

**An Exploration of
Mothers' Personal
Experience with Food and Meal Preparation,
and the Meaning within
the Family Environment**

By
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Abstract

Food choices are complex and multi-factorial. The environment in which one lives and grows plays an important role. As the culture and social norms evolve, changes are created in food habits. In particular, significant changes such as the increase in convenience foods and the increase in working mothers have had important impacts on the family meal. Studies have shown both the benefits of preparing foods at home and eating together as a family. The consequences of regularly eating foods prepared outside the home are thought to contribute to Canada's increased obesity problem. Within the family, women have traditionally performed many roles with meal preparation. Work and family roles may conflict and new challenges may arise when both parents are in paid employment. Researchers have speculated that this has contributed to the increase in convenience foods.

A qualitative design was used with in-depth face-to-face interviews. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. They were mothers of children who attended a cooking class program. There were ten interviews conducted; two pilot, one dropped out, leaving seven final interviews. Interviews were held during the summer of 2008. They were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

The research aimed to explore mothers' experiences with food and meal preparation, to identify the meaning she ascribes to her experiences and challenges that exist in preparing a homemade family meal. MaxQDA software was used to code data and look for developing themes. The approach taken to examine the interviews was a

phenomenological approach to understand the behaviours of the mothers. The social ecological theory was used to analyze and interpret the findings concerning the environmental influences and connections to the mother's behaviour.

Three main themes were identified: *Constructs of the Meal*, *The Mother's Roles*, and *Food Choice Influences*. *The Constructs of the Meal* revolves around how the mother was motivated to make the meal happen, important processes she wanted carried out, and purposes associated with the meal, such as connections she wanted to make with her family members through sharing the meal. *The Mother's Roles* identifies her own and others meal preparation duties (the roles she played within the family structure and outwards), experiences from her past, challenges that she had revealed and her thoughts about children learning food skills. *Food Choice Influences* discusses how certain factors can impact how she chooses foods and meals for her family, such as family food preferences, health, costs and the convenience of some foods. These findings capture the complexity that is involved in preparing a family meal; concerns for health, price, preference, tastes and timing can be counter-intuitive to each other. The task of providing a pleasing, nutritious meal can be very stressful and requires time for planning and preparing. Interviewed women wanted additional support from their husbands and often struggled with ideas of what to serve.

Messages, from health professionals and others who work with families, that encourage family home-cooked meals may benefit the family nutritionally and socially. Families require extra support to prepare foods at home. Support could be given through sharing

quick but healthy dinner ideas and educating families about the benefits of involving their children in the meal preparation process. Families should be encouraged to eat together. If employers can understand their ability to support families by allowing flexible work schedules, perhaps working mothers can flex their schedule around meal time. The evening meal emerges as the most important meal for connecting and sharing as a family. For those who work closely with families, understanding the challenges that may exist around meal preparation for families is relevant and helps to guide families in making appropriate food choices. Support to develop cooking skills, including preparing foods ahead and planning techniques are other ways to make food preparation easier. These women felt it was important for their children to develop food skills, and therefore having facilities and individuals who can teach cooking programs to children is another form of supporting families through a social environment. The cooking program their children attended was funded through the government; this could be a means of providing the opportunity for children to learn food skills without financial reservation.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Cooking skills can decrease the barriers to achieve healthy eating. Larson et al found that individuals who had skills to prepare foods at home were more likely to prepare and eat healthy foods than those who did not have skills.¹ Many community kitchen programs have focused on acquiring cooking skills for low-income families as an opportunity to develop better eating practices at home for families. Furthermore, children who help out with food preparation at home are also more likely to eat healthier foods.²

Individuals who eat in the home are more likely to eat a healthier diet as compared to those who frequently eat foods prepared outside the home.^{1,3} Preparing foods and eating at home is associated with a lower fat, salt and caloric intake, as well as a higher intake of fibre and some micronutrients³⁻⁹. However, today's families eat outside the home more regularly and fast food consumption is increasing annually.^{4-8,10-14} It may be argued that the social value of cooking skills has been lost.¹⁵ Foods chosen for convenience may have taken over as the preferred choice. These food choices may hinder overall diet quality.^{14,16}

The increased consumption of foods prepared outside the home may be partially responsible for increased obesity rates.^{4,8,11,13,14} Along with the obesity trend, childhood obesity in Canada has increased as a health problem.¹⁷⁻²⁰ Based on data from the 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey: Nutrition (CCHS), obesity among children (aged 2-

17), including overweight, increased from 15% in 1978/79 to 26% in 2004.¹⁹ The portion sizes restaurants and fast foods provide have grown significantly⁷ and promote over-eating.^{4,11,13,14,21}

The family environment is the most important influence affecting food choices and eating habits for children and adolescents.⁷ Eating habits learned early in life can extend well into the adult years.^{3,20} The number of single working parents and dual working parents has increased in the past few decades.²² Lifestyle demands, such as number of working hours, may present challenges to preparing foods at home. Parents have indicated a lack of time for meal preparation and societal pressures as challenges to healthy eating,¹² or to preparing a meal at all.^{9,23} Phipps and et al. found that the number of mothers paid work hours were significantly related to overweight in their children.²⁴ Children may be preparing more foods for themselves, possibly due to the increase in working mothers.^{10,15,25} The relation to overweight issues may lead to assumptions that children are preparing high fat convenience foods for themselves²⁵ and/or not using lower fat cooking methods. Another speculation may be that families are choosing to eat foods prepared outside the home more often when parents are working and do not have time to prepare a family meal. Choosing a fast-food establishment or restaurant influences how food is viewed by the children through creating norms within that family.

With the increased influence of convenience foods,¹⁰ it may be likely that kids are failing to learn the value in preparing foods from scratch. The ease with which convenience foods are prepared eliminates the need for skill. The trend towards eating outside the

home shows value for quick, convenient foods by today's society. Eating foods prepared at home and together as a family has significance beyond meeting nutritional requirements.^{25, 26} Interviewing mothers about their experiences with food and meal preparation and how they chose foods for their family provided an understanding into the meaning that food and cooking holds for their family by exploring their experiences.

1.2 Research Question

The purpose of the research is to explore a mother's personal experience with, and the meaning she ascribes to, food and meal preparation within the family environment.

1.3 Research objectives

Specifically, this research will:

- Explore mothers' past and present experiences with food and meal preparation
- Identify the meaning she ascribes to food and meal preparation in her present day life
- Examine how the meaning and experiences are inter-connected to her current family environment, including, factors that pose challenges to preparing a family meal

1.4 Significance of the Study

Over the past number of years, there has been a trend in eating foods prepared outside the home.^{6-8, 11-14} These foods often provide higher calories, fat, sodium and sugar to the diet.^{3, 4, 6-9} Eating outside the home is likely a trend that has contributed to increasing obesity rates.^{4, 8, 11, 13, 14} Eating foods prepared at home with the family is related to many positive aspects, including improved behaviour outcomes for children, better nutrition and diet quality as well as quality time spent with family members.^{7, 26}

Exploring mothers' experiences with food and meal preparation and the meaning they ascribe to them allowed for an understanding of their experiences and provided direction in how nutritional messages should be conveyed that are tailored around the needs of the family. Messages that encourage family home-cooked meals will provide benefits for the family. It is relevant to identify challenges that exist when it comes to preparing meals for parents. This allows for more practical advice to be given to individuals by health professionals and others who work closely with families. Depending on the individual, food preparation could be viewed quite differently; it could be stressful or relaxing. Therefore, it will also be necessary to evaluate what food preparation means for individuals. It is important to support individuals to make healthier choices, but it is necessary to have a full understanding of what food preparation means for them.

For health care professionals and others who work closely with families, understanding the life experiences and demands of both work and family life of participants helped to create an awareness of how nutrition education for families should be approached and guided. This research increased the understanding of the family food environment and served to inform initiatives that support optimum nutrition within the family.

Since preparing and creating meals can be very challenging, it is important to identify support systems. The work environment can be a form of support for families.

Employers can contribute to healthier lifestyles by allotting time for family demands, such as meal preparation. If employers understand their influence in contributing to healthy family eating patterns, families could benefit. For example, an employer that is

flexible in allowing parents to set their families as priorities could translate into a work schedule that allows for flexibility in hours. This could result in more home-prepared meals. Having more home-prepared meals and eating with the family could possibly increase the diet qualities of many children, adolescents and their families.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms:

There were no definitions found in the literature to match what was being represented in this research. The definitions are supported by some terms found in the literature.

In the context of this research, the meaning ascribed to key terms/concepts are as follows:

Food and meal preparation: Food and meal preparation pertain to the reference of food in terms of preparation leading up to and including serving a meal. Therefore, the creation of the meal in its entirety; the planning, purchasing, preparing, cooking and clean-up of a food or meal.

Family Environment: The family environment is a kind of social network.²⁷ It refers to the structure and influence of the family and its members, encompassing its beliefs, values and daily practices. Each member has a reciprocal influence on the other members.²⁷ Therefore, the number of parents, parents' work schedules and number of family members form the structure of the family. Parents' own practices and how each contributes form the influence from the family. Religious beliefs surrounding food, preparation techniques as well as social and gender viewpoints form the family belief system. Values toward homemade foods, healthy eating practices, eating together and

teaching food skills contribute to the family environment. Daily practices such as how the family chooses to prepare and serve foods have strong influences which contribute to the family environment.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

There have been significant changes in food and eating patterns over the past number of years.¹¹ Societal changes have led to some of these differences, such as the increase in working mothers, busier lifestyles and the preference for quicker, easier meals.

Convenience foods are more numerous and are thought to have had some negative effects, nutritionally.^{3,139} Research has identified that eating foods prepared at home is usually healthier,^{1,2,4,5, 8,28} and that it can help bring the family closer.²⁶ Learning food skills makes it easier to prepare foods at home (including healthier options)¹ and decreases the likelihood of food borne illnesses.^{25,29,30} Parents can be an example to their children by preparing homemade foods, choosing healthy options³ and teaching food skills.³¹ Work environments also contribute to overall health and can largely influence how the family meal is organized.^{3,6} Other factors such as cultural and societal values influence meals.^{3,32} Society has recently been labeled as valuing quick, convenient foods which seem to fit with a busy lifestyle.¹³ Preparing homemade foods can be challenging when time constraints exist and working parents have identified challenges to balance work and family demands.^{23,33} In the literature, there have been many factors identified to influence the family meal, such as culture, work, society and price/cost of food.^{3, 32} There is minimal research intimately understanding what the meal means for mothers: her role,

how she identifies with her role, her expectations, her views and the frustrations that can come with preparing a meal. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to explore her experiences with food and meal preparation, what they mean for her, and identify some of the challenges she faces when preparing meals for her family.

2.2 The Change in Food and Cooking

The way food is grown, sold, bought and eaten has changed dramatically during the last century.^{11,34} Food is increasingly more completely prepared when purchased.^{11,13}

Technological changes in society, such as the microwave, and the abundance of partial or pre-cooked meals available in the grocery store allow cooking without much required skill.^{14,35} And while this may be good in the sense that cooking has become easier, and less timely, it has also meant that nutrient intakes may have plummeted while the need for cooking skills is diminished. Convenience foods are more popular than ever before¹³ and each generation performs less cooking than the one before.¹⁶ Time spent on meal preparation in the home decreased 39% between 1965 and 1995.⁶ Even the knowledge of preparing some basic foods may have been lost.¹⁶ It has been speculated that children's abilities to defeat a video game far outweigh their cooking abilities.³⁶ The trend towards a more sedentary lifestyle and consumption of food prepared outside the home lends itself towards a generation that is losing an understanding of the value and knowledge of food preparation skills.

There has been a shift in the past few decades from consuming foods prepared at home to increasingly consuming foods prepared outside the home, such as in restaurants and fast

food establishments.^{3,6-8,11-14} The rise in food sales from restaurants and fast food establishments has doubled since the 1950's.^{7,11,13} Eating outside the home has become a social norm and serves to fulfill social and psychological needs. The social aspect of eating is thought to have contributed to the increase in consumption of fast foods.¹¹ Children are also choosing more fast foods; consumption increased fivefold for this group between the 1970's to the mid-1990's.⁴

2.3 The Impact

Eating outside the home is not likely to provide optimal eating patterns; it can greatly impact diet quality.^{3,14,16} Restaurants, fast-food establishments and take-out vendors offer foods prepared outside the home which are typically higher in calories, fat, sodium and sugar^{3,4,6-9} and lower in fibre and micronutrients compared to foods prepared at home.^{3,4,9} In addition, individuals who regularly eat outside the home are often found to have a lower overall fruit, vegetable, and low-fat dairy consumption and a high energy density intake.^{3,4,6,7,9,15} The portion sizes restaurants and fast foods provide have grown significantly since the 1970's.⁷ The large portion sizes now served promote over-eating, which favours weight gain.^{4,11, 13,14,21} The trend in eating foods prepared outside the home has likely contributed to the increasing rates of obesity.^{4,8,11,13,14} There may even be a correlation with high cholesterol levels and eating outside the home.⁸ However, the trends in obesity may have also influenced some families to consider healthier eating options and changed the way some people look at food.³⁷

Ready-made convenience foods bought at the grocery store are also becoming more popular. They are often processed, resulting in higher calories, sodium and fat.¹³ Consuming these foods on a regular basis is likely to add body fatness.¹³ Convenience foods in today's market are a high commodity. Sales for convenience foods doubled within 10 years between 1982 and 1992.¹³ The thriving market of convenience foods and the high food sales from restaurants and fast food show the preference for quick service and easy meals for today's consumers. That which was once thought to be a treat has now become commonplace.^{7,9}

Some research has looked at the positive outcomes of preparing foods at home and how this may influence our health.^{1-5,8,28,31} Diet quality may be improved by preparing and consuming more foods at home.¹⁴ However, the frequency of eating outside the home and the ease with which many foods are now prepared may translate into a social structure which lacks necessary food preparation skills.¹⁵ As a result, children may grow up preferring the easy-access, ready-made foods rather than foods prepared from scratch.

2.4 Benefits of Cooking at Home

Cooking at home often results in lower fat, sodium and calorie consumption, an increase in fruit and vegetable intake and an increased intake of a wider variety of all foods.^{30, 38} Learning food preparation skills may decrease certain barriers to achieving healthy eating¹. Young adults who possess the skills for cooking are more likely to eat healthier foods.¹ Even among low income women, those who have more cooking skills, are better able to feed themselves healthy choices.²⁸ Cooking a meal for the family poses more

significance than merely providing nutrients for the family and can create value towards home-prepared meals and foods. Eating together as a family is likely to increase fruit, vegetable and milk consumption by children and adolescents.⁶ Mothers may identify a feeling of fulfilling their role when they are able to provide nutritious, home-cooked meals for their children.⁶ The act of preparing family meals and eating together serves to take on many meanings for all members of the family, including social roles of the parents to quality family time. In addition, acquiring cooking skills can increase self-esteem, confidence and a personal fulfillment from cooking.³⁹ Preparing foods at home from scratch can be less expensive compared to purchasing convenience foods. Therefore, using food preparation skills can benefit those with low-incomes as well.

Cooking at home allows for more opportunities to get children involved. Having the children involved in meal preparation may be beneficial.⁶ Haapala et al. revealed that most seventh and eight graders did participate in some form of meal or snack preparation.⁴⁰ Adolescents who contribute to food preparation are more likely to eat healthier.¹ This may also be true of younger children. Researchers have theorized that children who help with meal preparation are more likely to eat what is served, and also more likely to try new foods.⁴¹

A cooking program may provide skills to children who are not being taught at home, whether due to lack of time, skill or plain interest. Research that has documented the benefits of a cooking program have concluded that children develop food skills, food safety knowledge, an increased awareness of healthy eating, and showed changes in their

food preparation and food consumption behaviours.^{25,29} Children become more interested in cooking at home and make special requests about food. They have the ability to influence the family to make healthier choices.²⁹ Other evaluative programs noted an increase in children's confidence, self esteem, cooking independence and involvement at home.³⁹ There is little research looking into the food preparation and cooking that occurs at home.

2.5 Meal Preparation Related to Employment

Employment can conflict with family demands and hinder the ability to make nutritious, homemade meals.^{6, 23} Increasingly more meals are eaten away from home and less family meals are eaten together.²³ Parents may be likely to opt for fast or convenience foods due to lack of time.¹² In some instances, preparing family meals may be looked upon as a chore or burden and parents may focus more of their attention on family activities, such as sports or school-work.^{6, 23} For others, cooking provides enjoyment and some may possess coping strategies to find ways to provide meals for their families when time for preparation is limited.^{6,23} Those with personal skills in planning are not as likely to feel stressed about time pressures for meal preparation.⁶ They plan and cook food ahead of time.

The number of dual working parents and working single parents has increased over the years.^{6, 22} The change in family structure has left far less time for cooking and preparing meals for the family.²² Single parents and dual working parents may find it even more challenging to get a home cooked meal on the table every night compared to when there

is one parent available at home to cook.^{6,7,23} Blake et al showed that sharing food roles between family members helped parents to feel more satisfied with food choices and eating patterns.²³ Single parent families are more likely to visit a fast food restaurant than other families.⁹ Fathers generally experience greater stress with meal preparation than mothers.²³ This was attributed to the possibility of taking on a new role. At home meal preparation can be even more difficult for families that experience low income as another barrier to healthy eating. In one project, low-income subjects indicated that they almost always ate convenience foods but that they wanted to eat healthier; however, they did not know how to cook healthier foods.³⁹

The amount of parental paid work time may be related to meal preparation time^{7,23,31} and may also, therefore, relate to pressures put on the child to either feed themselves, or to help out with meal preparation. Phipps and et al. examined the influence of parental paid work hours and overweight in children.²⁴ They demonstrated that mothers' work hours were positively correlated with overweight children. Interestingly, there was no association with father's work hours. This gives the impression that perhaps children are selecting and preparing their own meals when both parents are working, which may be higher fat convenience foods²⁴ or the family chooses take-out because of lack of time for meal preparation.

2.6 The Dynamic Family Environment

The family environment is the most influential in determining food choices.⁷ Parents are role models in promoting healthy eating choices, as well as in food preparation and

demonstrating the value in eating family meals.^{3,31} Values within the family dictate the parents' interest in preparing meals and teaching preparation skills to their children.³¹

Eating habits develop early in life and can last well into the adult years.⁷ If poor habits are formed early, they may be difficult to change once the individual reaches adulthood.³ It is optimal for children to learn healthy eating habits when they are young and learn to incorporate them into part of a healthy lifestyle. If children are exposed early to the positive influence of consuming home-prepared family meals, they will begin to share in the idea of preparing meals at home and eating together as a valued structure. Nutrition-related health problems begin in childhood³² and it is therefore essential that the family environment is supportive of developing healthy eating practices.

The family meal is shaped by parents' experiences with food and cooking and impact how food is prepared and viewed. Parents' education level and family income play a part in how families select and prepare foods. Families with higher incomes and education are more likely to choose healthier foods.³ By exploring the parents' experience with food and cooking within their own family, it may be understood how their experiences have created the present day family food environment, how they identify their role and what it means to prepare a family meal.

2.7 Roles and Gendered Work

Women have traditionally had the primary responsibility for preparing food and meals for the family. Gender is a key social characteristic which influences health behaviours.²³

Although, in recent years, men have held more responsibility than in previous years,³³ Doucet reveals that there is still a strong connection between women and domestic responsibilities.²² Blake et al. revealed that men and women view family meals differently and the act of providing meals takes on different meanings.²³ Caring for children has typically been seen as the mother's work.^{22,32}

The rise in working mothers has challenged the social roles of meal preparation but is dependent on working hours, schedules, as well as attitudes toward meal preparation and gender work. In 2007, the proportion of families with dual-working parents increased to seventy percent.²² For some families, this meant sharing food roles. However, women still perform most of the domestic housework, whether they work full-time or not.²² Blake et al. demonstrated that making food choices and meal preparation was easier when the food roles were shared.²³ Yet, fathers reported feeling more stressed about taking on the responsibility than women.²³

Some researchers and health professionals have argued that today's generation of children and youth are lacking essential food preparation skills, but this comes at a time when their contribution to the family meal may be more necessary. Families have revealed that extra support is helpful²³, including involvement from adolescents and youth.

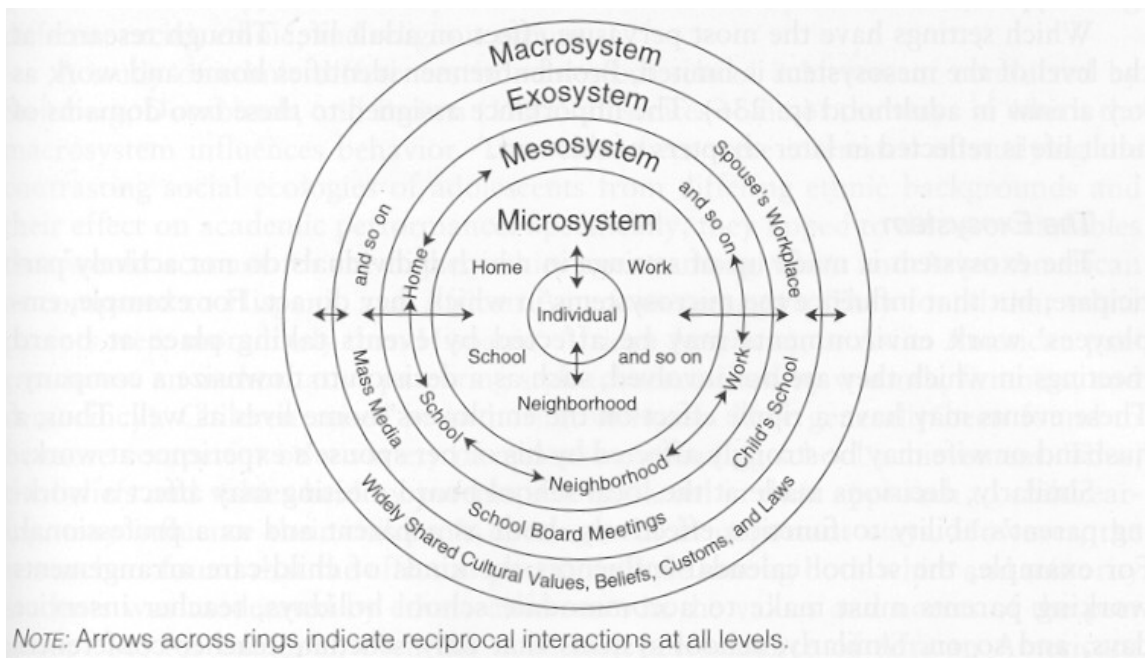
2.8 Sociocultural

Societal values toward cooking influence the family environment. For example, the perceived boy's versus girl's role in the kitchen influences expectations for daughters and sons. Societal pressures to eat ready-made and fast foods also exist. Cultural differences will impact how food is prepared and consumed.³ Perceptions toward food is viewed differently across cultures. Some cultures are more likely to have higher intakes of vegetables and others dairy.⁷ Cultural belief systems and values differ across cultures;^{3,27} one view may associate heavier body types with health and others idealize thinness.³ That can change how food is viewed, served and prepared.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

Food choice behaviour is complex and multi-factorial and involves the interaction of many variables across and between the environment in which one lives.³ It can become even more complex when responsibilities to prepare foods for a family exist and all the interacting variables such as income, education level, food preferences, health concerns, accessibility, timing, and work schedules all impact decisions about preparing meals. These factors all contribute to how a mother may choose foods for her family. Therefore, it was important to use a theoretical framework that recognized the interaction of variables in the environment and the multi-dimensional influence of those environments on behaviour. Urie Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory was used to guide this research project. This theory recognizes that many factors in an individual's world

interact to shape behaviour.⁴² The environment to which we are exposed plays huge roles in influencing our food choices. Individual preferences, culture, geography, religion, income, policies, society, community, the school environment and especially the family environment all interact to determine food consumption behaviours. Many factors within the family environment, such as parental employment, can cause differences in how food is prepared at home and the level of experience a child receives with respect to gaining knowledge about cooking. The parents' food experiences relate to their perspectives about food and meal preparation and are connected with other influences within that individual's environment. The constant interaction between environment and individual determine behaviour.⁴² The Social Ecological Model (SEM) is a theory used to understand how development occurs in relation to multiple levels and their interrelatedness. Below is a diagram of the SEM showing the spheres of influence.⁴⁴



3.1 Spheres of Influence

Figure 3.1 Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory⁴⁴

3.1.1 Microsystem

Microsystems are those settings most immediate to an individual, including home, school, workplace and the engagement within them.⁴³ The microsystem consists of individual or interpersonal factors, roles that an individual plays and how one perceives himself/herself. Impact from gender, ethnicity and learned roles are important influences.

In this research, the family and the roles they ascribe to themselves have valuable meaning. The mother's perceived role impacts the meaning she attributes towards preparing a family meal.⁶ A mother may connect fulfilling her role as mother when she provides healthy home-cooked meals for her family.⁶ What meaning the family meal holds is of extreme importance for the mother. Eating together as a family may provide much more than merely meeting nutritional/physiological requirements.^{14, 25} In addition to increasing intakes of vegetables, fruit and dairy products by children and adolescents, eating together has been related to a reduced likelihood for substance abuse by adolescents,^{14,26} improved behaviour, improved academic performance and reduced likelihood for disordered eating.²⁶ It can be a time for sharing and bonding for all members of the family. Whether family meal time is a priority will affect how this time together is perceived.

Food choices at home can reflect preferences for foods and cooking likeability. For some people, cooking may be viewed as a chore while others find enjoyment from it; however, skill may also be related to likeability. The size of the family, age of children and number of adults is relevant because a spouse or child may be a form of support by helping to prepare family meals.⁶ Single parent families are more likely to visit a fast-food

establishment than two-parent families.⁹ This may be related to time constraints, lack of energy or a single parent having the independence about decisions to eat-out. It is not necessarily reflective of a lack of value towards preparing home-prepared meals.

Employment may impact how family meals are dealt with at home. If an employer is accommodating to family schedules there will likely be less conflicts between family and work demands.⁶ When there is conflict between work and family demands, this often results in fewer meals eaten at home, and less focus on healthy choices.⁶ The increase in working women is a major social phenomenon and has resulted in a higher demand for convenience.³⁴ While working hours are directly related to time for family meal preparation, they are also related to income and education level of the parents.

Parents with a higher education level are more likely to place emphasis on healthy eating for meal times.⁷ Education level is positively associated with income and those with higher incomes are more likely to eat higher intakes of vegetables, fruits and dairy.

Those with lower incomes are more likely to eat higher intakes of grains and red meat.⁷

Although eating outside the home is associated with a higher fat, calorie, sodium and sugar intake, high income families are more likely to eat at restaurants than lower income families.⁷ Restaurants may provide healthier choices than fast-food establishments.

3.1.2 Mesosystem

Mesosystems are relationships between settings in which an individual is directly involved.⁴³ This may include schools, churches, teams or companies. For example, the relationship that exists between the mother's home and work; if she has a job that

involves cooking, doing dishes or preparing food, this may impact how she feels about doing the same work when she arrives home.

Influence from peers affects food choices in many circumstances.^{3,7} Adolescents are likely to visit a fast-food establishment more often than any other age group.⁹ Children and adolescents are influenced by their peers and likely to adopt similar eating behaviours.⁷ While parents have influence over what the family eats, children and adolescents also encourage the consumption of particular foods for the family and can be pressured by social norms to eat outside the home. Therefore, the family can be influenced by peers through the relationship with the children and the actions and perceptions of peers toward eating.

3.1.3 Exosystem

Exosystems indirectly influence the immediate settings by forming rules, policies and characteristics within an organization. This could include social networks and relationships with the community in relation to the individual.⁴³ For example, a school food policy may influence how the mother views food and her roles; she may begin providing healthier options at home, or she could feel that her child is no longer getting the treats he used to get at school and begins providing more treats at home. Pricing and costs of food is regulated through governing bodies and influences how families choose foods. If canned fruits and vegetables are less expensive than fresh ones, a family may choose to purchase more canned goods. Pricing is also affected by transportation,

seasons and weather. Price of food can differ according to how food was harvested and how it is sold.

3.1.4 Macrosystem

Macrosystems include cultural, societal and community factors. This includes global trends and bodies of knowledge.⁴³ The media would belong in this system because of its influence on culture and communities.

While eating at home used to be the norm, there has been a shift to eating outside the home more regularly.^{6-8,11-14} Going out for dinner or eating fast food used to be a treat.⁷ Increasingly, families are eating out. The social aspect of eating has likely contributed to the rise in restaurant and fast food use.¹¹ Food and eating can meet social and psychological needs besides meeting physiological needs. Foods are usually chosen for nutrition secondary to other reasons.³⁴ Coworkers, peers and friends form social eating practices that develop out of social norms.³ The secular trend in eating outside the home has become a popular choice for all members of society. Families are affected by societal influences and may opt for fast or convenience foods because they feel pressure to fit in, even when it may be contrary to their own values or beliefs. This may be amplified when children and adolescents are nagging to eat-out. Today's society places high value on quick, easy and convenient foods.¹¹ Fast food chains market their foods and spend millions of dollars on advertising each year.¹¹ Both parents and children can be heavily influenced by advertising. Convenience foods are difficult to resist when time pressures exist and low energy levels make preparing a meal difficult.

Research in nutrition and health messages in the media may direct parents to choose healthier foods for their families, such as reduced-fat, lower salt and trans fat-free options.³⁷ However, the many packaged and prepared foods available in the grocery store today were not so prevalent in earlier decades.¹¹ When the women from this research were growing up, they likely did not eat many of the foods their own children consume. The link to diet and disease, especially obesity, has triggered a transformation in the way some people view food.³⁷ Some families may relate fast-food consumption with unhealthy eating and weight gains. This may persuade them to prepare foods at home, even when time pressures exist. Some families may feel fast-food is not the healthiest choice but choose it nonetheless because they are tired from working and do not have the energy to prepare something at home.⁶

Culture has a huge influence on how we perceive food and eating. The methods of cooking, how foods are prepared and how they are served vary across cultures. Different cultures may have different viewpoints on who should be performing the cooking, if one parent should be at home while the other works thus allowing the opportunity for meal preparation by the stay-at-home parent. There may be differences in their expectations for their children in terms of helping out, as well as in gender-roles. Religion provides a symbolic meaning for food. The foods people choose, how they are eaten and served can be reflected by religious practices.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Qualitative research seeks to understand behaviours from the participants' perspective.⁴⁵

This research used a qualitative approach to explore the mothers' experiences of food and cooking to identify the meaning that is attached to current day family meal preparation.

The mothers' past and present experiences, as well as perceived barriers and challenges, provided insight into behaviours that deal with family meal preparation.

4.2 Methodological Approach

This research was guided by a phenomenological framework. This is a philosophical method which aims to understand a behaviour, or phenomenon, by exploring the participants' experiences and how they perceive it.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁹ The goal was to understand the participants' perceptions and origins of them.⁴⁶ Behaviours and experiences are described through dialogue with the participants. Phenomenology is an approach that explores the meanings for an individual.^{47,48} In this research, the objective was to explore what experiences and external factors mothers have been exposed to which influence their perceptions of food and cooking. The meaning they ascribed to their experiences, and the factors which have influenced them, impacted how they prepared foods at home for their families today. Barriers and challenges were present which hindered healthy meal preparation at home. Identifying how the participants dealt with these barriers and challenges interplayed with their own experiences growing up. It was likely that individuals learned from their experiences and applied them in similar circumstances. Whether they set meal preparation as a priority or identified it as a chore was perhaps affected by how meal preparation was viewed in their own homes growing up. The

phenomenology approach seeks to allow participants to come to their own conclusions without input or reference from the researcher.⁴⁶

A phenomenological approach requires that the researcher actively engages the participants to explore and describe their experiences.⁴⁸ The experiences created a meaningful description in relation to the purpose of the study. Realities of experiences can give new perspectives.⁵⁰ This approach recognizes that interpretations are largely influenced by perceptions of both the researcher and participant.^{46, 48} The contribution of both perceptions adds to the richness of the data and is a main component of phenomenological research.^{47, 48}

This research approach directed the researcher to ask open-ended questions allowing the participants to reply using their own words and descriptions.⁴⁷ Follow-up questions were used to probe the interviewee to explore particular areas of interest common to the literature.⁴⁷ In the analysis, the researcher identified the experience as perceived by the participant to arrive at how the meaning has influenced a particular phenomenon.⁵¹ In this research, the task was to derive how the meaning has influenced the current family environment. People differ in their perceptions depending on their own experiences.²⁵ It was relevant to explore a number of individuals' experiences. Interviewing several mothers gave different perspectives and meanings of the phenomenon, which crossed each other to present common meanings. This allowed the researcher to understand the phenomenon more completely.⁵¹

4.3 Research Design

This descriptive research used a survey design. This research was designed using a social ecological theory and phenomenological framework. This approach allowed the researcher to gain knowledge about factors in the environment that influence behaviour by exploring the experiences of participants and the meanings they ascribed to them. Mothers from a children's cooking program were approached. The researcher used an in-depth interview to collect data. After approval of the research from the Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board (UREB), participants were recruited. (See Appendix G for timeline.)

4.4 Participants

There were two children's cooking programs held through Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) that the researcher had been involved with for over a year; one being in Cole Harbour, titled "Kids in the Kitchen" and the other in Eastern Passage, titled "Cooking For Fun". Given that the amount of time spent for meal preparation in the home has decreased year after year,¹⁶ and consuming foods prepared outside the home has increased,¹¹ it is a phenomenon that parents and children alike are keen to attend the cooking programs.

Participants for this research were chosen through convenience sampling. Participants were mothers of children who attended the cooking class program. The program was offered for children ages 9 to 12 in Cole Harbour and ages 5-12 in Eastern Passage. The researcher recruited mothers of children five years of age and older. The program typically ran for 8 consecutive weeks during the fall and winter sessions. The research

occurred after the spring session which ran for 6 weeks in Cole Harbour and 8 weeks in Eastern Passage.

Children who were enrolled into the cooking programs consisted of mostly white females from middle-class neighbourhoods. The program accepted children of all social economic classes and typically enrolled 1-4 boys per cooking session.

Dual Relationship

The researcher was both researcher and cooking class instructor. While the research did not involve children explicitly, an indirect relationship between the researcher and children did exist. Parents were explicitly told that their response to the research questions would in no way effect their child's participation in the program. The children were told about the work and what role their parents may have in the research to quell any anxiety that may arise from the instructor speaking to a parent.

By addressing this relationship with parents, parents were reassured that their participation or non participation in the research would not influence their child's participation in the cooking classes in any way.

The researcher as cooking instructor and nutrition student may have also acted as a limitation in the research where a position of power may have influenced participants to respond differently to interview questions, whereas, they may have sought to answer how they feel the researcher would want them to.

4.4.1 Inclusion Criteria

This research included all mothers who had a child between ages 5 to 12 enrolled in the cooking program. It included mothers with more than one child, mothers of varying socioeconomic status and ethnic groups, in addition to single and step-mothers.

4.4.2 Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion criteria included those who were not mothers of a child in the HRM cooking program.

4.4.3 Sample Size

There were 12 children who participated in the Cole Harbour cooking program and 14 who participated in the Eastern Passage cooking programs, which totalled a possible 26 mothers who could have been participants (assuming there were no siblings in the programs). Sample size was sufficient when theoretical saturation occurred, that is, when no new information came out of the data collection. The goal was to interview a minimum of 8 individuals to a maximum of 12 for this research. There were two pilot interviews, 8 additional interviews, and 1 participant dropped out of the study, leaving 7 interviews for data analysis.

4.4.4 Sampling Strategy

The researcher made an effort to establish a rapport with the parents prior to approaching them to participate in the research project. The researcher thought that this would increase the likelihood that they would participate. The research began after the spring

program ended and the researcher began to contact people via telephone through to the end of school and during the summer months, as well as into the new fall school year.

Cole Harbour

The research began after the spring cooking program. Once ethics approval was given, the researcher contacted the parents by telephone to request an interview. Upon agreeing to the interview, the researcher met with each participant for individual interviews.

Before the interview, the researcher provided parents with a written explanation (See research information sheet Appendix A) about the project and orally described the project and procedures with the parents. All parents were given a research information sheet and expression of interest form which they filled out at the interview. (See Appendix B)

Included in the research information sheet was contact information for the researcher if the participants had any questions about the research. If the researcher could not reach a participant, several phone calls were made until they indicated they did not want to participate, a message was left in which a call was not returned, or there were enough participants to reach saturation. Interviews were performed upon reaching a participant; sometimes this meant having to complete a few interviews while trying to contact more participants.

Eastern Passage

The same procedure was carried out with participants whose children attended the Eastern Passage cooking program.

The goal was to interview at least eight mothers and up to a maximum of twelve. Participants were contacted in random order. It became difficult to reach mothers once the new school year had begun. Into the first weeks of September, there were eight interviews complete; therefore, the researcher decided not to contact anymore individuals for participation. Mothers were beginning to decline interviews and no new information was being retrieved, therefore; theoretical saturation had been achieved.

Phone numbers were provided with permission from the recreation centers, who gave permission to contact any parent whose child had participated in a previous cooking class with HRM. A loss of contact between researcher and participant was assumed to mean that the participant was no longer interested in participating in the research. Through the process of member checking, contact with one participant was lost and therefore her interview had to be dropped from the analysis.

4.5 Interview

Qualitative research is an approach which uses open ended data collection methods.⁴⁵ One such method is an interview, which is appropriate to explore insights about a topic.^{45,46} In this research, a semi-structured interview was the method of data collection. The interview provided a guide to address particular areas of interest but open ended enough to allow the participant to provide their own words and expressions.

Foods that we choose is determined by both past and present experiences; therefore, the interview was used to collect information about mothers' past and present experiences

and the meanings which she ascribed to them. The interview was administered by the researcher in a place and time chosen by the interviewee. Participants signed a letter of informed consent prior to the interview. (See Appendix C.) The interview was audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim. Upon completion of transcribing the interviews, participants were contacted and a second time to meet was arranged for member checking.

A face-to-face interview may increase the rate of participation and can allow the greatest interaction between researcher and participant.⁴⁶ Therefore, it is possible that more detail can be retrieved from an in-person interview compared to over the phone or by other means. The first part of the interview included a two-page questionnaire to provide demographic information relevant to the research. (See Appendix D.) The second part of the interview asked open-ended questions about the mothers' particular experience with food and cooking. The questions were in relation to items identified in the literature as being relevant to the research question. They took into account the interaction of both environment and individual. The questions provided the participants with the opportunity to describe their own perspectives and realities.

Seven interviews were completed and involved member checking. An eighth interview was completed but then taken out because the researcher could not gain further contact with the participant for member checking. However, seven interviews were sufficient to collect relevant information pertinent to the research question and achieve saturation. The initial two interviews were used as pilot-testing only to ensure face and content validity and to identify if the responses answered by the participants are indeed that

which the researcher had sought to explore. These pilot interviews did not involve member checking and the researcher explained to participants that their information would not be part of the final analysis of the research. The interview entailed probing questions which were used when regarded as necessary for further information or details. The particular probing questions that were used varied between participants.

The questions from the interview were developed through consideration of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory, which recognizes the influence of many factors on an individual's behaviour.^{42,43} (See Appendix E.) The interview provided the depth required to understand the interaction between variables in the environment.

5.0 Data Analysis

Trustworthiness of Data

The transcription of the interviews began shortly after each interview. To ensure trustworthiness of the data, the researcher met with each participant at a time and place convenient to the participant for member checking. This was to verify that the written transcript was correct and interpreted as intended by the participant. The first two interviews were used to pilot test the questions to ensure face and content validity.

Tool for Analyzing

Analysis of the data was performed during member checking and until final write up of the thesis was complete. Using an Excel computer software program, participants' demographic information was compiled. (See Appendix F) Mothers' experiences and meanings of food and meal preparation were examined using a MaxQDA computer

software program available at Mount Saint Vincent University and through examination by the researcher. MaxQDA is a software package used in qualitative data analysis, such as for in-depth interviews. This program was effective in assisting the researcher to identify or relate particular aspects or characteristics gathered in the data.

Content Analysis is a method to allow the researcher to identify characteristics of similarity or difference in the written documents or audiotapes.⁴⁵ Food preparation behaviours and maternal experiences and meanings were analyzed to determine unique characteristics derived from individual lifestyles and experiences. Themes are items in the research that share a common aspect across the data from different participants. The researcher searched for common perspectives or experiences by participants. This allowed an identification of common meanings that enabled an understanding of the interaction of variables in the environment.⁵¹

Urie Bronfenbrenner's social ecological theory was used to guide the analysis of the data to determine the interactions between the environment, individual and behaviour. Differences between the systems may explain meal preparation choices at home.

6.0 Ethical Considerations

The research was reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Boards before beginning any research with participants. The research used a face-to-face interview tool with human participants which incurred minimal risk to the participant.

The research followed the ethical policies and procedures for conducting research as outlined by Mount Saint Vincent University.⁵²

Prior to the interview, the researcher obtained informed consent from each participant (see Appendix C). Confidentiality was maintained by abstaining from using individual names in analysis and reports. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym name to represent the data collected in the interview. The dialogue could only be traced back by the researcher for member checking. The researcher maintained confidentiality by not discussing people, situations or experiences that were not relevant to the research itself. Since participants were recruited by telephone, participation was kept anonymous from other mothers in the cooking program.

The interviews were tape-recorded with permission of the participants and used to transcribe the interview into a password protected word document. The files were kept in a private room in the researcher's house. They will be maintained for five years, after which they will be destroyed. The participants were given the chance to discontinue when and if they chose without penalty to themselves or their children who were in the program. There was one participant who discontinued without penalty.

It was understood that some experiences could be difficult for participants to discuss. Eating has many influences and psychological factors involved which determine food choice. The researcher informed participants that they could skip questions if they did not feel comfortable. The participants appeared comfortable and did not have any issues

discussing the topics related to the interview. All the participants were comfortable in sharing their experiences. It was not the researcher's job to make judgments or to give advice, but to explore the experiences of the mothers as they were relevant to the meaning of the research. All confidentiality was maintained on such matters.

7.0 Results

7.1 Introduction

The interviews were analyzed with consideration of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory. This theory examines many levels of the environment as a way to understand how behaviour is shaped by the factors in an individual's environment. The experiences of the women in the present is described with reference to their past when appropriate. The past is intricately related to their present actions and the meaning associated with food and meal preparation within their current family.

There were three main themes identified in this research: *Constructs of the Meal, the Mother's Roles and Food Choice Influences*. There were twelve sub-themes within these themes, including *Making connections through the meal, Value for traditions, Stability and structure of the meal, Experiences with cooking and baking, Meal preparation duties, Challenges of preparing a family meal, Teaching food skills, Food availability, Food preferences, Health trends, Price and cost of food, Trends toward convenience options*. . Although some of the information is presented in isolation, it is recognized that each factor influences another and it is the combination of interactions that influence behaviour.

7.2 Description of Participants (See Appendix F for more information)

Participants were mothers from a children's cooking program. Participants one and two were part of the pilot run for the interview script. Their interviews were not used in this study. The tenth participant dropped out of the study.

All of the participants had at least attended college, some had gone to university and one had a Masters degree. All but one of the participants were Canadian, the other was Lebanese. All of the participants were married or common-law and had more than one child. Three of the participants had teenagers, which added some differences between participants with regards to meal preparation and planning. Two were currently stay-at-home mothers (one due to maternity leave), 3 worked part-time, and 2 worked full-time. All of the participants had spouses that worked full-time. Information specific to each participant follows:

Participant three: Diane was a married mother of three children under the age of twelve. She was on maternity leave with her 7 month old son during the time of the interview. Despite being home, her husband was the one who cooked and prepared the meals; mainly because he enjoyed the cooking and was often home in time from work to prepare meals.

Participant four: Kel was in a common-law relationship and has four children, two of which were teenagers. She and her partner both worked full-time. They shared all the

food responsibilities. Her teenagers presented some challenges when it came to eating together and meal preparation. Convenience options were common in this household.

Participant five: Ella was married with two sons both under the age of eleven. She worked thirty-four hours a week and took care of most of the food responsibilities. Her sons were involved with nightly activities and she could find meal preparation difficult when pressed for time. She brought a lot of experience from her childhood, which was unique in that her parents were separated when she was a child.

Participant six: Clare had recently been promoted to a full-time job. She held most of the responsibilities in her household when it came to food preparation. She was married with two children, both under the age of eight. She had a firm belief in healthy eating, sharing food responsibilities and teaching her children to help out.

Participant seven: Jodi was married and had three children, one of whom did not live with her. One of the two that was home was a teenage daughter. Jodi worked part-time and was often home hours before dinner and had more time for meal preparation. She held most of the food preparation responsibilities, even though she did not enjoy cooking. She was actively involved in summer activities with her children, which could make summer meals more difficult to plan and prepare. Her son, who did not live at home, would visit often. This changed how she would prepare a meal.

Participant eight: Jamie had a Masters degree but was not currently employed. She was married and a stay-at-home mother of one nine-year old boy and two three-year old twins. She had most of the food responsibilities in her family because she is at home. Food responsibilities were shared more often when she was working. Despite working full-time, her husband had a very flexible schedule, which allowed him to be home for two out of three meals.

Participant nine: Queen was married and a mother of three, including one teenage son. Her Lebanese culture added some variation to the sample by giving some unique differences to the data. She worked only ten hours a week was home most often with her kids when she was not working. She enjoyed cooking and found making meals easy. She prepared a lot of foods from scratch and her kids loved to help out any chance they could.

7.3 Constructs of the Meal

The mother had perceptions and ideas of how she wanted the mealtime to happen. She identified meals with making connections and sought to carry traditions forward. She tried to maintain stability and structure of the meal and did this by creating and implementing her own unwritten rules. She wanted to make sure the meal happened, and that it happened in a certain way. She was aware that her children would learn from her own modelled behaviour and from the environment that she provided. Therefore, she wanted to provide structure as a means of influencing her children in a positive way and so that they could find meaning in sharing and eating together as well.

In this section, the mother's experiences with food and meals was explored, her wishes for the meal and some food rules she has developed. It is evident that many of the values and perceptions stem from experiences growing up. Positive past experiences have

influenced the mother to carry out the same actions in her own family, where as negative experiences have led her to change the meal or foods that are served.

7.3.1 Subtheme: Making Connections Through the Meal

It was evident that the participants wanted a meal that was shared with the rest of the family. For some, there were strong associations with their past. Sharing a meal was strongly associated with making connections with the family.

Clare expressed a strong interest in having the family sit and eat together. She reflected on her past. It was evident that her past had influenced her views.

“Well we always ate, like my parents came home from work, they always made supper so it was roughly around five o’clock. We used to always eat together, sometimes we’d eat separately, some people would eat downstairs, some people would eat in the kitchen, some people would eat in their bedroom, like when you get older.

She continued and revealed how the television may have played a part in separating the family at mealtime. Certain meals were eaten together, and others were not.

“Big meals, like when we had chicken, roast beef, pork or holidays that kind of stuff we always sat together. Um, there would be times when my dad would go downstairs and eat in the rec room and I’d go eat in my room and stuff. But I find a lot of that comes from, like I had a t.v. in my bedroom, and my dad had a t.v. in his room, and so I would go in my room to watch t.v. by myself kind of thing and eat my supper.”

She felt it was more important for her today to have her own family eat together.

“I wouldn’t say it was as important as it is today, like you realize more things, like for us, it’s important to me and my husband and the kids to sit here and eat together. More important than it was back then.”

The experience Clare had growing up where her family would eat separately at certain times has led her to believe more fully in the importance of eating together. She connected eating together with her personal happiness and that of her family. She revealed that there was some disconnect in her family when they did not eat together.

“Probably because well, as I was growing up, I wouldn’t say we were together a lot as a family, I mean we’re close, but not super close, and I think I want that more for my kids and my husband. It’s important to be together and we’re happier together, like, I am happier when I am with my kids and my husband than when I’m not with them.”

Queen had positive experiences that she wanted to carry on. For Queen, growing up in the Middle East, meals were shared with everyone.

“...our house was like an open house to everybody. Growing up... we had seven kids at home, so we always had someone over for supper or for lunch... Even as we grew older... always, always, always have somebody over for lunch or for supper. Um, it was just whenever it’s time for supper, whoever is there, we would just invite them and they would sit down and eat, you know. I guess you could say in the middle East...meal is a very important, I mean food, is part of our heritage, or part of our culture. And it just, it’s something you grow up with, and you just share it with everybody that’s around you.”

Meals were never eaten alone in Queen's experiences. This translated into how she viewed mealtime; eating a meal meant sharing and it meant company. For her, eating was very social. She commented:

"I can't imagine sitting just by myself at the table and eating, I mean... my kids, I take them down to, we have a McDonalds... sometimes we go there... I will be sitting at the table, I can never remember sitting just by myself, without feeling, okay, I feel something's missing, um, it just feels odd to me, personally to me... when I take my kids to McDonalds, I call my friend ahead of time, like 'I am going, do you want to go? Do you want to take your kids?' And like you know, sometimes we'll eat...and sometimes just for sitting there, we'll have a cup of coffee and that would be it, it's not um, even though that there's food around, the main thing is not the food, it's the gathering, the people, the company."

Queen recalled sitting together as a family for meals even when her mother was absent to look after her sick aunt. She referred to it as occurring out of routine but recognized that it may have had more importance for her parents.

"On those days when my aunt was sick, and we still would get together, even though that my mom wasn't there... I guess it was important to them, they never made it feel like we had to do it, you know, they didn't emphasize too too much on it. I don't know if deep down inside of them it was something that's really important to them...it was something that we were used to, and it was, part of our daily routine I guess."

From her experiences she has learned that the family meal represents being together, even with extended family members. She was passing that on to her children. It made them happy to have family around during mealtimes.

“... my kids they love, like I said it’s part of you know, part of being a family to us, it was to me when I was growing up like you know, having not just my immediate family, but the large family over, it was more enjoyable I guess, and it’s the same thing for my kids, whenever their cousins are over or when somebody is over for lunch, or for supper, whatever, or when we’re out, you know, visiting somebody, I mean they love going out to restaurants and stuff, but they would enjoy if we’re at somebody else’s or if somebody’s at our house, they would enjoy it more.”

Queen discussed how much her children enjoyed eating with the family, especially extended family and friends; she saw it as part of her culture and she wanted to continue it.

“... we have family around and we try to get together as often as we can, um, my kids love that. They do enjoy you know, sitting around the table with a big family and friends, and you know, whoever is there, cousins and everybody, or having somebody over at our house it’s the same thing. I know they do enjoy that.”

Queen associated food with company. It did not matter what they were eating, or where they were eating, she was very flexible. Even if she had put in a long day’s work and they end up eating elsewhere, the food was not the centre of the meal. The family meal could be created anywhere.

“I like us to eat together, but I mean, if it doesn’t happen, it’s not the end of the world for me... It’s important but it’s not something that you know, has to happen... even if I cook a big meal and you know, we can’t eat it all together or something happens, and we go out and eat somewhere else, it’s not something that I feel, oh I’m disappointed that you know, I worked so hard and you know, at the end of it nobody, it’s, I mean, I don’t know how to put it, it’s important but it’s not a disaster if it doesn’t happen, or by the end of it, it doesn’t happen, or turn out the way it’s supposed to be.”

Queen explained that in her culture, there were significant associations between food and family.

“... coming from the Middle East, I’m from a big family, food was always a major part of growing up, it wasn’t a main thing in our life but I mean it was part of being a family and even outside our home, at any party, or any gathering, food was always a major part of us growing up. I left home town and you know, came to Canada... still for family gathering... food is a major part of it.”

For Queen, the two seemed to connect, even unintentionally.

“...you can’t separate the two of them, I guess, that’s the way I look at it.”

A meal with external family members could provide another experience. For Ella, she remembered eating with her grandparents and it being a positive experience. It was a social time for her. She believed the shared meal brought them closer and formed a stronger relationship.

“... we tended to stay at my grandmother’s and usually our supper time we all sat down together, with my grandmother and grandfather... I always sat beside my grandfather. There were always certain things that were on the table that weren’t on the table at your own house, like there was always cottage cheese on the table in a dish. There was always cheese sliced up... Nan always made homemade beans. So there’s always those little things that you go back and you associate with certain people and certain meals, so yeah I’m glad I always had those because my kids aren’t all that close with any of their grandparents, so I think because we got to spend the time and have those meals I am a lot closer with my grandparents, than I think my kids will be to theirs.”

Ella commented on her family meal. It has changed some-what from when she was growing up. Eating together did not mean sharing in conversation. The rules have changed a little. She has created a different environment.

“...I try to get us all sitting at once but sometimes, you know. Well the kids pretty much always have to be sitting down with me. I don’t care so much if my husband makes it to the table, on time. I mean he tries. But for whatever reason... I do try to make sure that we are sitting, but it doesn’t have to be quiet. The t.v’s usually on, unless they start trying to watch it while they’re eating. And it probably doesn’t last as long, like I think we had to ask to be excused. I don’t so much do that with the kids...”

Mealtime was a time to eat what was on your plate with no discussion about the food, or anything else. It was a very controlled environment. That experience translated into how Ella viewed mealtime today with her own family. She encouraged more conversation.

“...supper we always sat down for supper, but um, we had to be quiet... ’cause my step-father always listened to the radio, listened to the news. So it was kind of quiet and you had to eat whatever mom put on the table, and I was, you had to make sure you were chewing with your mouth closed. You didn’t chew with your mouth open. You’d be very quiet. Which was really annoying. Because as children you just don’t get that, so, I make sure it’s not like that at supper time now, ’cause I didn’t like that as a kid. So as long as you ate your supper, you might like get a cookie or something for dessert.”

For Jodi, the meal itself may have changed from when she was growing up, but they would still eat it together.

“Well, like my mother we do sit down to have supper together, every night. The meal might not be elaborate, it might be a grilled cheese sandwich but we all do sit at the table and have our supper together.”

Jodi would enjoy her whole family together. It was motivation for her to make sure everyone was sitting together.

“Well, everybody here would be a big thing.”

Jamie shared her thought about what she felt was important when it came to family meals.

“Okay, um, being together is very important to me, that we try and listen to each other, not have outside things happening like t.v. or... somebody comes to the door...”

Being together for the meal was important for Diane.

“Well, everyone being together, not rushed. Everyone sitting down.”

Kel’s ideal scenario was when her whole family was together.

“...well if everybody was together, the whole family.”

Ella expressed her ideal meal, which involved sitting together without goofing around.

“We’re all sitting at the table, no one has raw carrots sticking out of their nose...”

The mother viewed mealtime as a way to share and connect with family members. It was important to her to have that connection. Her past experiences with food have served to create some of those associations.

7.3.2 Subtheme: Value for Traditions

Traditions from their past are carried forward. Traditions for meals or food is tied to special times which brings special meanings for the participants. A special food can bring feelings about people, memories and connecting with family members.

Growing up, many of the women experienced some days as being unique, or special in terms of family meals. There may have been certain foods that were eaten on certain days or shared time with extended family members. These traditions have been passed on and show the meaning these women hold for those traditions. Traditions influenced what kinds of food were served, or how they were prepared.

Diane could remember how special it was to get to eat in front of the television with the family. It was a rare occurrence.

“...no t.v. Nope. Always at the kitchen table. The kitchen was separate from the living room so you couldn’t even see the t.v. from the kitchen. Um, there was a few times I remember, on Sundays we were allowed, sometimes, to sit in the living room and watch the Wonderful World of Disney. Having two channels in Newfoundland, that’s all that was on. I remember eating in the living room watching t.v. just maybe a handful of times, growing up, so it wasn’t a common thing.”

“...it was important just because we were together and would still eat our meal together, even though we were in front of the t.v...”

Diane allowed her children to eat watching television on the weekend, just like she was allowed to do sometimes. It made her happy to have the special day. She carried it on:

“Now there’s sometimes I’ll let the kids take their lunch downstairs and eat if it’s Saturday or whatever... but yeah we always eat together, for sure. Then there’s no t.v. on, no radio on, no nothing.”

For Jodi, Sundays was a traditional dinner in the dining room, where it was a more formal meal with the family.

“Roast beef, every Sunday, except Christmas and Easter then it was turkey.”

Jodi carried on the tradition of Sundays being a little more special. It might not have been the same roast beef, but more emphasis was put on the meal than during the week. This meal required planning to make it happen.

“Sunday, I usually put more effort into cooking. Sunday we usually plan what we’re gonna have, and again it still could be a barbecue but like more emphasis will go on it, like maybe we’ll have steak rather than a burger or you know, make some salads and my son usually comes over on Sundays for supper...”

The Sunday meal may have changed for Jodi, but the time together was still just as important and something she remembered as being special.

“I think probably, just the Sunday dinner, is the one thing that stands out most in my mind. And of course now that our son is older and moved out on his own, that seems to be the time that he comes over and we get to spend it with him, so yeah, I think just the Sunday dinner has always, I mean I liked the roast beef, but you know, looking back on it now, it was a special time, yeah, and now we have that, too,...”

Kel carried on the weekend tradition from when she was growing up. It connected her to her past.

“...well I’m used to it being the tradition of having certain things on the weekends. On Saturday it would always be pizza and I can make my own pizza, Sunday would always be a roast. And I try to carry that tradition on.”

“It reminds me of my grandmother. They’re not alive anymore but it reminds me of that time.”

Clare felt she should not break the holiday traditions.

“Holidays. That’s cooking the turkey and all that stuff, um, just because you’re supposed to, I guess.”

Gathering for meals was a tradition Queen carried on even though they have grown and have their own families. Eating together was a very important part of Queen’s culture and continued to be.

“... now my older brother is married and I mean, I’m not living there anymore, but when I’m there, it’s just something that we do it naturally, and when I’m visiting my parents, oh, it’s that time. All of a sudden my brother shows up or his family shows up sometime, even now they still do it on the weekend, and my brother has his own kids... It’s just they gather at least once a week at my parents house, all of my brothers and my sisters...just something that they, you know, it’s done. I guess it’s something, we don’t think of it as something very very important but I guess it is. It is part of who we are, it’s part of the way that we grew up.”

Certain foods were associated with people or events and could take on the same meanings as traditions. Ella associated a certain food her mother would make as being a source of comfort. This demonstrated how powerful the meaning of food could be.

“I have to tell you about my favourite comfort food that came from my mom. It’s called slop. And I think slop with mashed potatoes is the ultimate comfort food, for me... you take ground beef and brown it and then you put in a can of tomato soup and a can of vegetable soup, and I always add in a little bit of sugar. And you let that simmer and cook and throw it on top of your mashed potatoes and you could’ve had the worst day

ever, and you start eating that slop and it all goes away. That is my all-time favourite comfort food that mom used to make; and she called it slop, and that's what it was, and my kids love it."

Jamie also associated certain foods with her mother and found comfort in those foods.

"Oh, homemade soups, and spaghetti. Those are comfort foods for me because she did that kind of stuff. Casseroles a little bit, but soups, she was big on soup and spaghetti is my favourite meal, so that's where I got some of the recipes, from her, yeah."

Food took on many meanings and traditions were one of those ways that demonstrated the symbolism of food. Participants felt a connection or felt special when certain food with certain people was shared. That food became associated with people and feelings.

Past experiences have significant bearings on our attitudes and food practices. Positive or negative experiences formed perceptions about food.

7.3.3 Subtheme: Stability and Structure of the Family Meal

Participants had many rules they tried to implement in their households, from what time to eat, what to eat, and sitting together at the table. It was evident that many of their rules have stemmed from their past experiences. The women felt it was necessary to enforce rules in order to have the family meal flow as they wanted and based on what was important to them: eating together, eating healthy foods and having some sort of structure to the meal. Having structure was meaningful to the participants because it meant connecting, sharing and instilling positive behaviours. Having rules was a strategy for her to create the environment as she wanted it and to achieve fulfillment of her roles.

Clare had rules about eating times:

“Now when they’re with my family [mother or sister], it’s a little different. I don’t find that they find it as important as I do, to have their proper meals. Like, they’ll babysit my kids and like the other night my older sister was babysitting and it was like seven o’clock and they still hadn’t eaten supper. Like, the way I am, we have planned, well breakfast isn’t totally planned but you know you have a lunch at twelve or eleven-thirty and supper is usually four-ish, it will be a little later now because I’m working ‘till five some days, but they go with the flow instead of actually knowing, okay children have to eat at this time, they can’t just eat junk.”

Diane had rules around healthy food. Her sons had to earn a glass of juice:

“... we have a rule that if you want juice you have to drink a glass of milk first.”

Jodi’s kids preferred a meal in front of the television. She described the rules she had about eating together, no matter what the meal would be.

“...they’d much rather be in there watching t.v., and they complain especially if it’s not a big meal, if it’s just something quick, so they’ll say, ‘well how come we’ve got to sit at the table, we’re only eating..’ you know, whatever. It doesn’t matter what we’re eating, it’s family time together, right?”

Queen explained that eating together was to be expected and just part of how she grew up; therefore, her rule was based on expectations.

“...it should happen at least once a week, at least [eating together]. I guess that is part of something of us growing up and I don’t know, I think I would worry. It would feel odd.

It's because it's something that we're always used to, I guess it's, we're used to it, that's what it is."

Ella discussed her eating at the table rules:

"They've never really been allowed to do any different [than sitting at the table to eat]... and we weren't either, as children, like you couldn't take your plate and go and sit in front of the tv and eat supper..."

Although the children had to eat what was served, Ella's step-father did not eat certain foods and would not even have them cooked in the house because he did not like the smell. This demonstrated how much the head of household dictated the meal. Today, she would not serve some of the foods she did not like either.

"My step-father didn't like fish. He didn't like the smell of fish cooking in the house, even though mom actually kind of liked it a bit. She didn't cook it in the house... but she used to make us eat liver and onions; dabbed in ketchup just to try and hide it. My children will never have to have liver. They can have it somewhere else; they will never have it here."

Many of Ella's experiences formed a very different atmosphere at her dinner table. She viewed many of those experiences as being negative. She preferred less strict rules than from when she was growing up. She remembered having to eat everything on her plate and how it had changed for her own children. The food rules growing up may have been

motivated by income or perceptions towards food. Perhaps those were not as relevant for her today.

“...I should probably make them eat more during their meal, um, you know, I probably don’t put as big of portions on their plates as I probably put down for me, and that was another thing, you always had to clean your plate. Like now, I don’t make them ‘cause you know what? I’m usually the one who puts food on their plate and I’m trying to judge how much I think they can eat but ideally, we shouldn’t clean our plates, because we do and then we’re full and then we get fat. We always had to clean our plates and I don’t enforce that.”

Ella grew up in a very quiet household; mealtime with her current family was less than quiet, which is the way that she preferred it.

“I think some of the things that we weren’t allowed to do..couldn’t be noisy...we can talk at the supper table; I encourage it.”

Having a meal with structure provided routine and minimized chaos. The women wanted the family to routinely eat together or eat certain foods. This was important for the mother to provide an environment where the family could eat healthy foods and share with one another. Creating rules and implementing routines was the best way to provide structure. When the mother met resistance it compromised her ability to create the family meal as she felt was important. The women may have felt as if certain values were being challenged and therefore making it increasingly difficult to pass her values onto her children.

Within the subtheme, another category emerged from the Stability and Structure of the Meal, *Recognizing her Own Influence*.

7.3.3.1 Recognizing Her Own Influence.

The women recognized their own ability to influence their children and sought to model positive behaviour. This contributed to the rules she had developed for her family.

Children had a large impact on the mother and how she fulfilled her roles. It was found to be evident that the mother was extremely motivated by her kids: her desire to influence them, guide them, provide for them and share with them. They were conscious of the decisions they made. They were helping their children to make healthy choices by modeling the desired behaviour. In this section, it is revealed how strongly the women are motivated by their desire to influence their children in a positive way. It must be noted that despite their desire to do their best, there were obvious challenges or limitations, such as work schedules, income and personal knowledge.

Diane noted how some of the things that were important to her, like reading labels and being health conscious have had an impact on her son. She was also aware of her influence over what her and her husband ate and brought into the house.

“Definitely what they see us eat, they’re going to tend to eat more of. I’ve struggled with weight the past few years so I read the nutritional information on everything. And the kids are in Newfoundland right now and I was talking to the seven year old last night and he said, ‘ Mommy, Tim had a bag of chips and there was 1026 milligrams of sodium in them, and they were salt and vinegar chips’. So he’s seven and he’s noticing those

things. So I think definitely being health conscious does have a really important impact on them. You know a positive impact..."

Diane tried to stress the important things:

"...and stressing you know a lot of times they don't wanna eat the vegetables on their plate. They'll eat other things but they'll try to get away without eating it and we stress how important it is, you know, definitely with the vegetables to eat them. And their meat. Sometimes they'll go through a stage they won't eat their steak, or don't eat the meat there..."

She was aware of how important it was to keep negative comments to herself.

"Another thing that we don't do is tell them that we don't like something. I hate brussels sprouts with a passion and my son wanted to try them and I never told him that I didn't like them so I picked them up and I cooked them and he tasted them, he said, 'Oh, I don't really like these' and I said, 'Mommy don't either, but I didn't want to tell ya'. So yeah I let them discover on their own..."

And she understood offering new foods was important.

"... keep trying different things too because my son couldn't stand peppers, or onions and mushrooms. Now he'll eat mushrooms and onions..."

Queen noticed how purchasing certain foods (or not) had influenced her daughter to make healthier choices outside of the home.

“Just for example, my kids love pop, like any other kid, but I don’t buy it at home, so it’s a treat for them whenever we go out...I buy it um, probably once every two, three months, but it’s not something that I always buy, ‘cause I know if it’s available, my kids will only drink it. That’s because... they drink orange juice and milk and you know, chocolate milk and stuff like that, because that’s the only thing available for them at home, and now I notice that my daughter when she goes out, she doesn’t buy pop anymore even when it’s for a treat, she doesn’t buy pop, she orders juice or milk, chocolate milk instead of you know, pop. I’m like okay, I guess that helps.”

Clare hoped that she was instilling the value of eating meals together in her children.

“They would rather be watching, sitting at the table, well see at our old house where the kitchen was you could see the t.v., so they would’ve rather sit here and eat supper and watch t.v. then, but, I’m hoping that doing it this way will hopefully encourage them as they get older to realize that it’s more important, too. But I think they are used to eating together that I think that it will, like, it is ideal.”

By creating rules and seeking to implement them, the mother took on the role of bringing the family together to connect and share. Through her own values toward certain foods, meals and routines, she sought to provide a positive food environment for her children.

The mother had a multitude of roles and responsibilities that tied in with her role to care for her children.

7.4 The Mother’s Roles

A role can develop through a series of experiences, such as social norms, individual interpretations of what is expected, and the influence of society and occurs from the relationship between expectations and behaviours. Gender roles are one example of how behaviours develop through social norms. The women in this research revealed many of the roles they had taken on as a mother and wife. Her experiences and interpretations of them contributed to the development of her roles. In this section, it is described how the women depicted their roles in the household when it came to meal preparation and how some of their family members contributed to the family meal.

7.4.1 Subtheme: Experiences with cooking and baking

The women describe how or why they learned to cook. It influenced some of their roles today, whether they were taught or learned on their own, whether they enjoyed it or if it was viewed as a chore, or a job. Many of the women's roles developed through socialized gender roles, such as being home with baby, and expectations from their families that they learn to cook.

Queen shared special days with her sister in her father's bakery. She had many memories of those occasions and had developed some positive attitudes towards both cooking and baking. Her sister and she were allowed to try new recipes and experiment with baking when the bakery was closed.

"... I have a lot of memories with my sister. My sister and I we used to love baking, and we used to do it, my sister is a little bit older than me... and my mom would let me help her. My mom is not very, she would bake, but she is not big on baking, so my sister and I, we loved baking and my dad has a bakery so it made it easy for us, whenever we were inventing something... We didn't make a big mess for my mom in her kitchen so we were always down in the bakery, and we used to do a lot of baking...."

Queen repeated many of the things her mother did to stay organized, preparing foods ahead, soaking and freezing foods. These strategies helped make meal time easier by being prepared, such as knowing ahead what would be served. Queen remembered her mother planning meals and always being organized.

“... if there was anything that needed to be prepared ahead of time, we would help her, like on the weekend. And then we would freeze it and use it, we, my mom never used frozen foods... she was a stay-at-home mom... she used to say that she had all the time to prepare the food...”

“My mom is very organized, if there’s something that needed to be prepared like, you know, that would take some time, you need to soak some like dry vegetables or whatever, she would usually do it the night before.”

Queen also froze food in advance to be prepared:

“...my oldest one comes home for lunch, he doesn’t eat lunch outside the home, he just comes home for lunch... usually there’s something in the freezer. I have something prepared, like sometimes he asks me to make a lasagne, so I make a pan or whatever and I cut it in small sections...whenever he comes home, he just takes one out. And there is lunch ready for like that day. He knows there is something in the freezer he can take out. And it’s just for my son, not for my whole family.”

Queen also learned how to prepare foods differently, to make a recipe healthier or easier. This must have had some importance for her.

“So we learned from my mom, my mom used to cook the traditional way...as we were growing we learned, my sister and I... that you can do a lot of stuff differently...we never did something because that’s the way my mom did it... you learn as you go along.”

For Kel, she was taught that healthy eating was important.

“My grandmother taught me a lot. She was a dietitian.”

She also cooked in her job.

“I was a cook for the military, too.”

Jodi recalls learning by doing once she was married and on her own. She learned how to cook because she was home with a new baby.

“Trial and error, ‘cause I never cooked growing up, my mother did it all, then I got married and moved away and it was like, oh my God. I left Newfoundland and I went to Calgary and I barely knew how to boil water, so we ate out a lot for the first couple years. Then my son came along, and we had to give up one income and stay home with a new baby and I learned how to cook. So there were a lot of meals put in the garbage, but, I learned to cook.”

She added that help from her mother helped to learn:

“...a lot of phone calls back home.”

Jamie was forced to learn once she was on her own. She explained that her mother tried to teach her things but she was not always interested. She did have an example once she moved out; she watched and learned from her roommate.

“...partially from my mom, but really when I went to university, I think I knew how to make three things, like spaghetti, chilli, and I don’t remember what else, really, I wished

I had paid more attention 'cause I think she tried to show me, but I wasn't really interested. But anything that I knew how to do was from my mom and then when I moved out, my roommate was really good to cook, so I kind of watched what she did as well. She was a pretty good cook."

Ella learned out of expectations and chores that came with age. She moved in with her father and had to help with meals at age fifteen. This was when she learned a lot. She was expected to help because her step-mother had a new baby. She assumed that she would have to learn eventually anyway.

"...you know I probably learned more from my dad, because when I moved in with him I was fifteen. And my step-mother had a new baby and dad did a lot of the cooking so I probably learned, you know I watched mom cook but you know we didn't help as much, like with dad I guess because I was going into those years where I was going to have to know how to cook anyway. I probably learned more from him at that point."

Roles develop through different experiences and can be positive, especially when the experience or memory was viewed as fun, as was the case with Queen. Most of the participants mentioned having opportunities to learn how to cook or bake but not necessarily the interest when they were growing up. The same women who were interested as children were also interested as adults.

7.4.2 Subtheme: Meal Preparation Duties

The women carried out most of the roles in meal preparation for their families. Women have traditionally performed most of the responsibilities related to meal preparation

and although men have contributed to some degree, it is still the woman who performs most of the meal duties. These women revealed their duties and how their husband helped. Few women felt comfortable with their husband's cooking abilities; they felt it was necessary to guide him whenever he had to fulfil the meal duties. Socialized gender roles were apparent in the interviews where some women were preparing meals because they were home with their children, and it was not always performed out of enjoyment, but rather a chore. The woman performed the meal preparation duties out of default. Even when the husband was available (and the woman was working), it did not mean the husband was going to cook. There was one incidence where the husband performed almost all of the cooking of the meal; he was raised with his father cooking and was therefore exposed to different norms. Having to fulfil the daily role of meal preparation was often stressful and tiring for the women, especially with limited help. This demonstrates the impact of the environment created for children and how they can learn shared responsibilities within the household and carry them forward throughout their own adult lives.

All of the women in the interviews had multiple roles when it came to meal preparation: deciding what to serve, purchasing and selecting food, preparation of the meal, and clean up. In their families, they had larger roles in comparison with their husband or children.

Ella cooked most of the meals for her family. She discussed the times when her husband might help out, which may be if he was home first from work. However, she did admit she would leave him instructions. Even when he did help, it was not always a complete meal. He had limited knowledge about food preparation and had never assumed that role; therefore, she felt it was necessary to guide him when he was in a situation where he may have to prepare something. She did not hold high expectations of him.

“ Sometimes now, he'll get home before I do, so...if there's something out, so that he knows what's for supper, he will take it upon himself, which is fine but sometimes he does the main part of it, so like he'll do the meat, and forget that you actually need to serve something with it. Or he'll start the thing that takes the shortest amount of time to cook,

and start the thing that takes the longest, so his timing is off. But that's okay. I try not to reprimand him because you know, he did cook."

He might have also helped out if time was an issue, but not to the same level that Ella would.

"Now I left him instructions the other day 'cause I knew he was going to be home early, and I had to be out the door so I left him the instructions and he followed them pretty well, except when I got home, all that was on the table was a plate of chicken wings. There wasn't anything to go with it. So he will do that."

He knew how to cook a breakfast meal because he would prepare food for himself,

"He'll do breakfast, sometimes he forgets to ask if others actually want some. He'll just cook his own. Because for breakfast we don't tend to, like a weekday morning we're not all up. We're all up, we're just not all eating at the same time, 'cause that never could happen."

Ella revealed how her husband might need prompting to help out. She also revealed that he was more likely to help clean up after the meal.

"...if I tell him to do something he'll cook he just doesn't always take it upon himself to do it. He'll clean up. Yeah he's a good cleaner-upper."

Ella may have asked for input from other members of the family, but many times she was the one deciding what to have for meals. She revealed some frustration when she made

something and her husband did not want it. Her frustration might have stemmed from the lack of appreciation, the time she had put into the meal and because she had asked what others wanted her to make. This shows how difficult it could be to prepare meals for others.

“...a lot of the time it’s me [deciding what to have] ‘cause I’ll ask and he’ll go ‘I don’t know, what is there?’ So I always tell him then when it’s cooked, and he’ll go, ‘oh, I don’t want that.’ You know what? I asked you what you want me to buy at the grocery store, and I ask you what you’d like for supper. If I get ‘I don’t know’ to any of those then you know what? You’re going to have to deal with what’s on your plate. So that’s the deal he has.”

Jodi was the cook in her family despite the fact that she did not like to cook.

“Well my thoughts about cooking is that I’d rather not do it”

“I don’t enjoy it, but I do do it. No, kitchen isn’t my favourite place in the house I’d just assume not have a kitchen, but you’ve got to eat, right? No, it’s not my thing at all.”

“if someone else wanted to do it, I’d be willing to let them.”

Like Ella, Jodi tried to include other family members by asking for meal ideas.

“...lots of times, I’ll say, ‘ok, what are we going to have for supper tonight and you know everyone will give one or two suggestions and we’ll pick something from there. I

certainly don't get up in the morning and plan my supper. I get off work and come home and maybe by four o'clock, okay, what are we going to have for supper?"

She took on the role as cook when she had her first child. She claimed it was her husband's role to barbecue.

"And we barbecue a lot, an awful lot. Now my husband does the barbecuing, so I guess, in that sense, he does do that."

Jamie was one of the few women I interviewed who was not employed in paid work. She did most of the cooking for her family, which was influenced by the amount of time she had at home. She linked her role to cook with being home with her kids. She had interpreted being home as giving her the responsibility. Even when he barbecued, she had planned the meal.

"Most of the time, it's me, [cooking] because I'm at home. My husband really just walks in at five o'clock, and we'll eat sometime within that hour... but he might barbecue. I guess he is cooking, and tonight I planned everything that he barbecued, the chicken."

She remembered a time when he used to prepare and cook the whole meal once a week. She recalled how nice it was for just once a week to not have to think about the meal. This showed how much effort was involved with planning and how challenging it could be.

"It used to be that on Sunday he would plan the meal and cook the meal. That was really nice for one day, not to have to worry about what we're gonna have but we've kind of

drifted away from that. But he used to do that, maybe for about a year, he did that, a couple of years ago.”

Jamie discussed how her husband was more involved with meal preparation when she was employed. She would direct him with food preparation, or helping with the child care.

“He’ll come and help out if I ask him to, most of the time I’ll just tell him to do something with the kids, while I’m making supper... he’ll barbecue if I ask him to, or he’ll cut up stuff if I ask him to, most of the time I have a lot of that done or I warn him to entertain the kids so that I can do it in peace.”

She described him as a good cook, though he did not do a lot now.

“...and he’s a good cook. He was a better cook than I was whenever we met. He was in the navy and he was prepared more than I in terms of meal steps, so he did, when we both worked, you know, it would be whoever got home first... I just have become a better cook because I have to...”

On the weekends, he helped out more, presumably because he was home.

“He would do like, one of their breakfasts he would do ‘cause we take turns sleeping in, so he would make one one day, and I would make one the other day and then wake the other one up when breakfast is all done...on the weekends, he certainly would help with lunch. But for me, mealtime, help is him entertaining the kids, too, right?”

“Suppertime...most of the time it’s, it’s probably us doing it together to tell you the truth... he might help me prepare something in the afternoon to make for supper or he’ll be the one barbecuing, yeah, it’s certainly more of a team effort on the weekend.”

Even with her husband’s help, Jamie still wished there were more help, especially with meal ideas.

“What I wish would be different...uh, maybe that I wouldn’t have to do, you know, every supper... so I guess that when we used to do, like my husband doing at least one meal to have the total responsibility, the idea, the creation, everything, was really nice... if I could have a wish it would be to have a little bit more help with that; especially the idea of it, like what to have, right? It would be great if somebody said have this, then you’re off to the races, right?”

She further commented about the amount of time it required each day, especially when she offered snacks for her children between each meal. It really did take a lot of thought and time spent on each meal.

“...we do snacks in-between mealtime...we pretty much do breakfast, snack, lunch, snack, supper, snack. That’s why it seems like I’m cleaning out the kitchen all day. But a lot of your days...if we didn’t have to eat, we would have a lot of free time. Think of the time on grocery shopping, writing the list, preparation and clean up, we would have a lot of time on our hands if we didn’t have to do any of that. So it is kind of a focus point in your life.”

Like Jodi and Ella, Jamie tried to get some food ideas from other members of the family. It made her happy to make something her son wanted because she liked to see him eat it all. It made her feel good when her family enjoyed the meal. Food was associated with happiness.

“In the morning, I might say ‘does anybody have an idea?’ – and you know, we talk about assigning days so people can pick things, but it never really happens. Anytime I ask my son he says tacos... I might go out there and hopefully somebody gave me something, some idea, ‘cause it gets kind of repetitive. And I don’t want it to be just what I want. Like when I make tacos, my son cleans up and it makes me feel so happy because other times you might make something and he picks at it, right?”

At the time of the interview, Clare was in transition from working part-time to full-time. With her part-time job she was able to be home to prepare meals. She carried out most of the responsibilities for meal preparation. Her husband had the role of “barbecuer” (similar to many of the other husbands).

“I’m normally the one that cooks the meals, I’m the one that plans the meals.”

She was usually the one to select the foods and do the grocery shopping. She revealed when he might help.

“[He cooks] ..when he’s home and I’m not. That’s the only time, well he’s the barbecuer though. He’ll do the barbecuing so in the summer he does a lot of the cooking. Well, you know, we help each other.”

She referred to her husband's limited abilities being due to the fact that he did not have to do anything growing up. So she has taught him a few things. Like other participants, Clare needed to prompt her husband to help out.

"If I don't tell him what to cook, it's normally, for the kids would be hot dogs, or grilled cheese and soup. He never had to do it at home, his mom always took care of that. So he really couldn't cook until he met me. So I've taught him a little bit on how to prepare it and cook it...when it comes to barbecue, he can take things out, and help...But normally at home, if he has to use the oven it's I don't know.. he's not like me."

"I'm the one that does most of the grocery shopping...We do go together sometimes but he won't normally go by himself unless I make him a list."

"...he doesn't do the grocery shopping by himself normally because he would come home with, you know, chips and pop...stuff that's not so good for you."

Her role was also related to enjoyment; Clare pointed out that she enjoyed cooking:

"I do enjoy cooking though...especially when I come up with something different that tastes good. I enjoy it."

Clare's experiences growing up were of her mother working to help take care of the family, but being home in time to prepare dinner. In her household she also recalled her and her father helping out with mealtime preparations.

“My mom and dad, they both shared. They both shared the responsibility; whoever was home first was usually the one that did the cooking.”

She would often help out. She commented:

“Just to have it prepared, and just to learn. Whenever my mom was cooking, I was always in the kitchen, watching her. I wanted to help.”

Interestingly though, her other siblings were not interested in helping out and Clare believed it has translated into how well she can cook today.

“They had no interest. And today I’m the one that can cook more than they can, ‘cause they never really helped out in the kitchen. They were too busy doing other things.”

Diane was the only participant interviewed who did not have the role to cook in her family. She was on maternity leave when she was interviewed. She stayed at home, but her husband was the one who cooked the meals. He enjoyed the cooking and he grew up with his father cooking for the family. Diane did not like to cook but still did many of the other food responsibilities. Their roles were also related to work because he was not always home, and therefore she cooked or prepared meals when he was not home.

“I buy all the groceries. I pick everything out. He’ll make a list, and usually I’ll pick up whatever he needs. Now that’s not all the time ‘cause he’s in the Navy so he’s gone a lot. So, when he’s home he cooks.”

She further discussed her husband’s role as cook and compared societal expectations:

“A lot of my friends, their husbands cook too. Societal, in Nova Scotia, or even like in the city I find is different, like if I lived back home in Newfoundland in the small town I grew up in, the women still cook, usually for the men. But being where we are, it’s not out of the ordinary for women not to cook and men to cook more. I think because my husband’s father did most of the cooking in their family too, it’s normal for him as well....”

Her son was now learning to cook, and would take on some of the role as well, preparing food for the family. The norm that her husband grew up with is carried on and passed down through her own family.

“...my son does cook now since he did that cooking course. He does scrambled eggs, he does lots of stuff so, and he always cooks it and puts four plates out and puts some on every plate...”

Diane explained that it was the woman’s job to stay home and cook when she was growing up.

“I think ‘cause my mom was raised the same way, and so was dad. The woman...that was her job, once you got married and you had kids and you do all that, like, mom would cook all the meals so if she cooked it, you darn well sat down and ate it. We would have to help with the dishes afterwards, but, um, yeah just because her family did and that’s just kind of what you did back then. Pretty well all my friends and neighbours, the women all stayed home.”

Kel grew up with her parents sharing the responsibilities because her mother was a nurse and worked often. She remembered her mother working a lot and her father taking over a lot of the cooking. In her own household, the same was true.

“My mother worked a lot... she was a nurse so she wasn’t always there, so in that case my dad would cook otherwise it was usually my mother. They equally shared.”

Kel described her household as having shared responsibilities. Work schedules dictated some of the responsibility.

“Well I get off work at six, and he gets off work at three thirty, so if he waits ‘till I get home, we do it together, or he’ll do it. On the weekends I do it, so we take turns I guess.”

Clean up was also shared,

“And my common-law and I, we do the dishes together; so everything is shared.”

Even the grocery shopping was shared in Kel’s household.

“Well we’ll go shopping together.”

Kel’s household seemed quite different from the others when it came to roles around food preparation. She described everything as being shared as opposed to mostly her fulfilling the responsibilities. Work schedules and perhaps their own expectations around gender work guided some of their behaviours. The family structure influenced roles in the family as well.

Queen shared a similar experience with many of the other women, growing up with a mother who did more of the cooking.

“...my mom used to cook, she was the one who used to cook because she was a stay-at-home mom and my dad used to work outside the home. That’s why he never helped.”

Her father and the children would work together to prepare meals when they were needed. Queen discussed memories of her mother being absent to look after her sick aunt. She learned from her other siblings how to do things, and she learned that everyone contributed.

“...my mom and her sister were close...and my aunt used to get sick a lot, so my mom used to go and help her, and then we would take over wherever mom left, and I remember, there was a funny thing and I always remember it now, but whenever anybody asks me who taught you how to do the dishes and stuff, it was my brother who taught me... I mean my mom sometimes she would...but most of the time it was my brother... sometimes she would leave the house for two or three days in a row and she would sleep at her house....”

Queen had taken on the role as cook because she enjoyed it, felt like she was good at it, she knew how and because her husband had limited knowledge about cooking. Queen worked part time but was home with her kids most of the time.

“It’s because I stay home, and to add to it, I’m a good cook, and uh, my husband’s repertoire in cooking, I mean, whatever he cooks is good, but it’s very limited.”

She further commented on her husband's repertoire:

"Very little things, only if it comes out of a can."

A few of the participants noted how help with any part of the meal would be appreciated, or not having to do all of it by themselves.

Diane preferred help after the meal (because her husband already did the cooking of the meal):

"And everyone helping to clean up afterwards, would be nice."

Clare would want help with the meal:

"My husband would've helped."

Jamie adds what kind of foods would be ideal:

"Well, take-out is always a good night..."

Ella would not mind if someone else made the meal:

"And well maybe there's someone out there that's put it on the plate for me."

Jodi described her family as being very relaxed and she felt that there were not any expectations or pressures for her to cook from her family, but did bring up expectations that maybe her mother-in-law had for her. She even admitted that she would lie in order

to pretend she was fulfilling her role of taking care of her husband. Perhaps the pressure to take care of her husband had created some of her care-taker roles.

“She likes to call, [her mother-in-law] ‘what did you have for supper tonight?’ Tell her we had chicken. Don’t tell her we ordered out pizza again. Yeah, she is a wonderful cook and she is a real pampering person, you know, so it’s endless what that women can cook and oh my God, the stuff my husband had growing up, she was a real cook book person, where as, our meals were more bland, you know, you had your meat, your vegetables, your potatoes and that was it, no sauces, like my father wasn’t a casserole person, nothing like that, where as she was a much more, um, fancy cook and what she did, so I think she likes to know that her son is getting the same treatment, which he’s not. So yeah, there’s definitely, not so much now but probably first when we were married. She knows now not to ask.”

She provided the care-taker role with her son.

“If our son is coming over, we’ll all sit down and have a nice home-cooked meal, and he don’t eat well, so being out on his own, so it’s a good opportunity to give him a good meal and some leftovers to take home.”

All of the participants had different experiences growing up, but most had mothers who fulfilled significant roles with meal preparation. Some of the women contributed to meals while they were still at home with their families but many learned out of necessity. They had expectations of themselves that they would need to know how to cook in order to provide for their families. It was clear that they had developed roles out of gender and social expectations. The number of women who have entered the workforce has likely

presented challenges to preparing meals at home. Social views toward paid employment and roles at home have begun to change in some aspects, but the position of the woman is that she still performs most of the domestic work.

7.4.3 Subtheme: Challenges of Preparing a Family Meal

Balancing work and family demands has become a required skill for many women. While many of the women were in paid employment, her role to prepare foods for her family was strained by time: time to prepare foods, to decide what to make, time for grocery shopping, time to eat without rushing. The pressure of having to successfully perform all duties was identifiably stressful at times. The participants revealed that choosing healthy options and preparing homemade meals was heavily influenced by time. The pressure to provide satisfying, nutritious meals was frustrating when a lack of support was given from other family members or when family members were picky about food choices. At times, it was less tiring for the mother to accommodate the children and husbands by making several meals and creating something everybody would eat rather than trying to argue with them about what is on their plate. Despite busy schedules, the mother had many strategies to deal with the challenges in order to create the meal as she wanted it and accomplish her goals.

In this section, the participants discussed some of the challenges they often encountered when preparing meals. In some instances, they revealed some of the strategies they may have used. The mothers would go to great lengths to try to please all the family members: from making several different meals, to purchasing and preparing only foods that the family members would eat (and sometimes in spite of what she would like to eat herself). The mother took on several different roles: to keep the peace, and to provide meals that were both nutritious and satisfying. However, as revealed in the interviews, this was a frustrating and sometimes stressful task. Two main challenges were identified, and these were *Pleasing the family* and *Rushed meal times*. While some of these topics may seem to fit in with previously mentioned issues, it lends itself to the difficulty of singling out one issue or subject. There were more ways in which the mother tried to

please the family members, and other situations where time could easily be tied in. Here, they are looked at more closely in terms of how the participants discussed them.

Within the sub-theme, there were two further categories that emerged as challenges of preparing a family meal, *Pleasing the Family* and *Rushed Meal Times*.

7.4.3.1 Pleasing the Family

Fussiness was a big factor for many of the families. Many mentioned how much they would appreciate a nice meal without it. Trying to please all family members was definitely a challenge all participants dealt with.

Clare gets tired of serving the same foods all the time, yet finds it difficult choosing something new and liked by everybody in her household.

“I just find it’s hard to come up with new ideas that everybody likes. And then you get tired of feeding the same meals. The thing is with the same meals, you know everybody likes it, but then people get bored of it. I find it’s hard too, I’ll come up with recipes that I would like and pretty much my husband will eat anything but my kids are not the same way.”

Clare continued:

“It is hard when you have people that are picky.”

Clare experienced challenges with picky eating from her kids and husband. It could be a setback when her husband would make comments about the food he did not like.

“My daughter doesn’t like cooked vegetables, and my son doesn’t like raw. So it’s a little difficult, and they won’t try anything that...I would make a stir fry and they wouldn’t eat it even though they like the vegetables that are in it, because of the sauce, it looks

different, so my son is more fussy... he doesn't eat rice, or he doesn't eat potatoes, or fish, or eggs. My daughter will eat all those things so she's not as picky as he is. He gets it from his dad 'cause his dad doesn't eat fish, doesn't eat eggs."

She revealed some of the strategies she might use to help encourage her kids to eat certain foods. She acknowledged the influence her husband had as a role model.

"I just feed them what they'll eat, I guess, more or less. I try new things. I try to put it on their plate and just keep putting it on their plate, hoping eventually they'll try it and eat it, and I try and get my husband to not say, 'eww, I don't like that', 'cause then they won't eat it for sure."

Deciding what to make was one of the biggest challenges for Clare and could be stressful.

"...even preparing some things the night before if it's possible. But I find sometimes like having to plan supper every night is stressful. Like it's something you always have to think about."

She knew it could be easier if some things were made ahead.

"If there was a way of having everything ready, like I know you can make lasagne and freeze it, like spaghetti, I make my own spaghetti sauce normally, then I'll freeze the other half of it so that you don't have to worry about preparing that part. But if there was just more things."

Clare commented further on how her family's intakes influenced her own. When asked what she would like to be different, she commented about her family eating more variety and trying new things.

"If I didn't have to do it all the time...if I had more choices, if I can get my family to eat more different things than it wouldn't probably be so bad, it's getting them to try it, is the hard part, 'cause even my husband... 'cause he don't eat fish, I would love to eat fish all the time and I keep trying to get him to try salmon and stuff like that and you would think where he is from a Newfoundland family he'd eat fish, but he don't eat it."

She discussed what it was like when she did not have to cook, and returned to how challenging it could be to plan the meals.

"It feels good. Not so stressful. No, it's not that, it's having to think of it everyday. I think is the hard part... like you'll be finished cooking supper one night, then you're thinking about what you're cooking next night. You're always thinking of what you can make for supper because you get tired of making the same meals, or eating the same thing."

Diane agreed:

"... no one saying I don't like this, that's a big thing here. Our middle one tends to say that quite a bit, just because he doesn't want to take the time to sit down and eat..."

Diane remembered the picky eating in her family growing up.

“Trying to get something that everybody liked, would’ve been hard with four children. Yeah, there was one sister who was really picky. She didn’t like any berries, she didn’t like mayonnaise, she didn’t like jams. That would probably have been the worst, but usually you had to eat what was prepared or you didn’t have anything, right?”

She later added:

“...mom would cook all the meals so if she cooked it, you darn well sat down and ate it.”

Jodi commented on how relaxed her family was when it comes to meal planning and preparation. She would have rather not do it, or perhaps would have liked more help with it.

“...I wouldn’t say stressful. It can be challenging, but no, I don’t think stressful is the right word. We’re too laid back for that. Like nobody’s going to be ranting and raving if it’s not on the table...”

Jodi insisted that she did not feel any pressure to cook from her family. Her family members may have been more excited about choosing their own foods. Jodi may not have always tried to have one meal the whole family would eat; therefore, the pressure to please everyone with one meal was not so relevant.

“Oh no, they’re just, even my husband is like, whatever. If he came home and I said, I’m not in the mood to cook tonight, that’s fine, we’ll just have a sandwich, like, oh no there’s no pressure, and actually the girls are probably glad that I didn’t cook because then you

know, they can just get their own thing anyway, which would be a lot less nutritious than if I cooked. No, they don't care."

She tried not to complain:

"It would be nice if we didn't have to do it. No, I guess, no, you know what, it is what it is, some days are better than others but it's fine. I can complain, yeah I wish someone else would do the shopping, or whatever, but you know it's not that bad."

Jodi still found it difficult when it came to deciding what to have for supper. It was a challenge when everybody had different tastes.

"We eat a very wide variety of food. And everybody likes different things so sometimes it's a bit of a challenge."

It was not easy when she had no interest for cooking either.

"Oh, difficult. Very difficult when you don't like to cook, and you don't know what to cook and everybody likes different things, it's really difficult. Yeah."

She commented on how a plan could make cooking easier:

"If everybody liked the same things, it would make it easier. I think too, just knowing what to cook, maybe having a better plan might make it easier."

Jodi added how she might try to accommodate everyone in her family by having different food selections for the barbecue.

“I try to accommodate as best I can... we all eat different things, I mean, when the barbeque is lit, there’s always all kinds of stuff in the freezer, so if my husband wants a hamburger, which he probably would, my daughter will want a chicken breast, the other will want a chicken leg, I’ll probably want salmon, so it’ll just all go on the barbeque, so most of the times like that, it’s not a big deal, now if I cook something, like spaghetti, one won’t want sauce, and the other won’t want meat, and the other one just don’t want spaghetti at all, so, that can be challenging.”

She might have even planned meals around family member’s absences.

“...if I know that she really doesn’t like a particular thing, if she’s out to a friend’s house that night and the rest of us like it, well that’s an opportunity to have it...”

Ella discussed picky eating in her family. She worked full-time and explained that sometimes making something that each person liked was less tiring than making one meal that someone was likely to complain about.

“I have picky eaters. Sometimes it’s more than one meal, sat down, which, no it’s not a good habit to get into. Sometimes as a mother you just don’t want to have that fight. Like I know there’s things, honest, that my children don’t like to eat, but that my husband and I do, so, if it’s a night where I know we have time then I will make something else for them so I can make for us what I want, ‘cause somedays you just crave something and you have to have it. You just don’t want the fight with the kids.”

Ella would have liked more help with her role because it could be so challenging. This was how she replied when asked what she would change:

“...more help. I don’t mind cooking the meal, it’s the having to decide what it’s gonna be. ‘Cause I find that’s just as big a, that’s almost as much work as trying to figure out what you’re gonna have. I’ll cook pretty much anything you just need to tell me what you want, so, every night to come home and ask what someone wants, and they go ‘well I dunno’, or ‘what’s in the fridge?’ well, you know what? Open it. So yes, having help...”

Having foods readily available would also be helpful.

“... having an endless supply of whatever I want right then and there. You know, having quick recipes, or having actually, looked that you do want to make something. You know, like a quick meal that’s prepared for me is spaghetti, but, you know, they don’t want to have that three times a week..neither do I, but..you could dress that up with some garlic bread, or whatever right? But it’s fast.”

Ella would have liked a little appreciation in addition to no complaining.

“[ideally]...no one is complaining about what’s in front of them, they’re all saying, ‘yay, mommy this is nice, thank you for cooking it.’

And including no complaints from her husband:

“...and my husband’s not complaining that the vegetables are touching, ‘I didn’t like that’ or ‘that gravy is yucky, why didn’t your mother teach you to make gravy?’ He’s been saying that for fourteen years, so getting used to hearing that.”

Ella revealed how difficult it could be to make a family meal at her house. She went to great lengths to try to please her family members: re-naming recipes and cooking multiple foods. Her family members heavily influenced what foods she prepared, and even how she prepared them. Her husband's past experiences have shaped his views on certain foods.

"It's not easy. It's not the hardest thing in the world, but it's not easy. I have a very fussy husband, like you can't make mixed vegetables 'cause that means the vegetables have all touched each other. He doesn't like cooked broccoli, he doesn't like anything with broccoli in it... He doesn't like mashed potatoes. He picks what days of the week I can make pork chops, or pork tenderloin. He doesn't want to see them on a Friday 'cause Friday, well that's the weekend so apparently that's a different kind of meal. His mother used to burn the crap out of the pork chops. You know they used to be like make sure they're cooked 'cause they have trichinosis in them. So she made them like, burnt, so of course he looks at them that way...Which is why he wouldn't eat parsnips either, because his mother would put them in stew and he doesn't like stew. So sometimes I have to change recipes or I call them something different so he doesn't, like I have one recipe, and it's called mellow stew, but it's just stew beef and carrots and they're cooked in more of a tomato sauce, so for him, the kids and I, I serve it with mashed potatoes, for him I call it sweet and sour beef and I give it to him with rice. And he'll eat it. But if I told him I was making stew, he would just moan and groan and complain. So if I change the names or what I am going to serve it with...But yes so it is a little harder. It's not the

easiest thing in the world to make supper. And I'm a good cook, so that annoys me sometimes."

Jamie talked about the challenge of preparing something everybody would like. It required a little more thought and planning. She did not want to make several meals, just one meal that everybody would be happy with. She provided something that everyone could eat.

"...I try and make sure it's something everyone will eat or at least if I put it on their plate, like lets say it's a casserole and I think one of them might not love it, I'll make sure that there's a fresh veggie tray... 'cause I know that, like my twins for example, they will haul into that and maybe just have one or two bites of the casserole. So I'll make sure that there's something... I don't want to make two meals, once in awhile I do, but hardly ever... so I have to think ahead about yeah, who's going to eat what. I don't wanna make something that three of the kids are going to sit there crying about."

When asked what could make preparing the meal easier, Jamie responded that sometimes it was just a matter of being able to prepare the meal without having to entertain the kids at the same time. Jamie replied:

"Uh, a full-time cook. Um, so it could certainly be easier but it wouldn't be the meal that I would want it to be. Yeah, I mean, store bought things, certainly I buy them sometimes, frozen fish, stuff like that I would buy, but I wouldn't buy like a store bought lasagne, or anything like that 'cause I know that mine would be better. Yeah, so things could be easier but I wouldn't want it to be, but certainly we have fast meals, you know, once in

awhile we'll have chicken nuggets or what have you, but most of the time, I like it to be homemade. And it would be easier if, it's easier now because the kids are getting older to entertain themselves. For me, that was the biggest factor, is to try and make something with two twins on my leg, you know, where as now, they'll play, really for me it was always kid factor, but now it's getting easier."

Jamie dreamed of a meal with no fussing:

"...nobody's whining, nobody saying they don't like that. Yeah, it would be when nobody's complaining about anything and everybody's talking and I might have a glass of wine, too, that might be nice."

Kel had some challenges dealing with indifferent teenagers when it came to family meals.

She commented on how difficult it could be to prepare a meal for her family.

"Well it's hard because everybody has different tastes. They're all so different. Everybody has their own thing they want to eat. It's just hard to please everybody. Sometimes you make something everybody likes it, but that's not very often."

She would try to accommodate everyone's tastes and preferences.

"I usually try to have something in the meal that everybody will like. Like if it's macaroni, and they don't like the sauce, or whatever, they can just eat plain macaroni, put cheese on it or something. I also have a meal with homemade bread and they can have the bread if they don't like whatever else we're having. I'll make sure there's something, at least."

For Kel, eating together was important and a way to monitor her daughter's intakes.

Perhaps her daughters did not view family meals the same way.

"...it's nice to be able to see everybody at once and being able to talk to them and know they're eating healthy."

"And [to know] if they have a problem with eating. Teenage daughters, like I can actually keep track of, you know make sure they're getting enough."

For Kel, sitting together as a family may not have occurred as frequently as she would have liked. Conflicts and differing viewpoints with other family members, especially teenage daughters proved to be challenging. Her perception of mealtime was all sitting together eating. Her daughters' perceptions were to grab something quick to eat, and preferably not with the family. The role of food had different meanings for each member of the family.

"It's not as easy to get my kids to eat at the table, but it's coming along. They want to stay on the computer, and they don't want to come for supper. The girls are worried if something might make them fat, so I'm dealing with that right now. Yeah, they are just absorbed with other things and they don't care."

She later added:

"They'll come up two hours later and just try to make themselves something to eat, or get what we had for supper and take it out."

Kel revealed her thoughts and frustration about her teenage daughters not eating with the family.

“I don’t really appreciate the kids doing that because they just make a mess after I’ve got it all cleaned up and I think that they should be eating with everybody, like we should be eating together. But you can’t argue with them or yank them up the stairs.”

“...they don’t like the rules eating at the table.”

Kel described a scenario that would make all the family members happy:

“...probably like a buffet style, everybody can help themselves to whatever they want.”

“...I’d probably make different things and set it out and have everybody come help themselves.”

Kel imagined ordering in might be less stressful:

“Well I’d probably prefer to order it in because it’d be less work for me, when everybody runs away... ’cause I’d be all stressed out probably [from having to prepare a buffet and clean it up].”

On the other hand, Queen found it quite simple to prepare meals. She felt comfortable cooking and experimenting with recipes.

“It’s very easy for me [meal preparation & cooking]. It’s very easy for me because I have a large repertoire of recipes... if even sometimes there are certain things that I have

or um, like, I um, I don't follow a recipe. I mean, the first time I do a recipe I try to follow it as close as possible to the instructions that you got, until I get a feeling of how the recipe is, you know, or the end result is, after that I add or subtract, and I change the recipe according to what I've got or whatever I have and um, I, there are certain recipes that I don't follow, if anybody asks, sometimes, a lot of my friends they ask me for a recipe, I'm like okay, a handful of this, a handful of that, a pinch of this, a pinch of that. They look at me, 'no, we need measurements.' I'm like, 'I don't measure.' I just, I dump everything together and like it comes out the way it, you know, 'cause I, it's a recipe that probably I've used hundreds of times or whatever, so it's very easy for me to create a meal from anything that I've got around the house."

When asked about picky eating in her household, she commented:

"Well, they've got no choice, to be honest, they've got no choice."

She was also very good at planning and preparing foods ahead of time. This seemed to help.

"I make it a habit of whenever I'm cooking something, doubling whatever I'm making and like, we'll eat whatever we eat, and I freeze the rest of it."

When asked what might make preparing the meal easier, Queen was quick to reply that it had only to do with the recipe. It was not about the food, as it was for other participants. For Queen, it was about the recipe, and its difficulty. For others it was about deciding

what to have, not having the time and others helping out. Queen never mentioned any of these as factors.

“...depends on the recipe, it doesn’t depend on my mood or anything, it just depends on the recipe, you know, if I’m used to making it but I’ve got no problems, if I can find a short-cut to do something, I will go for it, as long as it doesn’t, I mean... I try to be as healthy as I can be in preparing food for my family, so as long as something is not you know, too much salt and whatever, I would have no problem, I would go for it.”

Growing up, Queen also learned about her mother’s views on food, and learning to appreciate what food you had. Queen recalled how her mother felt about food for the family:

“My mom had a motto we had to live by, it’s she’ll get us anything that we want, or she’ll cook us anything that we want... but once the food is cooked, what’s available, that’s what we’ll be eating, ‘cause she won’t be doing anybody any favours....”

Her mother saw food as a blessing. They were taught to eat what was prepared by their mother. This may have had some religious significance but Queen seemed to share a similar viewpoint.

“...when we were kids we would complain sometimes, but not very often. So we knew it’s not gonna work, it’s never worked, not even once. She never gave in once to our whining or anything about food, because she said... that we should feel blessed... that we have food on the table and stuff like that...”

Living with this motto and also having her children so involved may have made meal preparation a little easier, or at least diminished the challenge of picky eating.

Some of the participants mentioned having a peaceful meal, through satisfaction with what was prepared or getting along at the dinner table.

Diane responded:

“... no bickering, or fighting at the table.”

Jamie revealed:

“So it really just is people getting along and liking the food, really is all, would be the ideal situation.”

Ella would have enjoyed some nice conversation:

“...there’s chatter but it’s not you know, meanness towards brothers or you know, that sort of thing, it’s just us, all sitting down at once, chatting about our day and you know, no one’s getting cranky with each other...”

Many participants noted that satisfaction with the meal was important.

Jamie commented:

“...if it was something I made, it would be really just something everybody liked and was nutritious, really.”

Ella added that satisfaction with the meal was also ideal.

“...it could be take-out Chinese. It could be all kinds of little boxes sitting there in front of me. Um, ‘cause I like that, too...if not, yeah, it’s just a nice home-cooked meal that everybody’s happy with.”

Queen described her perfect meal as being nothing more than everyone having enough to eat and being satisfied with the meal.

“Perfect for me, is by the end of the meal, when everybody is happy and satisfied, and everybody had their fill.”

Providing a meal that the family enjoyed and the mother viewed as healthy was the definition of a successful meal as identified by many of the women. This made her feel as though she had accomplished at her role. Most of the women identified that the perfect meal would be when everyone was happy with the meal. Items that interfered with her role could present obstacles such as when there was less time for meals.

7.4.3.2 Rushed Mealtimes

Time was mentioned several times as a barrier and a challenge to creating homemade, healthy meals. Time for meals was related to work schedules, including spouse’s work schedules and extracurricular activities. Participants often felt that if they had more time, that they could prepare healthier meals at home. It was revealed that roles and the purchase of convenience options were also influenced by time. When the woman was working, her husband performed more duties related to meal preparation; if she was home in time for supper, she often fulfilled the role.

Within the category of Rushed Mealtimes, it could further be divided into two groups: *Employment and Extracurricular Activities.*

7.4.3.2.1 Employment:

The family structure has changed. Most of the women had mothers who stayed at home and were able to prepare homemade meals every day, not to mention breads, rolls, homemade cookies and muffins as well. Many of the women have entered the workforce, however, it seemed as though the women interviewed here still performed most of the responsibilities related to preparing a meal: the selecting, purchasing, preparing, cooking and clean up. These women did note how their husbands or kids may have helped, and how the responsibilities were being a little more shared than perhaps when they were growing up.

Employment can affect meals in many ways. It was evident that work hours influenced the meal; if the mother finished early, she was able to come home and start the meal. If she worked long hours, then perhaps her husband contributed more, or she may have been too tired and opted for quicker options. Some of her strategies might have been preparing quicker foods, using convenience options, take-out or getting others involved in helping.

Diane noted how varied the days could be because of work schedules.

“We usually have a cooked meal. Like a.. ‘cause we always had that growing up, too, you know...I would say they’re all based on our schedules right? And I’m on maternity leave now so it’s pretty well the same but when I work nights then it’s just my husband and the kids. Then meals could be different than if I were here or if he’s away and I have to get supper ready for them. I want something that’s easy for the babysitter to get ready

and so it varies so much. It's never the same thing like it was for me growing up. You know where mom was always there and you had supper at the same time all the time..."

Kel realized that she did a lot more healthy cooking when she had more time. Now a lot of her strategy was freezing foods, but purchasing convenience options had become more frequent for her as well. She associated healthy eating with time and less time meant less cooking.

"...well before I started working I'd cook a lot healthier. When I'm working I just don't have the time, to make things. But when I do, I make a lot and freeze it. But I don't cook as much as I used to."

Clare found juggling activities and working full-time a new challenge and that meal planning had become more necessary.

"...if we have lots of things going on through the day. I find it a lot harder now that I'm working, 'cause it's just when I was home I had all the time... I had time to prepare."

Involving her husband more would be helpful.

"Normally, I will take something out. My strategy is, whoever is home first, cooks. Which will mostly be my husband so he better get used to it; 'cause I work 'till five o'clock and he is usually off at three."

When asked what might make preparing a family meal easier, Clare responded that having things prepared ahead of time would be a big help, but realized that took time, as well. And finding the time was another challenge.

“... if you could prepare it beforehand and put it in the freezer kind of thing. But I find there’s only so much you can...but then you’ve got to find the time to prepare it and cook it and then freeze it, know what I mean? So like it’s really not so easy anytime. But it’s easier if you’re home all day then to have to come home at five o’clock and prepare it and cook it, ‘cause then you’re looking at six, six-thirty before you’re eating.”

Even though the meal itself could be quick and hurried at times, some participants noted that time was important when it came to the length of the meal, and that they wanted a longer lasting meal.

Diane noted:

“[ideally]... the meal taking about half an hour, not ten minutes.”

Jodi’s ideal meal was a very detailed meal, lasting beyond just a simple dinner.

“[ideally]...as far as the meal goes, I’d like to have it, like before the meal, have an hors d’oeuvre and a drink and everybody is together and then sit down at the table and have the main course, and then I like to clear away then, afterwards everybody sit in the living room and have coffee and dessert and just socialize I guess a little bit longer than just sit at the table and leave.”

7.4.3.2.2 Extracurricular Activities:

Extracurricular activities could cause time constraints for meals, especially if both parents are employed. Activities such as sports or homework could make the family meal a little

more rushed. Many participants still stressed the idea of being together regardless of how long the meal was or what was being served.

Diane commented how the meal revolved around activities, but they would still eat together.

“... it’s all varied depending if there’s baseball practice, or soccer practice, or cooking class, or karate, or...any of the above... we always eat supper together...always.”

Ella also commented on how rushed mealtime could be when activities and work interfered with mealtime. Less time meant having to prepare a more simple meal, and no time to wind down.

“You know a couple nights a week we’re rushed because by the time I get home from work and we have to be out the door for baseball or something, they have to be meals that are not as labour intensive. ‘Cause you know other nights I can just come home and just kind of you know, relax for a minute...”

Despite busy schedules, Ella revealed why meal time was still so important; it may have been the only family time they got on some days.

“I think the family meal is important because we are so busy. Um, and even though we’re so busy, I think we still need to take that time, ‘cause it may be the only time of the day where the four of us actually you know, sit, and look at each other; um, yeah, they might be cranky and complaining when they’re doing it but at least, you know, we’re there, um, together.”

Jamie had three small children and also related working mealtime around activities. The mealtime was flexible but she made sure that they still ate together.

“Supper for us is we’re all together, five of us... And I work suppertime around any activities that we might have... so I make sure that supper is on the table and we’re finished eating... I work around other things that we might be doing, but we always sit and eat together.”

Jodi explained that the time together was more important than the food itself. Mealtime may have changed with the seasons and was scheduled around extracurricular activities in the summer.

“We don’t put a lot of emphasis on what the actual food is going to be, I think the more emphasis is on that we do eat at a fairly same time of day, usually between five and six, closer to five in the summer time because we’re on the ball field by six. And in the winter time, it could be a bit later, but I think the main emphasis is on the time together rather than on actually what’s being eaten.”

For Diane, time could be a challenge but she tried to avoid it by how they would schedule extracurricular activities.

“Well, you know, the kids need to know it’s an important part of the day to have the meal together and you know that it’s not just eating food just for the sake of eating food that it’s actually time when we all get together and sit down, have conversations and eat supper. Take the time to eat and not eat and go kind of thing. It’s hard to do that when it’s a busy week but we try not to schedule too many things for the kids so we are able to

do that. Being on maternity leave has made a big difference too 'cause I'm home more, right?"

Time was a big component of homemade family meals. In the past, women spent many hours in the kitchen preparing everything from scratch. There is not enough time to devote to that much food preparation with today's busy lifestyles. Families complained that time is such an issue that it prevented them from cooking homemade meals at times, let alone spending the amount of time on food as women did in the past. Based on the women in this research, it was still very important to them to make homemade meals and to create foods from scratch.

7.4.4 Subtheme: Teaching Food Skills

The women felt it was important to teach their children food skills. They felt it was necessary for their children to know how to prepare foods for themselves and to be able to contribute in a family setting. However, many expressed time as a challenge for not having their children more involved.

This section demonstrated the mother's keen interests in teaching her children food skills. Many of the participants believed that socially, food and cooking was changing and that their children would need to know more than they did. Almost all of them expressed how important it was for their children to learn to cook, or why they wanted to get them involved, sons included. They wanted to prepare their children for their future and empower them to do it on their own. Whether they took on a role to teach food skills or not, all of the parents had enrolled their children into a cooking program. This was an opportunity for kids to receive or practice skills and demonstrated the mothers' values towards her children learning new food skills.

Queen had ideas about her children contributing with food preparation. Queen was raised to help out and contribute to the meal. This had played a big role in how she looked at food roles today. She had developed the belief that teaching your children to do things for themselves was important, including how to prepare and cook food.

Queen explained why she thought it was important for her kids to learn how to cook.

“It is important. I have a philosophy, and it’s about everything, and you know, everyday life, it’s just better you learn, that you know, you knowing in everything, in every aspect of the everyday life, whether you live with a family or not, at some point you’re going to end up, you’ll have to do some cooking whether for yourself or for somebody else. Um, same thing for cleaning, same thing for doing the laundry, just for everyday stuff, it’s, I like them to know, and I like to teach them, better than them not knowing.”

Queen even tried to explain why she did certain things so they could understand.

“...I try to tell them why I do this a certain way as to compare like sometimes, for example, it’s a very simple thing, it’s something that we do on a regular basis, like the pancakes...the recipe calls for two whole eggs, we don’t use two whole eggs, and I like try to tell them we don’t use the egg yolk ‘cause you know, it contains too much saturated fat, and you know, and it’s not a bad thing or anything, but it just, I try to teach them why, the reason behind why I do certain things, or why I don’t do certain things. So it’s good, I think it’s good for them to know, whether they want to do it or not, it’s up to them, I mean in the future, but um, at least they know.”

She spoke further about how her children would help her out. She admitted to finding it difficult when she was in a hurry.

“I mean my oldest one he can cook by himself, if the needs rises...he can cook something on the stove, so it’s something that my kids know how to do, it’s not they don’t know. I’m teaching the other one now, because they’re younger than the oldest one. Um, even when my daughter was taking your cooking class, at the recreation centre, my son’s teacher at the junior high school, his son was, ... when he saw me the first time... the first thing he goes, ‘but you’re a good cook, why are you sending your daughter to learn, to teach her how to cook?’ It’s easier for somebody else to teach your kids the little, the basic things... ‘Cause when you cook... and I do a lot, sometimes I will be in a hurry you know, to finish the meal or whatever um, so it’s hard having somebody like, just starting out. But I guess now I’m teaching my daughter, she’s getting good at it. Um, and I’ll be teaching the little one too...in a couple years, but my kids, they enjoy cooking. Even now the little one he helps with, you know, when you’re baking...or pancakes or mixing and cracking the eggs or whatever, or putting the ingredients in and stuff like that, he enjoys that. And he fights with his sister ‘cause he wants to do everything. He doesn’t want her to help.”

Ella also wanted to teach her children, but felt pressure when she was in a hurry.

“...I do like when the kids help me cook. I don’t always have the patience for it, so I do feel bad if, you know, ‘cause they do wanna help, they generally want to help, but sometimes it’s like, I just, I gotta get this done so just let me do it.”

From her own husband's inexperience, she has learned why it is important to teach her sons. She thought it would be even more important in their future.

"Where as, I'm gonna turn them into better boys if I let them cook, not like my husband; his mother ruined him... I want to shape...I want them to carry it into when they grow up. I want them to be self-sufficient. I don't want them to have to find a woman that's going to cook for them because I don't think that when they get that old there's gonna be a woman whose gonna want to cook for them, because if it keeps going the same it is, I don't think there's going to be a lot of homemade, prepared food. It's all going to be running to the grocery store and grabbing something that's already prepared for me or go out, so I think that it's important that they see, um, at least one stable thing in the household that they can bring with them and that when they do, you know, finally leave home, that I know that they might actually eat something other than Mr. Noodle...I just think, um, it just has to be done."

Clare explained why she thought it was important to teach her children, not just about how to cook food, but about eating together, eating healthy and shared responsibilities. She revealed her frustration with being the only one who had the knowledge about cooking and believed that knowing how to cook gives you confidence.

"I think it's important to eat together every night, if possible. It's important to eat healthy. I think it's important for parents to teach their kids that as they're growing up, so that they do the same thing as they go on in their life when they have kids. Um, I mean it's important to teach your children how to cook. I know just from my husband alone, like it's sometimes, kind of frustrating 'cause... he did not know how to cook

anything...when he lived on his own... he ate out all the time or his mom cooked, so it's important to teach them so when they go out of your home, they can take care of themselves, and their families. I had to teach him how to cook some things, and not only that but it also gives you confidence when you're taught how to cook and you can cook. I always say my son will not be like his dad in that respect, he'll know everything, he'll know how to cook, he'll know how to clean... his girlfriend or wife won't have to deal with that. 'Cause nowadays it should be fair, it's you know, back then it used to be the mother's did everything, took care of the kids, cooked the meals, nowadays you have two people working, it has to be even, you have to do fifty-fifty, I mean the mother will always do a little more because it's just in her to do more... even when I was at home for five years, yeah I did most of the cooking, and stuff and took care of the kids, but my husband still did more than my dad has ever done, like with us."

For Queen, even eating out was a teaching opportunity to educate her children about moderation.

"I enjoy it [eating out] ... it's not an everyday occurrence or whatever, so I like, I try to teach my kids that it's okay sometimes... more like a lesson, I take it as an opportunity, like you know, a teaching opportunity for my kids, if even if you're not cooking the food, you can still have whatever you want and part of everyday, I mean, there are certain things that you can't eat everyday, and it's not healthy and it's not good anyways...it's okay, it's not a big deal, and I do enjoy it myself, so it's not a major thing."

Queen and her siblings were very involved with the meal preparation. They used to help out often and her experiences guided her with her own family today.

“My kids usually like to wash...I would say everything in there, because when I bring my groceries, I usually clean everything before I put it in the fridge, or the freezer...the washing time mostly is done as we’re bringing the groceries in, and usually my kids will ask to do the washing for me, um, especially the youngest one, he loves playing in the water, so I end up cleaning up after him.”

“They like to set up the table. Usually everybody takes, whenever we’re done, everybody takes their own plate to put it in the sink. Um, so the cleaning of the table and stuff is for everybody. Most of the time, I do the dishes and um, that would be it.”

Jamie relished about the food preparation her son was able to do. The role her son was developing was apparent in Jamie’s comments.

“...like tonight he husked the corn, he, if we’re making smoothies, he started making them himself. He’s really proud of that the last couple of times he’s been the smoothie guy, so now that’s his job, and he’s really proud of it...kind of when I was a kid, with the preparation of things, he’ll set the table, that’s his job. He’ll bus the table after, that’s his job. I don’t know about the dishwasher yet, but I’ll get him there. But if I ask him to do something, he used to when he was little, if I made a homemade soup, he would put all the spices in, that kind of thing...if we’re making pancakes or muffins, most, almost all the kids are up there stirring and breaking eggs and whatever, so they’re helping us, even if we don’t want them to. But they like, you know what it’s like for kids, they want to be

involved and most of the time we tell them that they can't, you know. He can make cookies on his own, my son, pretty much with almost no help. Yeah, he probably could do more if I included him in it but he's usually outside playing or what have you."

Queen's children were very involved with the food preparation. Queen explained that her family looked forward to mealtime and believed it was because they enjoyed helping out. *"...it's something [meal time] that actually we look forward to, especially on the weekend... my two youngest ones now especially, they like to help, they are eager to help actually... they enjoy whatever they're eating, and they'll be proud to show it to... everybody else who's around, whether from us, immediate family...it's something that we actually enjoy altogether."*

The women discussed how they preferred homemade foods and the fact that they had enrolled their children into a cooking program provided evidence that they also wanted their children to know how to prepare foods. The fact that time was an issue for many families lends itself to the ability to be able to enroll children into a cooking program when parents felt it was so necessary.

7.5 Food Choice Influences

Many factors contributed to how the participant makes food choices for her family. She was responsible for providing healthy, yet satisfying options, while also spending within a budget and trying to prepare something quick and easy. Time constraints made it more difficult to plan and prepare meals. This section further demonstrates the complexity and connections within various systems.

In this section, participants identified what items influenced their food choices. There are many contributing factors, such as food preferences, health, time and cost of food. They

are all tied in together and no one factor singly affects food choice. Of course, each of these was of themselves influenced by several other factors. In this section, it was also identified how participants used convenience options. These choices were also affected by time and health concerns. It was evident that each factor influenced another and was affected by several, as identified in the social ecological theory.

7.5.1 Sub-theme: Food availability

Food is more available today and provides more opportunities to select and consume foods. Food is everywhere and there is a greater selection of food than ever before.

In this section, the participants discussed the changes in food availability and compared when they were growing up to now. Overtime, there have been many changes in food: how food is sold, bought and eaten. There is more variety, there are more convenience options and there are more restaurants and more opportunities to eat outside the home.

Choosing and eating foods has become very complicated. Jodi discussed her thoughts about how the meal may have changed. She viewed the abundance of variety as making food preparation more difficult; one reason being it was harder to decide what to have. She summed it all up by discussing the new pre-packaged goods there are, eating out, cultural differences and how complicated eating has become.

“I think it’s more difficult today than it was back when my mom was cooking, simply because I think we’re busier now, our lifestyles are busier now and also, the choices out there are endless. Now some people might say it’s easier because of the choices and everything you can buy pre-packaged, but I don’t buy a lot of the pre-packaged stuff you know, like Lasagne for example, I don’t buy the Lasagne made, I’ll make it myself, but I

just think their exposure to so many different things, and maybe it's not so much past and present, maybe it's Newfoundland and elsewhere, maybe we just weren't exposed to it, but other parts of Canada were, I don't know, but I mean we never ate out as children. I mean, mothers day was the only day of the year we ever got restaurant food, that was it, you know. Where as now, my goodness, I mean they spend more time in restaurants, so um, you know, I just think that, the way I see it, for me, I think it was easier back then where it was more regimental meals you know, it was your meat, your potatoes and your vegetables and I think it was cheaper, because you weren't having to buy just so many different things and sometimes you'll buy it and it spoils or you know, what have you. But no, I think it was probably easier for mom then it is now. And actually you know, even mom says that, the difference in cooking back then and now and just don't know what to cook..."

Diane spoke about some of the challenges her parents faced living in a small town in Newfoundland.

"Well trying to feed a family of six a healthy meal, when you don't have all the resources there, like fresh fruits and vegetables all the time, like, you know in the summer it was different 'cause it was being grown there, but in the winter time, it was really hard, like we ate a lot of stuff, like canned vegetables, or frozen. The meat was never a problem because you'd get a moose, you'd freeze it. You'd get fish, you freeze it. Berries you'd even freeze."

Even some basic things that were so readily available today, were not available for Diane's family. She commented about some of the things she had never tried.

"...there were some things I remember growing up, we never, I never had fresh corn, like ears of corn until I moved to Nova Scotia. We had corn on the cob in a can and there was four ears of corn in the can and we loved that. And mushrooms, fresh mushrooms, never ever had them..always in a can, cause we lived in a small town, it was hard to get those things to smaller towns, like they would be not able to be eaten by that time, so we had a lot of stuff, just the basics, you know, like carrots, potato, turnip, cabbage, that stuff that people could grow in the garden."

Jodi, who also grew up in Newfoundland, discussed some of the foods she never tried growing up due to a lack of availability.

"I mean we never had variety like we have now. I never had pizza, spaghetti, I never knew what a taco was 'till I was married, like there was no, that kind of variety, hamburger, like we never had hamburger ever. Hot-dog, maybe for lunch once like I don't know, every six months or something we'd have a hot-dog, but no, certainly not the variety that we have today, like my kids have. Very straight forward, your basic cooked meal and that was it."

It was likely that the increased availability of food has made meal preparation more complex. It was simpler when there was less choice. Deciding what to serve for meals was a huge challenge identified by many women. Although the food industry has tried to make preparing food easier, the selection of food was more complex and could be difficult.

7.5.2 Subtheme: Food preferences

Family food preferences dictated what foods were served. The parents selected and purchased foods and had a significant influence over what foods the family ate. As revealed here, the husband had a big influence over what foods were prepared. In both past and present, the husband's own preferences swayed food selection for the family. The children also had a great influence over what foods were bought and prepared, and perhaps increasingly so. Many referred to their own past where picky eating was not catered to. Parents today are more likely to consider their child's preferences and accommodate them; they wanted their children to enjoy the meal, eat the food and not complain. They were willing to provide different foods if that's what would make them happy.

Jamie discussed what influenced food choices for her family. Food preferences were a big factor.

"Food choices...certainly their tastes. I am sensitive to what the kids say they want like one of my little guys doesn't like oranges, I wouldn't put an orange on his plate in my life... we might have different things at lunch but they're easy things, one likes peanut butter, the other doesn't so I'm not going to make the one who doesn't like peanut butter eat peanut butter, because that's easier."

A big part of Ella's early experience involved memories of eating foods she did not like. She would not force her kids to eat foods they disliked and also would not serve foods she did not like to eat growing up.

"And I don't make them eat things they don't like, because that's just wrong. But I in turn, will not cook things for them if I didn't like them. So like I will never cook liver, ever. Now maybe one of my kids is destined to love liver but he's not going to find it in this house, never."

It is evident that her past influenced her present.

“And I don’t tend to um, make my kids eat gross disgusting things, if they don’t want to, ‘cause I always had to. I had to do it without saying a word about it.”

The negative food experiences have shaped the way she viewed food.

“Like English muffins are disgusting if they’re not toasted. They are so disgusting. But my mother made me eat them, well actually my step-father made me eat them, and they were gross, so you know what? My kids will never have to try that. I will never take an English muffin and say here eat it. I will never put canned peas in my potato salad.”

But perhaps some things she enjoyed as a child she continued:

“They always have bed snack, ‘cause I always had bed snack.”

Jodi identified food preferences, but also acknowledged other factors:

“I guess likes and dislikes obviously. I don’t know, mood, time, activities.”

For Jamie, considering food likes and dislikes is important because she wanted her family to enjoy the meal. She viewed meal time as an experience.

“...for the kids to get some enjoyment out of it, like I don’t wanna just be telling them eat your supper and I don’t care if you like it or not. I want them to experience the meal and try different things and enjoy the food, you know. Food is a really delicious thing, you know, I don’t want them to just be forced to eat stuff that they don’t like.”

Clare had difficulty choosing certain foods when her husband enjoyed a limited amount of vegetables and other foods. She did not buy food just for herself.

“Cause he comes from a Newfoundland family. They don’t eat the greatest, like they eat all the time, but they eat with high salt you know, fried stuff, and my husband, that’s all they ate growing up, that kind of stuff so he’s not a big vegetable eater either, like he’ll eat potatoes and corn and carrots and turnip, that stuff, but he won’t eat broccoli or green beans or and I’m, like I love all that kind of vegetables and it’s hard to buy them because I’m the only one that eats them and then you get tired of eating the same vegetables because you don’t have a big enough variety.”

The women tried to provide foods and meals the family would enjoy. That was important to her. Family members all have an influence over what foods are purchased and prepared, and family members choices are influenced by many internal and external factors as well, such as children’s peers, husband’s past experiences or social groups that they belong to. The mother wanted contribution from other family members by having them make food choices for meals at times.

7.5.3 Subtheme: Health Trends

The women felt it was their responsibility to provide healthy options for their children to grow and be healthy. Changes in nutrition and increased knowledge about health has made it easier to access nutrition information. Foods have nutrition labels, products are promoted and opportunities for education (including self education) are more available. As part of the mother’s role for caring for her children, she sought to provide healthy foods and create healthy meals.

New research in nutrition has led to a greater knowledge of health and how foods affect our bodies. The media is responsible for some of the messaging the public receives and can impact families to choose different foods or ingredients. There is more knowledge about providing proper nutrition for children in today’s society. From this research, it

was evident that many of the participants have been influenced by these messages. Many of them were health conscious, aware of reading labels and wanted to have a positive influence on their children.

Health trends have impacted how the mother viewed her role in providing foods for her family. As demonstrated in previous sections, it would be important for her to provide the best for her children anyway; therefore, increased knowledge in nutrition has helped her make those decisions. The interviews revealed that for some of the women, it was their role to make sure their children were eating the right foods and the proper amounts. Many of the women noted how important it was to provide healthy choices for their kids and revealed that it was one of the most important influences in deciding what to prepare and serve the family.

Diane chose fresh produce and pasta, lean meats and whole grains. She tried to limit processed foods.

“... the quality of the food. You know, a lot of fruits and vegetables and good cuts of meat, that’s what we usually eat. We don’t eat very often like, Kraft Dinner or we never have hot dogs for supper, or you know, if it’s hamburgers, I make my own. We use whole grain buns, we eat a lot of fresh pasta...so definitely eat things that are you know, healthy, and every meal has to have vegetables in it.”

Ella discussed how health and reading labels helped her choose foods. She has learned how to make some health conscious decisions through a weight loss group.

“...I do tend to look at the labels a lot ‘cause I used to go to Weight Watchers and I do know that I’ve got to stay away from sodium...I compare the labels on some stuff and even though some of it says that it’s healthy, it’s no different than something beside it...”

Like the other women, Jodi also indicated that healthy choices were important; second to eating together. She used label reading to help her make appropriate decisions.

“I read labels on everything. It’s very important for me that the fibre is there, the fat is not there, um, I will pick products that have less fat and more fibre and I read every label.”

A healthy meal was one of Jodi’s top priorities:

“Well I think the most important thing is nutrition, that it’s balanced and that we’re getting proper nutrition, and the second most important thing is that we’re all together and eat as a family. So as long as those two things are accomplished, then you know, everything else is okay.”

Jamie tied in time with making healthy meals. She also classified homemade as being healthier:

“...it’s more to be home in the afternoon to make a little bit of time to, and to make homemade meals, I mean anybody can make something out of a box, but it’s important for me to try and make as many homemade meals as I can, and healthy meals, with all the food groups, as many as I can.”

Jamie remembered a house filled with the smell of baking and homemade meals. Her mother spent a lot of time preparing food. She likely learned that cooking was hard work from her mother.

“She probably spent a fair amount of time planning, and then cooking it. And, it wasn’t just something out of a box, it was always a homemade meal. Unless my dad was working, my sisters always say once in awhile we’d have Kraft Dinner and bacon. It would be like a treat to have a little meal as opposed to a meat and potato kind of thing, would be my father driven, you know that would be driven to, you know, make something because he worked hard all day, she would make sure it was like a full course meal, as opposed to if it were just the kids and she, she might not get as fancy. But if everyone was together, yeah, I think she spent a fair amount of time making things and preparing things, thinking about them. And not just meals, you know, she did homemade rolls and muffins and cookies, you know when we were in school she would spend a big part of her day making homemade everything. We would come home from school and there would be this smell in the house, like everyone would wonder what she made, chocolate chip cookies or whatever.”

She was keen about buying healthy options and had become familiar with reading the labels on products. It was important to choose healthy foods to take care of her family, including her husband’s high cholesterol.

“...I usually read the nutrition labels for things that I don’t know about... if it was something new or I would compare. If my son asked me for a certain kind of cereal, I would compare and if it was junk that he asked for, I’d leave it on the shelf. I’m always

looking for the sugar and the fat. They're the big ones. And fibre, it's a big one, too. But before we had kids we did that because my husband has high cholesterol, so we have to be a little bit careful of that, yeah."

Queen was also aware of comparing products, or reading food labels. She had learned to make recipes healthier and her interests in health lead her to make better choices for her family.

"...I try to read the labels and you know, um, especially in the fat department, the salt department, sodium and stuff like that. The fat content, I try to read the labels as often as I can."

Queen had even adopted some traditional recipes to make them healthier.

"There is a lot of traditional food that I don't cook traditionally, like the way you're supposed to do...we learned a lot as we grew older, it was mostly about health stuff and health reasons... if we make pancake in the morning, the recipe calls for two full eggs, we don't use two whole eggs, we just use the egg whites instead...I don't deep fry anything, anything that I can get away with cooking in the oven..."

Diane viewed health and costs to be a good reason to eat at home, besides that, her husband enjoyed cooking. She knew what was going into the food and monitored intakes when they ate at home.

"Well the health benefits would probably be the number one answer. Money being the second one, it would be too expensive to eat-out all the time. Um, he enjoys cooking. He

probably cooks most of the meals, pretty well all of them when he's home...But you know what's going into it when you cook it yourself, right?"

Ella addressed the influence her kids had and some of the requests that they might make for food. She wanted to avoid conflict and avoided purchasing foods she did not consider healthy.

"That's why they're not allowed at the grocery store. Very rarely will I take those two to the grocery store. Sometimes I'll take the older one by himself. I mean I take them occasionally, because they just want crap, or they want those lunchables, with the crackers and the cheese. Well they'll pick at one part or the other if they do get them, so I try not to buy those things anymore. But yeah, they just want junk..cereal that's got chocolate in it, ice-cream, popsicles. Yeah they don't want me to buy the good stuff. They aren't looking at that stuff."

Clare considered how her experiences growing up had influenced meals and food choices. Growing up eating a lot of treats has led her to want to feed her children in a more healthful way.

"..my mom always had dessert after supper, you know, so there's always, you have to have dessert. Myself, I never used to eat very healthy growing up, like I'd eat my fruit and vegetables but I ate a lot of chocolate bars, chips, and I tried to stop, more so as I got older and I learn that okay really, it's not that good for you, but I find it hard because my body will want it, and I like food...but no I try to not do that to my kids. That's why I

think I feed them healthier too, just so that when they get older that's all they know, except for my daughter loves to eat junk, too, so I don't know. It's a hard one."

Providing healthy foods was not identified as an issue for the participants. For most of the women, it was part of the way they made food selections. It played into how or if they chose convenience options and what kind of food they served at the meal. It was important for the women to provide healthy foods and create healthy habits. It was possibly a norm that they were creating within their own households and making their own children more aware of selecting healthier food products.

7.5.4 Subtheme: Price and Costs of Food

The mother's role to provide healthy foods is challenged by the costs of food. Healthy foods can be more expensive than less healthy options. Socioeconomic factors contribute to the ability to purchase healthier foods. The women in the research were not considered to be low socioeconomic status, but pricing of food was a factor that influenced their food choice; however, having a greater income allows for more flexibility with food options and the ability to purchase more healthy foods. The mother was better able to fulfill her role to provide healthy choices when cost of food was not such a concern.

Income can be a significant factor when it comes to purchasing food and food ingredients. The women in this research noted that costs were not a major challenge in purchasing groceries, but many of them did note that it was an influence and that they did tend to look for the cheaper prices or sales. Some of them noted that the health benefits were more influential than the price of the food. In this section, it is discussed how the participants viewed food costs and how it influenced their choices. Overall, cost of food was a factor but not the only factor; health concerns, food preferences and convenience also played big roles in food selection.

Diane rationalized that price was not really a factor that influenced her purchases because she wanted healthy choices for her family. She believed that she needed to spend more money to eat healthy. However, she did note that she would buy foods that were on sale, or look out for sales in order to save money.

“...if it’s something that I know is going to go on sale I will wait, and the kids know that. They’ll be like, ‘is this on sale, can we buy it?’ But for the most part, really to eat healthy you have to spend money. Like if you wanted to save money on your grocery order you would eat everything in a can or a package...”

She would use strategies, such as buying in bulk.

“I started going to a fruits and vegetables stand a couple times a week and getting like forty dollars worth of stuff... they sell it a lot cheaper...But I try to buy things, if chicken breasts are on sale, I’ll buy a lot of them and just put them in the deep freeze or steak or um, hamburger beef....”

Kel would look for deals, purchase more for her money or what seemed like a better deal. Price did limit purchases, and may have been a factor on whether or not she bought something.

“If something’s like ridiculously priced like chicken breasts compared to chicken legs, I’ll probably choose the legs just ‘cause you get a lot more for your money.”

For Ella, buying something on sale made sense if she would normally buy it in the first place, but if it was something her family wanted she would still buy it without the sale.

Participants assessed whether they needed it or not, despite promotions.

“...I don’t fall for buy one get one free very much anymore...sometimes it’s not always something that I would normally buy, so why am I gonna buy it ‘cause it’s buy one get one free? Um, like today I did talk myself out of buying the fudge-sicles that are buy one get one free, because yes I know I am going to get two boxes for five dollars and sixty-nine cents, but I wouldn’t normally buy that one box for five dollars and sixty-nine cents...”

She would look for sales, but it was not the deciding factor.

“...I will look and see, you know, what’s on sale but I don’t, if it’s something that I want, um, I’ll still buy it, even if it’s, you know, not on sale.”

In Jodi’s household, price was a big influence on food purchases, however; she did note earlier that sometimes convenience would triumph over price. She would look for cheaper prices.

“...I would look for store brand, as long as it’s a comparable product and I do read the labels, and if it is a comparable product, I will buy the store brand to save money...”

She would look for food items in bulk to save money as well.

“...there’s things I have not bought because it’s too expensive. And for example, cereal, I will not pay regular price for cereal, I don’t care. I will buy what’s on special that

week. I will not pay regular price, because it's just ridiculous. And we can go through a lot of cereal, like we have eight or nine boxes, of cereal open at any time, and maybe twelve downstairs. We're real big cereal eaters, so when something goes on sale that we like, I buy a lot of it, yeah, and I won't buy it at regular price."

When asked about fruits and vegetables, the response was the same:

"...if it's seven dollars for a bag of grapes that day, I won't buy them, I'll pick something else instead. So, yes, it certainly does influence what I buy but I do buy a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables."

Like many of the other participants, Clare showed how health and food preferences would take precedence over food costs, in some circumstances.

"We kind of eat what we like, like if the kids eat any kind of fruits and vegetables I will pay whatever it costs normally."

Higher food prices may have persuaded her to purchase another food item of the same type, but for Clare it was worth the extra cost sometimes.

"...if strawberries are like four dollars then maybe not or blueberries or you know if watermelon is over five dollars we won't buy the big ones, depending on...I'm kind of like if the kids would eat that healthy stuff I'll buy it whatever the price is, but I mean it is sometimes an issue because depends on how much money you make too, right?"

Food preferences were a big factor, despite costs, but if she could get away with buying cheaper foods she would. She also considered healthier choices. All of those together played a role in how she selected food.

“Definitely with meat, like you wanna buy the white meat, like in chicken and stuff but it can be pricey. But we enjoy eating chicken legs more, but I just find them not so dry. And they’re usually cheaper, so definitely, especially even with pork, same thing, you know you have loin and then you have the rib ends, but rib ends of course are cheaper, same with hamburger, extra lean is a lot more than lean, but I would never buy medium. I would never go any lower than lean.”

Like other participants, health and family member likes and dislikes were major influences in Jamie’s food selection. Cost also had a role to direct or guide her purchases.

“ And it not be too expensive, you know, we certainly have to be within a budget, within some kind of budget, but it’s not a major factor but it’s you know, in the back of your mind when you’re in the grocery store and you try and pick up things on sale so that you don’t have to, you know, you can save money that way.”

Although the women in this research did indicate that price of foods influenced their purchasing decisions, they did not identify cost of food as being a barrier to eating healthy or serving foods they wanted. They bought foods they thought the family would eat with consideration for costs, but not as the deciding factor. The women were able to select nutritious foods for their families and feel good about their food selections because they did not have to make sacrifices or choose foods they would not otherwise choose. It

is likely that this relieved some of the burden women could feel if they were not able to provide healthy foods for their family.

7.5.5 Subtheme: Trends toward Convenience Options

If the mother's role was to provide healthy options, then providing convenience options was a contradiction. The mother assessed the quality of the convenience foods and tried to limit how often she chose these foods. However, other factors also motivated her food choices, such as family preferences, social norms and trends, and time. These interplayed with her role to provide healthy foods, yet her views on how convenience foods should be used are important, too. Since she carried the primary role of preparing meals, when the family decided to eat-out, she found the break refreshing and enjoyable, which meant that convenience foods had a positive meaning as well.

Many different food options have developed over the years to accommodate people's busy lifestyles, such as ready-to-go foods, fast food restaurants, including drive-through options, semi-prepared packaged foods and facilities that prepare the meal for you. There was a growing trend towards using convenience options. In this section, it was investigated how the participants used some of these new and convenient options and what influenced their decisions. Time, health, costs and availability all certainly played big roles as to what convenience options participants may have chose, if any.

Diane discussed using a facility that prepared dinners. She did not like to cook so perhaps this option was even more enticing when there was little time to prepare meals at home. It might have been a healthier alternative to some other convenience options, which was important for Diane. It also helped her to plan and be prepared for future meals, which was even worth the extra cost sometimes.

"What my son and I did, um, a couple of times now. We went to 'What's for Supper'... you select your meals and you pay for it online, and when you go there they have stations

set up and they have everything cut up, the measuring spoons are there, you just assemble it, bring it to the labeling station, put a label on it and put it in the fridge and then you do like six or twelve entrees and then you just check out with them so then you have twelve prepared meals and you just put them in your freezer so even though like if I am working a nightshift or whatever we can have that, like on Sunday take out two or three of them and we know, ok, Monday, Wednesday and Friday we're gonna have these, so we're not like just grabbing whatever from the fridge, so we're still having healthy meals."

"...the time it takes to prepare the meal is definitely important, like I don't want to be spending my whole evening in the kitchen that's why I decided to do the 'What's for Supper'; a little bit of you know, more money but it's all ready for you, it's all prepared, you know cut up and everything, so definitely the time it takes.

Ella revealed that energy levels and the lack of help she had from her husband may have been some good reasons to choose more convenient options. She discussed how a lack of planning could be stressful when her energy was running low. Therefore planning meals may have helped her stay away from the convenience foods.

"...sometimes I'll have those nights, you know if I've worked a really long and exhausting day, and it's just so easy to call and order or stop at the grocery store and get something that is semi-prepared and I don't have to do a lot when I get home 'cause I just don't feel like it. I know that my husband probably didn't really start anything or put any thought into it or will have a damn idea in his head when I get home of what he

wants. And there's nothing worse to come home, know they want to eat but you don't have anything taken out or they don't know what they want."

Ella recognized that planning ahead helped her to avoid the stress of not having a meal ready. Like Diane, she viewed a facility that prepared dinners as a way to help her plan ahead.

"I'm good if I plan the night before or a couple of days before... different weeks I'm really good. And for awhile some friends and I were going to one of those places Creating Dinners, where you make the meals and bring them home and throw them in the freezer...awesome, because then I had a real meal to take out, unthaw and put in the oven. So, if I plan ahead, I'm much better, and if I go to the grocery store with a list that's based on a few recipes...."

Jodi enjoyed the convenience of portioned food because it was easier. Sometimes convenience triumphed over cost.

"...I like M & M's for example, 'cause everything is already individually frozen as opposed to buying a big pack of chicken breasts that I'm going to have to separate myself, it's more convenient to go there and buy it. Certainly I would pick that over the other product, even pay more for it because it's more convenient for me, and things that are portioned, I find it easier, too."

Clare noted why she would prefer to make her meals at home. She was motivated by health, including health messages and financial reasons.

“Well ‘cause it’s better for you, and it’s cheaper [to eat at home]. You can get more out of cooking yourself than eating out. Those are the things that you are told to eat because they say it’s good for you. You’re supposed to have protein a day, you’re supposed to have fruit and vegetables a day, you’re supposed to have grain, you know.”

“... you’re not supposed to eat out all the time, it’s not good for you and it can be very costly.”

“I mean for the four of us to even just go eat at McDonalds you’re looking at twenty-five, twenty-six dollars, so if you did that every day of the week, that’s too much money when you can get a lot more groceries for that cost.”

For Jodi, cooking at home meant more nutritious foods. She explained why eating out (or ordering in) was not an everyday option, mainly because of cost and health reasons; however, convenience certainly played a role when nutrition and cost were not factors.

“Well, for one, it’s less costly to cook it yourself. And it’s more nutritious to cook it yourself. That’s the two reasons why I would choose to cook it myself...”

Taste was important too, and in that case, a convenience option may have been worth buying.

“The quality of it, the taste of it is certainly a big factor. Like baking, for example, Sobeys can bake better than I can, so I’m not going to go through the effort, right? ...if it’s there and the taste is there and the nutrition, and whatever, I go for convenience...”

Ella commented on how nutritional factors could steer her away from purchasing some convenience options. Despite the occasional need for quick foods, she did not like to compromise her health just to have a quicker meal. If there was something just as healthy, like vegetables already cut up, then convenience was a good choice for her family.

“... I won’t buy a lot of the meals, like the frozen things that are already prepared because I find they’ve got too much fat or sodium in them, and sodium, for me I may as well turn my body into a sponge and soak up all of the water...I mean the amount of fat and the amount of calories and the amount of sodium that is in it...Even for the price and the convenience it’s just not worth it, so I won’t necessarily just go and buy prepared stuff just ‘cause it’s easy.”

Ella’s choice to purchase quick and convenient meat products were also influenced by weather, such as heat during the summer months.

“But now I’ve been finding lately, as well, I’ve been buying a lot of sandwich meats, it’s been too hot to want to cook, so and I’ll just let them build their own subs or sandwiches...”

Ella also looked for healthier convenience options, especially if they saved her time.

“... we eat a lot of raw vegetables too, just ‘cause the kids like to be able to dip them and then they take what they want... I will pick up vegetable trays that are already done, because to me, it’s worth the money, because by the time you end up buying three or four different vegetables and cutting them up I may as well have bought them...”

Ella associated eating out with fast food restaurants, money and unhealthy foods. Like the other women, Ella felt costs and health reasons were good reasons to cook at home. She was also strongly influenced by her role to cook foods at home.

“Sometimes, it’s for nothing more simple than financial. Um, ‘cause trust me, I would probably like to eat out a lot more than I do. Um, but either financially or health-wise no, I shouldn’t bring pizza or McDonald’s, although my kids are pretty good they’d eat Subway everyday of the week I’m sure, um, you know, it just seems like maybe there’s, like maybe I should cook the meal, that it should be you know, also just something that, because I like to cook, I do like to cook, I just don’t like the pressure of having to cook.”

Jamie also felt like cooking foods at home was important. She demonstrated a preference towards homemade foods and felt like she should provide home-cooked meals and snacks. She was a mother of young twins and mentioned how difficult it could be when they were both competing for her attention. Yet, she still felt like she should be able to do it all, and felt lazy if she did not.

When asked about buying ready-made foods, she responded:

“I wouldn’t even say once an order, like I go shopping once a week, so it’s probably every second week I might pick up something like that but I just mean frozen fish. It wouldn’t be like a prepared meal. I used to but I never found that they were, you know, that good and I know they have a lot of preservatives in them, so yeah, I don’t typically pick up that stuff and I feel that it’s lazy for me to do it, because I am at home so I try and stay away from it.”

Eating out could also be viewed as a treat and a break. That was the way Jamie saw it. Friday meant break time from cooking all week. This meant heading out to a restaurant with her family, or ordering in; this had become the family rule.

“Friday night I almost never cook. So it’s take-out or go to a restaurant. That’s the rule.”

Jamie expressed how great it felt to get a break from cooking:

“Love it. ‘Cause it’s not just the cooking part, it’s the preparation, it’s the taking something out, it’s the thought about, you know making sure everybody likes it, yeah, yeah, great.”

She viewed eating out as a treat for the whole family because each family member could decide what they would like to have.

“...if it’s like a take-out night, they’re pretty excited. It’s nice when it’s, like I said, it’s not just about me having a break...it’s a treat for them, too, and then they can pick something out of the menu as opposed to just being given something for supper, yeah, they can have whatever they want within reason.”

Queen viewed it as a simple treat as well.

“And if my kids wanted fries, we’ll usually go out, and you know, I’ll get it for them as a treat. So whenever they want fries, we just go out. They’ll go out and have a treat and then come back home and that will be it.”

Jodi was the only one who cooked in her family, besides her two daughters who would help with baking. Although she did not enjoy cooking (or baking), most of their meals were home prepared. Eating out was rare but exciting for Jodi. She had a few comments about when they got to eat-out:

“Well, if I’m out, not here, like if my husband and I are going out, say on a Saturday night, the girls will just get a pizza themselves, or look after themselves...if we decided to go out as a family or sometimes you know, order pizza in or unexpected company showed up, and we decided to order something but other than that, pretty much every night I cook supper.”

When asked how she felt about not having to cook when they went out or ordered in she replied with enthusiasm.

“Oh, wonderful. I’m the first one in the car.”

“Oh they love it, everybody loves it.”

Diane was not the one who usually cooked for her family, so eating out was viewed a little differently and perhaps was harder for her to enjoy. Finances played a significant role.

“Um, that’s a hard one for me ‘cause I don’t cook most of the food anyway. Probably would be more so for someone who did cook.”

“Well I feel good, a little bit guilty that we’re probably spending more money than we should.”

But she did appreciate not having to clean up.

“Not having to clean up, that’s a good one. Happy that we don’t have to clean up.”

For Diane, eating at home also meant better nutrition for her kids.

“...I know what they’re eating and how much and making sure that they’re getting all the right things when we prepare a meal...”

In Kel’s family, her kids enjoyed the convenience options she sometimes chose. Perhaps, her children’s preferences towards convenience foods also influenced her to buy them.

Nutrition may have come second to pleasing their tastes, and sitting together at the table was more difficult, so she would buy what they would like.

“...they kind of prefer the packaged food. You can spend all day in the kitchen and then if you take something out of the freezer, like a pizza, the kids are happy.”

“They just like to have everything that’s convenient. They like it when you cook and clean up. They’d prefer that.”

Eating out was a very rare opportunity in Kel’s family. She felt there were too many kids and fears it would be too noisy. She found it mostly stressful to eat-out with the kids, so it usually became a weekly treat for just her and her common-law husband.

“Sometimes, yeah, but we find that a little bit stressful with the kids [eating out]. You know, having everybody not be loud or anything, with four kids.”

Diane referred to her past:

“... we never ever ate out as, when we were young, it didn't happen. There was too many of us to go and have a meal out, right? Now I find with us, we eat out way more than we ever did, even than my husband's family did and they lived in a town that had restaurants and stuff.”

Queen compared eating-out today with the limited times that her family would go out when she was a child. She viewed it as a teaching opportunity to teach her children about moderation.

“... I look at the way we grew up and I look at the way my kids are growing up, and like I said, fast food wasn't available at that time, as often as it is now, and back home it's not something, I mean, we used to eat it, and like go out sometimes and have it, but it wasn't something that we needed to do, or we had to do on a regular basis, I find now my kids, probably if you asked them, do you want to go out?- to McDonalds or eat at home, they'd probably go oh okay, we're going to go to McDonalds, there's no question about it, and I don't blame them 'cause that's the way it is, it just, things changed a lot from when we were growing up and like my kids are now. But still, I try to teach them, it's okay to have certain things, but certain things you can't have every day. I try to teach them as much as I can about the health part of the food.”

Most of the women viewed convenience foods as unhealthy and costly, but they still had their place. The women revealed that they would purchase ready-made foods once in awhile and use restaurants or visit facilities that prepare and organize meals. The women identified that eating out was a break from preparing meals all week, or a treat for the whole family. Even though the meal might be less healthy and cost more for the family, the benefit of not having to prepare the meal was a good bargain.

8.0 Discussion

8.1 Introduction

The literature suggests that a number of internal and external factors influence a behaviour:³ in this case, how the mother prepares meals for her family. Food choice varies, according to family member's preferences, time limitations, price, health, traditions and beliefs surrounding food. Her work environment and schedule, friends and peers, her husband's work schedule, food industry and availability of convenience options are all factors that influence food choices and shape the mother's views on food and meal preparation and the meaning she ascribes to them. It is evident that food choice is a complex issue. As identified by the social ecological theory, there is a reciprocal relationship among and between varying factors.³

In this research, the experiences of the women are described and the meaning they ascribe to them are identified and analyzed. Making food choices for the family is complex and multi-factorial.³ The social ecological model encourages the researcher to consider all the factors that may impact the mother's experiences with food and meal

preparation and how they contribute as a whole to her decisions about food for her family. This theory helps to interpret the findings by examining the data collected in the interviews in relation to the systems in the theory (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem).

The mother's past experiences played a relevant part and were tied in with her beliefs and current practices. Exploring the mother's past experiences contributed another dimension of how complex food choice is and how heavily past experiences influence behaviour. Participants identified certain factors such as where they lived, whether they had access to certain foods, how their own parents grew or stored food, and views about food during their childhood. The family's food choice is influenced by environmental factors within their own settings; such as the father's type of work or the mother's ability to stay home. For example, participants referred to eating fish because of their father's work in the fishing industry, or having homemade foods because their mothers were home to prepare and cook foods. The past in itself can be interpreted using the social ecological theory and how it contributes to the mother's food choices today is perpetual. While culture changes over time, so too, does its influence on society. The interview questioned external factors and how they might influence food choice or preparation. These included such items as price, media and health trends. Health messages from today's society play a role in how food is viewed. Research in nutrition is recent and has contributed to how families make food choices. Factors in the environment do not succinctly fit into one layer of the social ecological model perfectly, but rather are overlapping multiple layers because they are complex systems working together.

Data was coded using MaxQDA and further analyzed using phenomenology theory to explore the meaning the mother's ascribed to their experiences, how their experiences were connected to their past and what barriers and obstacles they faced.

8.2 Making Connections: The Spheres Re-visited

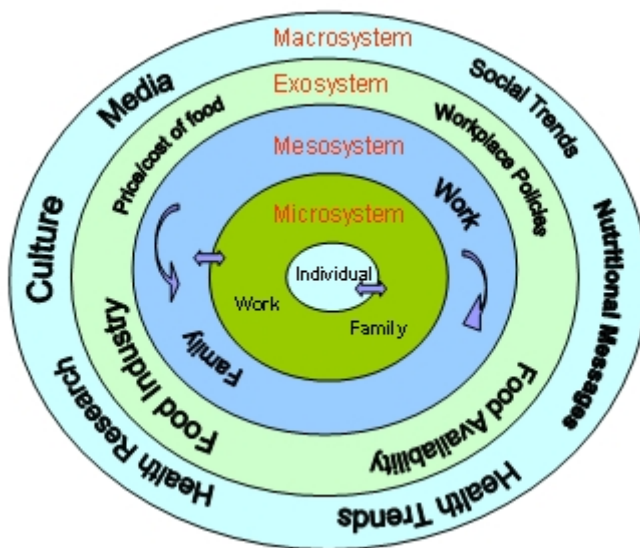


Figure 8.1 Findings within the Social Ecological Theory Framework

8.2.1 Microsystem

The microsystem forms the mother's most immediate environment.^{27,43} This system includes family, friends and workplace settings and her engagement in them.^{27,43}

Interpersonal factors, roles the mother fulfills, how she perceives herself and education contribute to how the individual interprets and processes information. The research explored factors in the microsystem to explore the meaning the mother attributed to them.

In many cases, the mothers had multiple roles when it came to mealtime. She was typically involved with choosing foods, grocery shopping, preparing the foods, cooking

and serving, as well as clean-up. The women had many roles in comparison with their husbands' meal-related contributions. It was evident that the lead up to the meal could be very stressful and frustrating; therefore, deciding what to serve, trying to please everybody, trying to incorporate variety, and trying to serve healthy, timely meals could be some factors contributing to making the task stressful. Her role could change because of work schedules, but her husband did not always fulfill the role up to par with what she would typically do. She would provide a complete meal whereas he may cook the meat portion only; the women noted that their husbands were responsible for barbecuing. Other participants noted that if their husband cooked then he might prepare something much simpler and not as nutritious as when the woman cooks.

Her past experiences were intertwined with her expectations, perceptions about food, values for traditions and how she viewed meal-time. For example, positive past experiences led to similar behaviours within her own family, while negative experiences led to the reverse of behaviours. Her husband's own past experiences also played a role in shaping the meal, from what food was served to whether or not he participated in some of the food-related duties.

The participants felt it was necessary for their children to learn food skills, and many felt it was part of their role to teach their children. The participants noted that they felt meal preparation work should be less gender-based, more equally shared, or at the very least, that their children should know how to do things for themselves. There have been social changes in regards to women working. As a result, the mother saw that her children

needed to learn food skills, and that she would provide them. There was indeed a reciprocal relationship that existed between environment and behavior and this perception was influenced by varying factors within the environment. For example, a participant noted that as convenience foods take over, she would like her son to know some basic food skills so that he can create meals. The same participant had struggled with the lack of food skills her husband had, and had concluded that it would be in her son's best interest to learn about food to prevent similar issues. In this case, and perhaps for others, she wanted to disrupt dominant roles. All of the participants had enrolled their children in a cooking program, which attests to how important they felt about their children learning new skills.

Knowledge, skills and attitudes about food preparation can contribute to how a mother views her role towards food.³ Her past was heavily tied to the development of these factors. One of the participants grew up in a household where the children actively contributed with the food preparation. As such, it was very similar in her present day household; the children were actively involved with meal preparation and clean up. This participant developed many skills to prepare foods and valued teaching her children similar food skills. This was one example on how the past has influenced her role. Gender, experiences, social norms and expectations can contribute to her perceived role, as well as her husband's own views and experiences. For example, many of the women had mothers who stayed home and prepared all the meals. This was the social norm in previous years. This has likely contributed to the development of her own roles and expectations that she may fulfill some of the same duties. For some, the role to become

involved with meal preparation was learned in their childhood, whether it was expected or developed out of interest. This carried on into her present household. Although the participants did not identify any expectations within their household, it does not mean that they did not exist, and that they were not fulfilling them.

Her role was related to factors such as time and work schedules. In most cases, the participants had multiple roles and responsibilities in food preparation, even when they were working part-time or full-time. How much her role was affected was dependent on work hours and other scheduled events. However, gender and past experiences seemed to have a heavier influence on their role than time and work. In other words, despite busy schedules and working, she still carried out the role of meal preparation most of the time. The literature suggests conflict between home and work life due to time constraints or other priorities such as activities and homework.⁶ Conflicts with employment was not extensively explored in this research, but there was some evidence to support this. Home and work conflict depended on work schedules and the husband's flexibility. In some cases, when the husband was available, he was more likely to contribute to meals. Whether he contributed was also related to his own past experiences, beliefs and roles. His roles form from interconnected relationships and is impacted by many varying factors. Most of the participants had time for meal preparation because of their work schedules (working part-time or staying home with children), but those who worked full-time did have more challenges. The woman's role might have changed when her work schedule changed, such as more time at home when she had a baby or less time at home if she went back to work, or increased her work hours. Paid employment plays a role in

shaping food choices through time, income, and education, which all play major roles in themselves. A larger income allows for greater food selection, including many healthy options but also the ability to eat out more frequently. The participants did not report any significant challenges related to income or education to eat healthy. Some participants commented about the cost of frequently eating out. They noted how they may eat out more frequently if they had more money, but evidence shows that this is a less healthy option to eating at home, which was another reason they chose not to eat outside the home.

It was evident that many of the participants were motivated to provide a nutritious and satisfying meal for their family. Food is a means of nurturing and in her role to nurture her children, she may feel obligated to provide healthy food. The research suggests that a mother can believe that providing healthy foods is a means to fulfil her role as a mother.⁶ In this research, it was evident that fussiness over foods could be very stressful. It challenged her role as a mother, whereby she may feel bad about giving her child foods he or she does not like. She wanted her children to enjoy the meal and if the children or her husband do not like the meal, that meant she did not do a good job. Her identity was attached to how she was responded to by her family.

Most of the participants felt overwhelmed and exhausted at times with fulfilling some of their roles with food preparation; from the daily decision of deciding what to prepare, to purchasing groceries, preparing and cooking the meal, and the clean up afterwards. They all appreciated a meal out once in awhile and almost all mentioned that they would love

to have more help from their husbands. The woman has traditionally carried out the role of meal preparation, and even though a high percentage of women have entered the workforce, the gendered role to prepare foods as a means of caring for the family is still the social norm.²³ While men have begun to contribute in some way, the women of this research have shown that they perform many of the food duties and that it is challenging even for those who stay home. Preparing food in today's society is more complex; there are more options, more advertising and greater food availability compared to the past. To tie that in with the challenge of balancing work and meals, family food choice becomes even more complicated.

8.2.2 Mesosystem

The mesosystem is an extension of environmental components where individuals spend their time and the relationship between settings, such as churches, work organizations, home, schools and recreation centres.^{27,43} Changes in one setting within the microsystem affects other settings within the microsystem which impacts the individual. For example, changes at the woman's work place will be felt within the family because of her connection to each setting. Her role with food and meal preparation or how she selects food for her family is significantly influenced by changes within her settings. One significant example is when a woman has a baby and takes time off of work to be home with her child. Her domestic roles may change as a result because she is home throughout the day. This also applied to women who had taken on more hours of work perhaps because their children had entered school or they had increased their working hours. Therefore, the expectations about roles change in relation to changes within her settings.

From past examples, it was likely that her role could develop through changes to within the microsystem. For example, the relationship between one participant and her mother and the roles that had been formed created situations where the participant would fulfill food and meal roles when her mother was absent to look after her sick aunt. Another participant assumed her role to help out when her step-mother had a baby. The change within the family created further changes in roles because of the relationship within the setting.

8.2.3 Exosystem

This system is made up of the social structures that influence the settings where an individual spends most of her time through the way it operates or functions.^{27,43} The individual's immediate settings are affected by policies, regulatory principles and the organization of the setting. How the individual interacts within her environment is influenced by these principles. Social networks, workplace structure, food availability and distribution²⁷ forms some of the influences in the mother's environment. The media belongs in this system and also impacts food behaviours.

The husband's work environment and its organization affected the family environment which in turn was a strong influence over what roles the woman carried out. Depending on the nature of the husband's work, the organization could allow for flexible working hours. If he was able to be home for meals, it would have likely changed what was served and rules around the table, or the formality of the meal. In some examples, the husband had flexible working hours and was able to participate in meals. In contrast,

given the type of the work the husband was employed in, he could have worked long hours and was unable to participate in meals, or he was not even home to eat with the family. In another example, the husband's type of work required travelling and being away from the family which meant responsibilities for meals would fall completely on the woman. In one instance it was shown that when the husband was away from the meal, for the family it meant more convenience choices, quicker food options and many times having to plan ahead.

The participants referred to food that was available when they were growing up which often was limited. Having limited access to fresh foods during winter months meant canned goods or frozen foods from the summer. There was also limited variety and no exposure to different cultured foods. It was suggested that the increase in food availability has made food selection more complex. There is much more choice and variety. Having limited access to foods can dictate which foods are served at mealtime and can make the mother's roles more challenging if she is seeking to offer certain foods, such as fresh vegetables and fruit. The family can have a greater exposure to a variety of foods when different kinds of foods are available.

The food industry affects food availability and can work to make some foods more easily accessible. The food industry can recognize the pressure families may experience through work schedules and dual working parents. They make convenient foods choices more available. There are more convenient food options marketed each year. A neighbourhood can be bombarded with fast food outlets and restaurants which can make

it easier to purchase a meal out rather than spend time preparing a meal at home. The women in this research noted visiting restaurants or using other convenient options as a break from their daily role of meal preparation. Convenience foods are impacting the family meal and changing what it means to sit and have a meal together.

Pricing and cost of food is regulated by government and is outside of the woman's control. Cost of food can be a barrier to serving healthy foods. Most women identified food costs as persuading their purchases, but in most cases, food cost was not the most significant issue. Health was a higher priority than the cost of food. Food preferences many times took over as priority to costs of food. The women saw convenience foods as more costly. If they considered the convenience food healthy and comparable to home cooking they might justify purchasing it, if it makes meal preparation easier.

8.2.4 Macrosystem

The most outward layer of the environment forms widely shared cultural values, global trends, influences, and belief systems.⁴³ These are the structural characteristics of the society.²⁷ The media also belongs within this system because of its influence on culture, society and communities. Cultural norms have shifted in different ways; in regards to employment, it is more common for women to work⁶ but still perform many of the food preparation duties.²³ In regards to food itself, consumption of convenience foods, and fast-food outlets has increased.⁵⁻⁸ We identify food as being a social means of which to gather groups or individuals (and not solely to provide nutrients for our bodies or to prevent disease). Many participants identified picky eating in their own household and remembered it being unacceptable when they were growing up. Within families, mothers

were being more accommodating to children and their food preferences. Many of the women identified picky eating in their families and how common it was for them to provide a food or meal liked by the children, instead of offering a meal and the child having to take what is offered. Creating this norm may be connected to food preferences and societal perceptions about roles.

There is a cultural trend toward eating outside the home and purchasing convenience foods. The women identified how and when they would use convenience options. There was a preference toward homemade and healthier meals. There were times when convenience foods were chosen, for reasons such as taking a break from cooking or because of time limitations. Even within choosing convenience options, many mothers still opted for healthier alternatives. Health was a significant motivating factor towards choosing foods.

Social and health trends externally influenced her role and food choices. New research in nutrition has led to an increased number of health messages. There was a health trend identified with the women of this research. For example, almost all of the participants noted how important it was to read and compare nutrition food labels on food products. This shows that the participants were influenced by health messages and the promotion of healthier products. They were all very keen on choosing healthy foods and products. However, individuals are also influenced by food availability and food industry through the accessibility of convenience products. The interaction of social influences, media, education, income and personal practices contribute to how she would make decisions

around choosing healthy foods. Although it is uncertain to say for sure, global trends in obesity and more media messaging in regards to weight issues may also influence families to place health as a priority. All of the women were very concerned with providing healthy foods and meals and some mentioned weight or health issues. The intention to provide healthy meals could easily go astray when challenges arose, such as time or energy constraints.

It was found that the participants used some sort of convenience option, whether as a treat or because of limited time, energy or family food preferences. Her decisions to purchase convenience options were influenced by costs, health, time, taste, as well as perceptions about convenience products. For some, health played a larger role, whereas they would not purchase an item just because of its convenience. Facilities that provide organized meals for families seemed like a healthier alternative to a fast food option, and also helped the families who used them to plan for future meals. The decision to purchase or use healthier products was also influenced by their own experiences, education and values towards health. Factors within the macrosystem interact with other factors in all the systems, such as personalities, preferences, family, time and work schedules. Each influences another and nothing occurs independently.²⁷

It is important to identify the challenges women face to better support them in the context in which they make their food choices for their families. It is essential to understand the multitude of factors that contribute to how a woman makes food choices for her family and to identify what meaning she ascribes to some of these practices. It was evident that

there are many challenges to preparing a family meal, therefore, it is important to consider the stress that may be present in an individual's environment and how these can impact food choices.

The participants were all married; it would have been interesting to obtain the viewpoints of the husband. Some research that has explored a father's perceptions found that it was often more challenging to prepare family meals (than for the mother),²³ likely because it was a new role for them. It would have also added to the research if there had been a variety of participants, such as single parents, (including single fathers) divorced parents or other cultures. There was a participant who added some richness to the data through her background of growing up in the Middle East, which seemed to provide some different meanings and experiences. All of the mothers were from a children's cooking program. They shared some similar attitudes toward food skills and healthy eating. Collecting information from mothers outside of the cooking program would have likely provided variable information and new perceptions.

9.0 Conclusions

The purpose of the research was to explore a mother's personal experience with, and the meaning she ascribes to, food and meal preparation within the family environment. The objectives in the research were to explore the mothers' experiences with food and meal preparation, to identify the meaning she ascribes to food and meal preparation in her present day life and examine how the meaning and experiences are inter-connected to her current family environment, including factors that pose challenges to preparing a family meal. There were three main themes identified: *Constructs of the Meal*, *The Mother's*

Roles, and Food Choice Influences. These were common perspectives across the data from the different participants. Each mother placed emphasis on sharing the meal, carrying out traditions and implementing rules around food or meals that were important for her. It was revealed that all the women had multiple roles when it came to meal preparation. They were often the ones to decide what would be served, perform the grocery shopping, prepare and cook the meal, and further clean up. Her role extended to teaching her children food skills and providing nutritious, yet satisfying meals. There were a number of challenges to complete the task: differing tastes of family members and limiting time contributed a lot of frustration or stress. The participants identified a number of food choice influences, including food preferences, health, pricing of food and convenience options that swayed how they would purchase foods. Although there were many factors that contributed to how or why she prepared a meal, it was for the purpose of analysis, to evaluate each one separately.

The mother's past experiences influenced the mother in a variety of ways: to carry out traditions, create food and meals similar or different to her own upbringing based on positive or negative experiences, developed gender roles and responsibilities related to food, and techniques learned from family members, such as preparing and freezing foods ahead. The social ecological theory helped to explain that behaviours are connected to different types of experiences and how experiences contribute to shaping food choices. The social ecological theory identifies a reciprocal relationship between individual and the settings in which one lives and interacts. The mother used experiences from her past to create her environment for today. The mother had perceptions and ideas of how she

wanted the meal to unfold and what that meant for her. Her ideas about meal times often stemmed from past experiences. She identified meals with making connections. She tried to maintain stability and structure of the meal and did this by creating and implementing her own rules around food and meals. Having a meal with structure provided routine and minimized chaos. The women wanted the family to routinely eat together or eat certain foods. She was aware that her children would learn from her own modelled behaviour and from the environment that she provided. Therefore, she wanted to provide structure as a means of influencing her children in a positive way and so that they could find meaning in sharing and eating together as well. Influences from social or health trends, may have also influenced her to develop some of her own practices. Her rules around food and meals also helped her to be organized with planning and preparing meals.

The ways she learned to cook contributed to how she perceived her role. If it began during childhood out of interest then she had more interest in cooking as an adult. A few of the participants were involved with family meals as a child, and it was evident that they had an easier time planning and preparing ahead. The literature explains that those who have organizational skills, such as planning and preparing foods ahead may find the task of preparing a meal less stressful.⁶ Certainly, the women commented that making meals would be easier if they planned and prepared better. They also indicated that if they had more time they could plan and prepare more foods. All of the participants had different experiences growing up, but most had mothers who fulfilled significant roles with meal preparation. Some of the women contributed to meals while they were still at

home with their families but many learned out of necessity. They had expectations of themselves that they would need to know how to cook in order to provide for their families. It was clear that they had developed roles out of gender and social expectations. The number of women who have entered the workforce has likely presented challenges to preparing meals at home. Social views toward paid employment and roles at home have begun to change in some aspects, but the position of the woman is that she still performs most of the domestic work.

The mother had developed a number of roles related to meal preparation; she held most of the responsibilities and the husband often contributed in a small way or only when she was absent. Most of the women were in paid employment but still carried most of the meal preparation responsibilities. There were a number of challenges identified, and some of them tied in with employment: such as not having enough time to prepare a healthy meal or not having the energy to cook something after work. Many of the participants noted that it was easier to prepare healthier meals when they had more time, such as if they got off work early or if they were home. The literature documents the conflict between work and family demands.⁶ It was apparent from this research that there were many challenges in balancing family and other priorities, however; many of the challenges stemmed from creating the meal itself. The meaning that mothers ascribed to creating the meal was stressful at times. Having to think about family food preferences, health concerns, the price of food and time constraints could contribute to some of the stress felt by participants. It was noted many times that one of the most difficult tasks was deciding what to serve the family. This has not been noted previously in the

literature. The experiences of the woman reveal the lengths that they will go to, to accommodate their family and to provide meals that are acceptable to them. The mother's own goals, such as to serve healthy options, were in some ways in contrast to what the family members actually preferred, which created tension. It was important for the mother to serve the family foods and meals that they enjoyed because she wanted them to be happy with the meal.

The women felt it was important to teach their children food skills. They felt it was necessary for their children to know how to prepare foods for themselves and to be able to contribute in a family setting. Women discussed how they preferred homemade foods. All of the women had enrolled their children into a cooking program which provides evidence that they wanted their children to know how to prepare foods. The fact that time is an issue for many families lends itself to the ability to be able to enroll children into a cooking program when parents feel it is absolutely necessary. They felt it was important for their children to develop skills and felt it was important to involve them in cooking at home.

Family food preferences dictate what foods are served. The parents select and purchase foods and have a significant influence over what foods the family eats. The husband may have a big influence over what foods were prepared. In both past and present families, the husband's own preferences swayed food selection for the family. The children also have a great influence over what foods are bought and prepared: and perhaps increasingly so. Many referred to their own past where picky eating was not catered to. Parents today

were more likely to consider their child's preferences and accommodate them; they wanted their children to enjoy the meal, eat the food and not complain. They were willing to provide several different foods in order to make the family members happy.

The literature describes an increase in convenience foods and foods eaten outside the home.⁵ Most of the women viewed convenience foods as unhealthy and costly, but they still had their place. The women revealed that they would purchase ready-made foods or visit restaurants (including fast-food) on occasion. The women identified that eating out was a break from preparing meals all week, or a treat for the whole family. Even though the meal might be less healthy and cost more for the family, the benefit of not having to prepare the meal was a good bargain once in awhile. A few of the participants were interested in using a facility that prepared and organized meals ahead for purchase. They indicated that it helped them prepare for future meals. The research suggests that cooking at home has nutritional benefits and eating together provides social needs for the family.²⁶ When eating outside the home was addressed, participants identified the financial costs of frequently eating out. The participants in this group were highly concerned about health and providing their family with nutritious meals. Health was identified as another reason by participants to prepare foods at home more frequently. Even when they would choose convenience options, they would often consider a healthier alternative, for example, using a facility that prepared dinners versus eating out at a fast-food establishment. A few noted that eating out at restaurants was more common today for them than when they were growing up. Participants discussed the increase in available foods today and thought it has made choosing foods even more

difficult. They were trying to provide a balance for their children by not frequently eating outside the home.

The participants in the research identified that health was very important for them and that reading food labels helped them compare products and choose the healthiest choice. Obesity trends may impact how families view food.³⁷ It is possible that health messages and research in nutrition has influenced them to be more conscious about making food choices. The changes in food and culture have led the women to believe that cooking skills are essential.

Providing healthy foods was not identified as an issue for the participants. For most of the women, it was part of the way they made food selections. It played into how or if they chose convenience options and what kind of food they served at the meal. It was important for the women to provide healthy foods and create healthy habits. It is possibly a norm that they are creating within their own households and making their own children more aware of selecting healthier food products.

The women in this research did not identify cost of food as being a barrier to eating healthy or serving foods they wanted. They bought foods they thought the family would eat with consideration for costs, but not as the deciding factor. The women are able to select nutritious foods for their families and feel good about their food selections because they do not have to make sacrifices or choose foods they would not otherwise choose. It

is likely that this relieves some of the burden women could feel if they were not able to provide healthy foods for their family.

The outcomes of this research demonstrate the complexity of choosing and preparing foods for the family. It reveals that there is more involved than the cooking part of the meal. It demonstrates the challenges that exist concerning time, health, food preferences, costs and personal skills. While most of these participants were concerned about health and often chose to prepare foods at home, it was evident that they still need support and encouragement to make healthy choices. Families need quick and healthy meal ideas and support to prepare foods at home. It is becoming the social norm to purchase more foods more completely prepared, but if health is the top priority, families need to be encouraged to prepare homemade healthier options. It is important to have facilities that teach food skills to children as this was identified as being very important. Developing food skills makes it easier to prepare foods at home and teaches food safety techniques. Children should be encouraged to participate in meal preparation and fulfill some of the responsibility of preparing meals when appropriate. Having shared responsibilities within the family can make the meal preparation easier, alleviate some of the pressure from the mother, and also help the family connect in a positive way.

9.1 Limitations of the Research

“Gathering data is easy; gathering meaningful data is a whole other challenge”.⁴⁶ The success of the interview is largely determined by the answers sought and the researcher’s ability to probe and uncover perceptions and meanings about the participant’s

experiences.⁴⁶ The researcher herself may be a limitation for retrieving all details in regards to the purpose of the research.

The interview required participants to rely on memory of past experiences. They may have been able to recall most, but certainly not all, relevant factors. It was important for the researcher to note that which the participant identified as relevant but also that which the participant had not identified as relevant. Meaning is derived not only from what is said, but also from that what is not said. In addition, some participants may have purposefully withheld certain information. Relying on memory of past experiences may have been subject to error; however, it was relevant to identify the experiences as the participants perceived and acknowledged them.

The researcher's own experiences and perceptions influenced how information was interpreted. However, this is a major component of the phenomenology approach. The researcher contributes to the interpretation of the data by using his/her own background, experiences and perspectives. Yet, there may be more than one interpretation of the narratives.

The participants were a homogeneous sample of the population due to the fact that they had all registered their children in a cooking program. They shared similar viewpoints about the importance of their children learning food skills. They differed in other aspects, such as whether they worked full or part-time and their experiences growing up. Interviewing a wider more heterogeneous sample of mothers may have provided

additional information relevant to the research. Theoretical saturation had been achieved because no new information was coming out of the research. Although the researcher felt like theoretical saturation had been achieved, one participant dropped out of the research who would have provided a different take whereas she was a single mother. The researcher had recruited and interviewed participants over the summer but once the new school year had begun, it was very difficult to recruit any further participants. Therefore, the timing of the research played a role into the number of participants and the results of the study. Since the research had taken place over the summer, many of the women were reflective upon their husband's role to barbecue and contribute to the meal in that way. If the research had been performed during the winter months, there may be some different perceptions toward selecting and preparing foods. The women may also have other coping strategies they use during the winter months to prepare foods, such as using a slow-cooker or more freezing.

10.0 Recommendations

10.1 Implications

The family environment is an important component of many environments that influence health and food behaviours. To understand and identify support that is needed for families, research that targets food activities such as preparing food, making meals and cleaning up are key.³² Blake et al and Nordenmark sought to understand how women interpret stress from household chores.^{23,33} Blake et al looked specifically at women and their ability to use coping mechanisms with food choices.²³ As Nordenmark identified,

coping abilities and role-related stress was dependent on numerous variables.³³ One of the trends identified was that higher income/educated women felt less stress than lower-income women as related to balancing work and family demands. It was concluded that a higher income can offset some of the stress that challenges can create.³³ It is relevant to identify the challenges that some families may have with creating family meals and the meaning that this has for them. Information gathering would be best achieved by those who work with families, including health professionals, psychologists, home visitors, physicians and others. These professions who work with families would be the best mode of translating research into practice.

Social trends and norms are very influential in influencing behaviours and research suggests that eating out is becoming the social norm. In order to have eating at home with the family the social norm, it has to be supported and advocated for. This could be the role of those who work closely with families to advocate through their work and educate families. The media plays a significant role in promoting health messages and could be another means of advocating for family meal times. Messages about nutrition and making healthy food choices have been successful in having people consider their food choices. Consistent messages about the family meal could also be successful.

Families need to know the benefits of eating together with the family, as well as the benefits of preparing homemade foods and having the children involved in meal preparation. For professions working with families, it is essential to identify the challenges that may exist in having the family eat together, or to prepare homemade

family meals in order to work within what is practical for the family. It is important to identify the distribution of tasks and encourage the family to become more involved with meal planning, preparation and clean-up. Offering resources such as cook books and meal ideas may help some families. Health professionals should offer coping strategies for dealing with lack of time, such as quick meal ideas instead of opting for fast food options. For families who lack food skills, courses that teach food skills would help families succeed at preparing more homemade foods. Facilities or programs that offer cooking skills can contribute to healthier eating. Parents, families or children could develop skills to cook, prepare foods ahead, and learn planning techniques. Facilities that offer cooking programs or workshops are a form of support through a social environment. Costs can be an issue for some families. Funding was provided to the cooking program that these participants were recruited from. It may be the best means of providing cooking programs to some families. Individuals who advocate for healthy families can recognize this as a need in community settings. It can be a challenge to identify individuals who can teach the cooking skills without having to pay a lot of money. For children to get exposure to cooking and learning skills it needs to be recognized by parents and government as something that is beneficial and for today's generation, very necessary. Schools have limited lessons taught about food skills. Individuals who advocate for families can show support for the need for funded programs. In addition, parents can request the availability of such programs and push for funding as well. This cooking program was developed through parents request and funded through the government.

Work environments that support the family structure can have a significant impact on the family meal. Employers that are able to give their employees flexible working hours or allow self-scheduling can support the family meal. Employees have more opportunities for meals with their families and more time to devote to meal preparation. The employee has more control over their working hours and can schedule how it works best for them and their families. Many health messages around the work environment and its role on health are new and ongoing. Any person working with occupational health or a workplace wellness committee can advocate for flexible working hours in their workplace.

It is likely that individuals will choose foods prepared outside the home more frequently if they do not have food skills. Future research should evaluate how individuals perceive the importance of acquiring food skills. It would be informative to evaluate the difference in genders. In the research, participants felt frustrated by their husband's lack of knowledge and felt it was important for their sons to acquire food skills. It would certainly alleviate some of the pressure of preparing family meals if there was more family involvement. There is no research on how families teach their children food skills in the home. It would be interesting to know how much teaching occurs in the home, children's involvement and when children begin to learn certain food skills. It would be relevant to identify what food skills are most important. Cooking programs or workshops could focus on developing those skills.

It can be challenging to prepare homemade, healthy meals when there are dual parents working. The women found it difficult to prepare meals everyday with little support or input on meal ideas. Research shows that eating outside the home is a growing trend, yet research also shows the importance of eating together at home with the family. Families will choose quicker food options if they feel they do not have time, or ideas about what foods to prepare. Through encouraging families to come together for the family meal and to have family members contribute in some form (whether through meal ideas, purchasing, preparation, cooking or clean up), the family meal can regain its importance as a priority for families.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A- Research Information Sheet

Research Information Sheet

What is this study?

This is a study to explore mothers' personal experience with cooking and food, both past and present. The goal is to identify the meaning she relates to these experiences.

Who is doing this study?

Heather Baillie, who is a graduate student at Mount Saint Vincent University and also your son/daughter's cooking instructor. She is performing a thesis project to meet her requirements for her degree in the Masters of Science Applied Human Nutrition. She is being supervised by Daphne Lordly, a professor at Mount Saint Vincent University.

What will I have to do?

Heather would like to schedule an interview at a time and place that is convenient for you. She will ask questions about your experiences with cooking and food. It will take about an hour. Heather will return to go over the written piece to make sure everything is correct and interpreted as you intended. This may take an additional half hour.

What will happen to my interview answers?

They will be analyzed along with other interviews. They will be kept confidential and no names will be exchanged. No single interview will be discussed, but some sentences that stand out may be quoted, with permission. The interviews will be discussed as a whole, both in the written part of the thesis, and in the thesis defence. They will be discarded after the thesis defence.

Can I withdraw if I choose?

Yes. At anytime you can choose to withdraw without penalty to yourself or your child.

Is there an incentive for participating?

Not to you directly; however, others may benefit from the knowledge that is retrieved from the research.

How will my child be affected?

Heather will still be your child's cooking instructor. Participation or non-participation in this research will not involve or influence your child in any way. The cooking classes, and the children involved in them, will not be used for this research.

The Halifax Regional Municipality recreation office is aware of research activities and gives permission for Heather as researcher to approach parents for request of participation through face to face contact or telephone.

If you have any more questions, or would like more details about this research project, please email Heather Baillie at research_project@live.ca or Daphne Lordly at Mount Saint Vincent University, 457-6249. Thank you!

Appendix B- Expression of Interest Form

Expression of Interest Form

(This form will be used to gain contact information from participants. It will be distributed to parents for them to return to the researcher during the cooking class hours.)

Dear Mothers,

Please return this form to Heather (cooking class instructor) next week, whether you are interested in participating in the research project or not.

Please indicate the following:

Name of son or daughter in the program: _____. (This is just so I know who I have received forms from.)

_____ No, I would not like to participate

_____ Yes, I would like to participate

If you have answered yes, please fill in the following required information:

Your name: _____

Your phone number: _____

Where would you like to have the interview?

_____ my house

_____ public café, such as Tim Hortons

_____ Mount Saint Vincent University

_____ other, please indicate _____

Do you give permission for me to voice record the interview? _____

When is the best time to reach you by phone?

Would you like to receive a written summary of the results upon completion of the study?

Yes No

If yes, how would you like to receive the summary?

_____ by e-mail. My e-mail is _____

_____ by snail mail. My mailing address is _____

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Heather Baillie
Mount Saint Vincent University
166 Bedford Highway
Halifax, N.S.
B3M 2J6
Email: research_project@live.ca

I am a graduate student in the Department of Applied Human Nutrition at Mount Saint Vincent University. As part of my thesis project, I am conducting research under the supervision of Daphne Lordly, Associate Professor at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax. I am inviting you to participate in my study, **“An Exploration of Mothers’ Personal Experience with Food and meal preparation, and the Meaning within the Family Environment”**. The purpose of the study is to explore mothers’ experiences with food and cooking and to examine how the meaning she relates to these experiences is connected with the current family environment.

This study involves meeting with the researcher for an in-person interview. All parents who have children in the Halifax Regional Municipality cooking programs will be asked to participate. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete and will take place at a time and place convenient to you. The interview will be used to gain an understanding about past and present food experiences. The session will be audio recorded for later transcription. After the interview is transcribed, I will meet up with you again, at a time and place convenient to you, to go over the transcript to verify that it is correct. This will take an additional half hour. I will not be observing your children or the cooking classes themselves. Upon completion of the research, you will be provided with a written summary of the results, should you wish to have it.

While there is no direct benefit to you by participating in the study, others may benefit from the knowledge that is acquired from this research project. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may also choose not to answer some interview questions and are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty to you or your child who is in the cooking program. All data will be stored in a locked cabinet in a private room in my home when not in use.

Privacy and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research process. Only myself and my advisor will have access to your identity which will be needed to contact you in order to review your transcript. Once the transcript is reviewed, the original identifiers will be removed. All electronic files containing stored data will be password protected. After completion of the project, all identifying documents (such as consent forms) will be destroyed by the researcher in a secure manner. It is the researcher’s intention that the results of this work be disseminated through publication or at conferences. You can be assured that any publications or presentations based upon this research will not contain your name or other identifying information without your permission.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Heather Baillie by email at research_project@live.ca or Daphne Lordly at 902-457-6259 or by email at Daphne.Lordly@msvu.ca. This research activity has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved with this study, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 902-457-6350 or by email at research@msvu.ca.

Consent for Participation

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in the study.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

Consent to Voice Record

I consent to being voice recorded during the 1 hour interview. I understand that I may ask that the tape recorder be shut off at any time.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

One signed copy to be kept by the researcher, one signed copy to the participant.

*Appendix D- Demographic Questionnaire
Interview Guide & Interview*

Demographic Information Questionnaire

(Adopted and modified from the Canadian 2006 Census Survey⁵³)

1. Including yourself, how many people currently live in your house?

2. Please identify the following information about the people currently living in the household. *Please proceed from oldest to youngest. Include yourself and make an asterisk (*) in the relationship column.*

Person 1 Age _____ Sex _____ Relationship _____

Person 2 Age _____ Sex _____ Relationship _____

Person 3 Age _____ Sex _____ Relationship _____

Person 4 Age _____ Sex _____ Relationship _____

Person 5 Age _____ Sex _____ Relationship _____

Person 6 Age _____ Sex _____ Relationship _____

Person 7 Age _____ Sex _____ Relationship _____

Person 8 Age _____ Sex _____ Relationship _____

3. MARITAL STATUS *Mark 1 circle only.*

☐ Never legally married (single)

☐ Common-law

☐ Legally married (and not separated)

☐ Separated, but still legally married

☐ Divorced

☐ Widowed

4. EDUCATION *Answer using Y for Yes. Leave blank for No. Mark all that apply.*

Have you completed:

High school or equivalent _____

A Registered Apprenticeship or Trades certificate or diploma _____

College _____

University _____ --> certificate or diploma _____

Bachelor's degree _____

Master's degree _____

Degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary, medicine or optometry _____

Doctorate _____

Other _____ Please Specify _____

5. EMPLOYMENT

a.) How many hours do you spend working for pay or in self employment in one week?

Number of hours (Average)

b.) How many hours does your spouse or common-law partner (if applicable) spend working for pay or in self employment in one week?

Number of hours (Average)

6. CULTURE

a.) Please list the ethnic or cultural origins of those who live in the house.

You may list more than one

Examples: Canadian, English, French, Chinese, Italian, German, Scottish, East Indian, Irish, Mi'kmaq, Ukrainian, Dutch, Filipino, Polish, Jewish, Jamaican, Lebanese, etc.

7. Do you have religious practices that influence certain ways of cooking or eating at home? Can you explain?

Example: Jewish

Interview Guide

The questions asked in the interview are targeted around these following items. In the literature, these are some of the influences that affect how food, cooking and meal preparation is viewed and practiced.

Past

- who cooked the meals
- roles of parents in food preparation or cooking
- lifestyle at time (family structure, such as two-parent household, number of working parents)
- did the family always eat together?
- did parents emphasize health at all as a priority for serving foods?
- did anyone else help prepare meals?
- parents employment
- challenges and barriers (for meal prep. or for healthy foods)
- food preferences
- food exposures

Present

- who usually cooks meals
- roles of parents in food preparation or cooking
- lifestyle/family structure (single parent family? Working parents?)
- how often eat together as a family (and especially at home together)
- what role does health play for family meals?
- challenges and barriers for a.) preparing meals b.) preparing healthy foods
- do others help with meal prep?
- employment

Meaning

- cooking (meals, healthy meals). What does it mean to cook a meal for family?
- mother and food. How does she see her role? What meaning does that have?
- support from family members? Do others help out? What meaning does that have?
- what significance does the family meal have? - quality time? What else?
- work conflicts and family demands. How does this influence the family meal?

Past experiences *Not all probing questions would be used, just the ones that have not been answered by the participant in their response, and if deemed necessary by the researcher.*

1. Tell me what meal time was typically like for you growing up. Give as much detail as possible.

Probing questions:

Who usually cooked the meals?
Who contributed to the family meal? In what ways?
Who had the primary role in cooking meals?
Did you always eat together?

2. What were some things that might have made it difficult to have a family meal prepared? (that you were aware of)

Probing questions:

What sort of things did your parents do to overcome these challenges?
Were there barriers to serving “healthy” foods?
Did employment affect family meals?
Did one family member stay home to prepare meals? (i.e. mother)
Did anyone else help to make meals?

3. When you had family meals, what may have been some things that made it possible, or encouraged having a family meal?

Probing questions:

Did your parents have cooking skills?
How was meal time viewed by members of the family?
What were the benefits?
How important do you think mealtime was for your mother? father? siblings? grandparents?

4. How important do you feel the family meal was to your mother? father ? grandparents? siblings? How do you know this?

Present experiences

- 1. Tell me what meal time is typically like for you today? Give as much detail as possible.**

Probing questions:

Who usually cooks?

Does anybody else help with meal preparation?

Do you usually eat together?

Do you watch television while you eat?

How/Where did you learn how to cook?

- 2. In what ways if any do you feel your early experience with food, cooking , mealtimes influences your present day relationship with food and cooking and meal times?**

- 3. How easy or difficult is it to create a family meal at your house? What has to happen? What helps your family? Adds pressure to the family?**

Probing questions:

What strategies do you use to deal with challenges (If any)

What do you do when it is not possible to prepare a meal? (Eat-out)

Do others contribute to making family meals?

Does somebody stay at home who is able to prepare meals?

How might employment affect family meal time?

What would be some things that might make preparing a family meal easier?

- 4. What sort of things do you think influence food choices for your family?**

Probing questions:

Does your child influence the purchase of certain foods?

Do health messages influence the purchase of certain foods?

Does ease of preparation influence the purchase of certain foods?

Does price influence the purchase of certain foods? Can you give some examples?

Meaning of Food and Meal Preparation

1. Can you tell me a bit about your thoughts around food and cooking and family meals? What is important to you and why might that be?

Probing questions:

What does having a family meal mean to you? Stressful? Important? Why?

Can you describe the various roles, including your own, held by all family members when it comes to selecting, purchasing, cooking and preparing meals at your house. Is there anything you wish would be different? If so describe?

2. What are some instances when you do not cook for the family?

Probing questions:

Do you eat out often? Why or why not?

Does someone else help with cooking? E.g. husband

How does it make you feel when you do not have to cook?

What do other members do when you do not cook?

3. What might encourage you to have a home-cooked family meal?

Probing questions:

How is meal time viewed by members of the family?

Do you think it is important to eat together as a family? Why?

What things prevent you from eating together?

What are some things that could make family meal time easier/better?

Do you enjoy cooking?

Do your family members encourage you to cook?

Are there expectations that you cook for your family? Where do they come from?

4. Can you describe what your ideal family mealtime might look like?

Probing questions:

Why do you think that is?

What needs to be in place for that to happen?

5. What would your child's ideal family mealtime look like (in your opinion)?

Probing questions:

Why do you think that is?

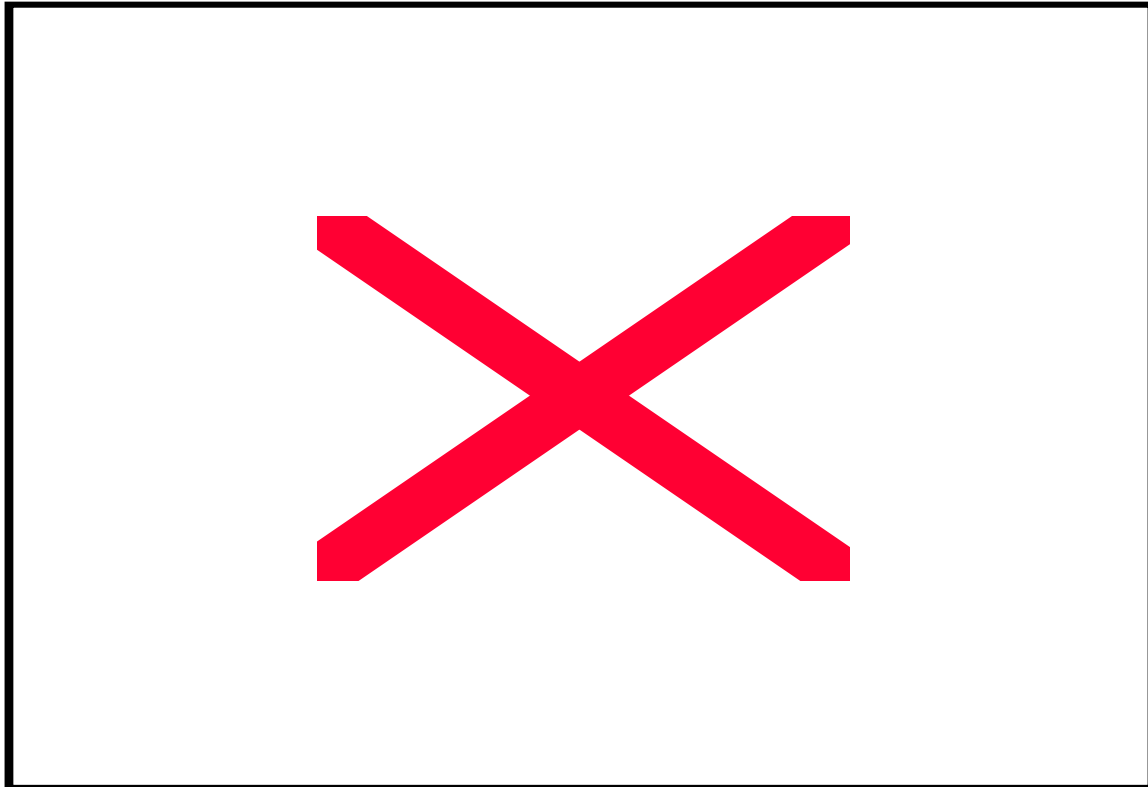
What needs to be in place for that to happen?

Appendix E: Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Framework

The Social Ecological Model (SEM) is a theory to understand how development occurs in relation to multiple levels and their interrelatedness. There are effects both between and among the different levels. Below is a diagram of the SEM showing the spheres of influence.⁴⁴

Spheres of Influence⁴⁴



Microsystem

Microsystems are those settings most immediate to an individual, including home, school, workplace and the engagement within them.⁴³ It consists of individual or interpersonal factors, roles that an individual plays and how one perceives himself/herself. Impact from gender, ethnicity and learned roles are important influences. Personality, cognitive factors and beliefs are also in this system.

Mesosystem

Mesosystems are relationships between settings in which an individual is directly involved.⁴³ This includes schools, churches, teams or companies.

Exosystem

Exosystems indirectly influence the immediate settings by forming rules, policies and characters within an organization. It could include social networks and relationships with the community in relation to the individual.⁴³

Macrosystem

Macrosystems include cultural, societal and community factors. It includes global trends and bodies of knowledge.⁴³ The media would belong in this system because of its influence on culture and communities.

Appendix F-
Demographic Information of Participants

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants

	# of ppl in house	age of ppl in household	Marital status
Ella #5	4	39, 36, 10, 6	married
Jodi #7	4	46, 45, 14, 11	married
Clare # 6	4	35, 31, 7, 4	married
Queen #9	5	42, 35, 15, 10, 5	married
Jamie #8	5	40, 40, 9, 3, 3	married
Kel #4	6	58, 41, 15, 14, 11, 9	common-law
Diane # 3	5	37, 32, 11, 7, 7 months	married
General	4 to 6	3 had teenagers 6 had a 10-11 yr.old 2-3 children on avg.	most married

	Education level	Employment	Spouse employment
Ella #5	1 year University	34	40
Jodi #7	college	25	40
Clare # 6	college	40 new	40
Queen #9	1 year University	10	>50
Jamie #8	Master's degree	none	40
Kel #4	college	40	40
Diane # 3	2 Years university	maternity	40
General	evenly split: college & university 1 year avg. 1 with Masters	2 @ home 2 full time 3 part time	most full time

	Religious practices	Culture
Ella #5	No	Canadian
Jodi #7	No	Canadian
Clare # 6	No	Canadian
Queen #9	No	Lebanese
Jamie #8	No	Canadian
Kel #4	No	Canadian
Diane # 3	No	Canadian
General	No	Canadian 1 lebanese

Appendix G- Timetable of events

Task	Tentative date of completion
Thesis Proposal	April 2008
Meet parents of cooking class	April & May 2008
Approval from UREB	May 2008
Approach parents from cooking class to participate in study	May & June 2008
Perform Interviews 1-4 a week	Summer 2008
Transcribe interviews	September 2008 to April 2009
Meet with parents to go over transcripts	Summer 2009
Analyze data	Summer 2009 to Summer 2011
Thesis write up	Summer 2009 to Summer 2011
Thesis Defense	September 2011