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Building Food Agency in the Fox Valley: A Program Evaluation Case Study at the Building For Kids in Appleton, Wisconsin

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Abstract

The Building For Kids children's museum in Appleton, Wisconsin, as a part of their recent initiative to promote food and nutrition education in the Fox Valley, developed and administered cooking classes geared towards families with young children. This honors project evaluates these workshops through the theoretical lens of food agency, an emerging paradigm in food systems scholarship. Following a mixed-methods design, this project utilizes group interviews, systematic behavior observations, and the Cooking and Food Provisioning Action Scale survey to identify barriers and supports of home cooking among Fox Valley parents, recommend areas of opportunity for future workshops, and explore the role of children in the meal making process. Time constraints emerged as a major barrier to meal prep among participants. Many participants articulated the difficulties of involving children in meal preparation, but for others, children's involvement in meal preparation was a support of home cooking and often reduced time constraints. The workshops demonstrated to parents that their children can perform many meal prep tasks, and some children have become more engaged in the meal making process as a result. Participants wished the workshops were expanded to incorporate more cooking tasks for children and include more nutritional and organizational advice for adults.

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Introduction

The fall of 2022 was a formative time for my understanding of food systems, food cultures, and individual people's capacity to take charge of their diet and consumption habits. Taking a course on "Food Justice Movements," while at the same time analyzing focus groups on healthy eating in my community (Brenneman 2022), opened my eyes to the complex array of factors that influence one's relationship to food. From the Deanwood food desert of Washington DC (Reese 2019) to the Triqui people of Mexico who comprise a significant proportion of the United States' agricultural labor force (Holmes 2013), marginalized communities are often forced—due to their historical and material situation in the larger food system—to rely on strategies of resistance as a means of carving out agency for themselves. In speaking to the residents of my medium-sized midwestern metro area about how they navigate their foodscape, I was surprised to see a similar yearning for agency. The modern, global food system, a behemoth of production built on the backs of exploited laborers, is systematically unequal in its distribution of resources and fails to adequately serve even those strictly on the consumption end of the chain.

Many residents of Wisconsin's Fox Valley may be living in a "food swamp," defined as an area "with a high-density of establishments selling high-calorie fast food and junk food, relative to healthier food options" (Cooksey-Stowers et al. 2017, p.2). The most recent data from the USDA's Food Environment Atlas (2023) indicates that the prevalence of fast-food establishments in Outagamie County increased by over 18% between 2011 and 2016. Meanwhile, the USDA's Food Access Research Atlas (2023) highlights several Fox Valley neighborhoods with low-access to sources of healthy foods within a 10 mile range. Living in a

food swamp is a major predictor of nutrition-related chronic disease like obesity and diabetes (Cooksey-Stowers et al. 2017).

Focus group participants I spoke with felt inundated with unhealthy options that always seemed more convenient than healthier alternatives. And when healthy foods reach Fox Valley residents, they all too often do not know how or struggle to make home-cooked meals with these ingredients. Two nutrition education programs—one geared towards home cooks with adequate access to healthy foods,[1] and another aimed at low-income residents who lack the same access[2]—emerged as imperfect but effective interventions that improved individuals' ability to prepare healthy meals for themselves and others. Now, Appleton's Building For Kids has unveiled their Food to Grow Initiative—a community-driven endeavor to change the area's food culture, starting with the youngest generation. My project seeks to evaluate one part of this initiative—family meal workshops in which parents learn to prepare healthy meals with their kids—through the theoretical lens of "food agency."

Setting

In the Summer of 2023, the Building For Kids, a children's museum in Appleton, Wisconsin, received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to pursue the Food to Grow Initiative. A new food- and nutrition-based exhibit to replace the old Kwik Trip convenience store exhibit was already under construction, but grant funding helped launch a variety of programming efforts to go alongside this new exhibit. In collaboration with the Department of Anthropology at Lawrence University, a long-term evaluation of the

[1] Thedacare's Lifestyle Intervention Program

[2] BeWell Fox Valley's Eat Well for Life Program

programming for its effects on the cooking, food, and nutrition knowledge of children and parents over time is another key component of this initiative.

The Building For Kids (originally called Fox Cities Children's Museum) was founded in November of 1992 by Paula Meyer and Rochelle Lamm. The museum and its supporters had the dual goals of revitalizing Appleton's quiet downtown district while also providing "kids and their grown-ups a safe place to learn through play" (Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, 2022). The two goals were quite complementary. As Meyer put it, "children's museums are a community asset. Just like you need bike paths, parks, sports fields, and so on, a children's museum is something a family-friendly community should have" (Building For Kids "Founders Interview." 2022). The Building For Kids has served as a positive example of community-building infrastructure in the area ever since, hosting over 120,000 visitors annually (Building For Kids, "Mission"). This community focus remains the mission of the Building For Kids today. As VP of Learning and Engagement Beth Vanderloop stated in one of our many discussions leading up to the launch of programming, the Food to Grow Initiative was created "in response to community needs." So, it is with this community-orientated outlook in mind that Building For Kids staff and partners set out to provide its members and the general public with food and nutrition education opportunities through the Food to Grow Initiative.

Among the many programming efforts[3], the Family Meal Workshops—where local food experts lead entire families through the process of preparing a nutritious and budget friendly meal—hope to address multiple concerns among community public health coalitions. First, a

[3] https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/project-proposals/ma-253351-oms-23-sample-application.pdf

goal of the workshop is to build confidence and skills in purchasing and preparing healthy meals. Through achieving that first goal, these workshops also have the aim of reversing the recent decline in the percentage of families consuming meals together at home in the Fox Valley area (Fox Valley Community Health Improvement Coalition, 2018). Lastly, these workshops serve as valuable case studies of children and their adults cooking together, an increasingly rare event (Lavelle et al. 2019; Bowen et al. 2014). Vanderloop describes this program with that theme in mind: "[the family meal workshops] reach kids early so that it positively impacts their attitudes and behaviors later in life." A systematic evaluation of the workshops will provide the Fox Valley community with a glimpse of how children today will learn to make meals in the future.

Literature Review

Part one of this literature review will synthesize theories of agency and transmission of knowledge as they relate to food, with particular attention paid to the narratives of decline that inundate the contemporary cooking discourse. Part two will bring the discussion back to Wisconsin, detailing the region's food culture and history as well as the rise of nutrition-related chronic disease and decline in fruit and vegetable consumption in recent decades.

Narratives of Decline in Home Cooking

Recent scholarship points to a decline in vertical transmission of food knowledge. From mothers in Ireland (Lavelle et al. 2019) to a majority Native American community in southern Arizona (Cherry 2014), survey data and focus group discussions tell a similar story: younger generations do not know as much about food as their parents. Parents are often resentful of this, claiming their children "don't want to learn" (Cherry 2014, p.18) about native foraging practices, or that they would rather their children stay out of the kitchen during meal prep (Lavelle et al. 2019). In Arizona, barriers to knowledge transmission included social change (e.g. the role of

grandparents in the household changing from “respected elder” to caretaker, or media becoming a primary source of knowledge), ecological degradation (e.g. less opportunity for intimate nature experiences), and economic barriers (e.g. financial hardship, time constraints, access to foods) (Cherry 2014, p.18-20). And in Ireland, time constraints, hours spent at work, and eating out frequently emerged as the main factors reducing opportunities for children to get involved in and learn about meal preparation (Lavelle at al. 2019).

Pope and colleagues (2021) detail the struggles American college students have cooking for themselves for the first time. Younger Americans rarely possess the knowledge or skills to prepare nutritious, cost and time effective, good tasting meals, and are increasingly resorting to the most convenient options such as instant ramen noodles (Larsen et al 2006). While young adults who reported learning to cook at an early age are more likely to possess greater food knowledge and cooking skills (Lavelle et al. 2016), this is increasingly rare (Lavelle et al. 2019).

So, it seems we have found the culprit: kids are not learning from their parents in the way previous generations did. While it is tempting to leave it there, to place all the blame for this generational food knowledge gap on busy parents and disinterested children would be to ignore the myriad of ways in which one can acquire knowledge or skills. Furthermore, measuring rates of vertical transmission of knowledge is a tricky proposition. Decontextualized, self-reported data can be tainted by misrepresentation, adults tend to overestimate the frequency and influence of their teachings, and children often respond to pointed questions by conforming to the expectations of their parents, teachers, or peers (Lancy and Little 2016). Thus, evaluating vertical transmission of food knowledge is a challenging theoretical and methodological undertaking. While it is right to claim that younger generations are lacking important skills and knowledge

about making meals, just pointing this out does not bring us closer to understanding or solving the problem.

It is easy to observe the steep decline of time spent cooking (Wolfson 2015; 2020) and rising nutrition-related chronic disease (CDC 2023) and conclude that adults in the United States have become "deskilled" or "checked-out" in the kitchen, that they have not learned something about cooking that they ought to have. This follows from the popular narrative that social, economic, and technological changes in the last 100 years have altered the traditional division of household labor, sparking a decline in the intergenerational transmission of cooking skills. But this theory fails to consider that the romanticized ideal of a stay-at-home mother spending all day skillfully preparing a family meal from scratch with her children was never the norm (Wolfson 2015).

Bowen and colleagues (2014) employ ethnographic case studies with poor and working-class families in the United States to illustrate the challenges of cooking for a family on a tight budget. The authors take a critical stance toward "slow-food" proponents like Michael Pollan, writing that such food movements "fail to see all the invisible labor that goes into planning, making, and coordinating family meals" (Bowen et al. 2014, p.21). For many of the families featured in their study, planning, making, and coordinating family meals meant making financial trade-offs at work or in food procurement. It meant relying on family and neighbors alike for things like transportation and childcare. And it meant working to please everyone with the end result. For people facing structural barriers to cooking such as those with a low income, lacking a car, working long hours, or with poorly equipped kitchens, family mealtime does not come about easily (Bowen et al. 2014).

Angela Meah and Matt Watson (2011) correct the record about how previous generations learned to cook and what it means for modern families. Focus groups and interviews revealed that older generations were not the "saints" of food knowledge and meal prep that popular discourse presents them as. The knowledge and skills that older adults acquired from their parents, teachers, or life experiences are not necessarily superior to those acquired by their children. Older adults recall receiving vague food safety advice like "cook meat until juices run clear," failing to consider nutrition when making meals, and struggling to fit meal prep into their busy lives (Meah and Watson 2011, p.111-114). Furthermore, case studies of intergenerational family dinners revealed the extent to which younger adults internalized the lessons they did learn from their parents. Younger generations continue to put effort into making modern meals and cherish time spent cooking with their families. There are no "saints and slackers" in the kitchen, only cooks. And while what it means "to cook" has changed dramatically, *being* a home cook is still a shared, cross-generational experience. The authors problematize the so-called "death" of home cooking as portrayed in media and health-food blogs, while drawing attention to the unwieldly complex of knowledge, skills, attitudes, memories, and passions that all combine to create the modern home cook (Meah and Watson 2011). Instead of accepting the decline of home cooking as an inevitable symptom of our modern world, more research is needed to identify barriers and supports of modern home cooking to effectively target future interventions and reverse the trend.

This is exactly what a team of researchers at the University of Vermont started work on in the past decade. Beginning with Maria Carabello's "Defining Food Agency" (2015), the inquiry spread across geography and disciplines in a series of studies (Morgan 2016; Trubek et al. 2017; Lahne et al. 2017; Wolfson et al. 2019; 2020; Pope et al. 2021; Karlsson et al. 2023)

combining agency theory, cooking pedagogy, and food and nutrition studies to craft a new way to think about the decline of home cooking: not as the collective failure of any one generation, but as an erosion of individual agency in the face of a rapidly changing foodscape. Now more than ever before, Americans can simply choose not to cook and still feed themselves and others (Trubek et al. 2017). Obviously, someone is still doing the cooking. But for a consumer working long hours, lacking time and access to equipment or ingredients, it is increasingly convenient to leave your diet in someone else's hands. If you care about what you eat, whether for health, sustainability, justice, or sovereignty, then the increasing popularity of having others cook for you can leave you feeling powerless.

Food Agency: In Theory and Practice

Fleshed out in Amy Trubek et al's "Empowered to Cook: The Crucial Role of 'Food Agency' in Making Meals" (2017), the concept of "food agency" helps explain this phenomenon of helplessness at mealtime. What makes some people so adept at creating home cooked meals? Why do others struggle? What can be done to address this? Food agency research attempts to answer these questions by understanding meal making as the totality of one's "ability to plan, procure, and prepare food for themselves and others" within the contexts of one's social, physical, and economic environments (Trubek et al. 2017, pp.297-298). And beyond the social ramifications of changing our mealtime habits, promoting food agency is also a worthwhile goal for public health experts. Recent studies have linked high levels of food agency—as quantified in the Cooking and Food Provisioning Actions Scale (Lahne et al. 2017)—to improved diet quality and more frequent home cooking (Wolfson et al. 2020).

A central tenet of food agency theory is that we always have some degree of agency, no matter how minimal, over what we eat and how we eat it. Maria Carabello (2015, pp.1-3)

includes a charming anecdote about her brief time spent exclusively eating the highly engineered "super-food" powder, Soylent. Despite condensing all the wonders of cuisine into a grainy, graham cracker-tasting sludge, Carabello (2015) noted that even the acts of scooping the Soylent powder, stirring it into water, and pouring and portioning her doses, required a certain degree of individual agency to perform. Lacking proper equipment to portion correctly or lacking knowledge of how the substance would affect her could have drastically changed her experience with the product. This experience shows that we are all always actors, and we always have "the potential for action even if, in some instances, there are impediments to such actions" (Trubek et al. 2017, p.302). The form our actions take relies on the context of the social structures, material conditions, and physical environments around us. Cooks make their own meals, but they do not cook them as they please.

Trubek and colleagues (2017) provide a case study that exemplifies high levels of food agency in action. Sylvia, a Russian emigre to America, is inspired to cook by a desire to "recreate the meals of her childhood" (Trubek et al 2017, p.301). This desire to cook, or what Trubek calls "intent to action" (p.298), is a major challenge for most home cooks. And even if one intends to cook the perfect meal, it does not mean that the result is preordained. As Carabello (2015) points out, the increasing popularity of the Food Network and other cooking-related media coincided with Americans' rapid decline in time spent cooking. Sylvia acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to turn her desires into action thanks to "familial and cultural exposure and repetition" (Trubek et al. 2017, p.301), something that this study and others (Trubek 2017; Lavelle et al. 2019; Larsen et al. 2006) have noted is increasingly uncommon in the United States. Furthermore, Sylvia is lucky enough to live in an apartment with a fully equipped kitchen. She has fresh ingredients on hand along with cookbooks in both English and

her native Russian. For her, the process of cooking is unimpeded. She's made this meal before and can do it again (Trubek et al. 2017).

But it is vital to note that Sylvia is the exception in the United States. Trubek's example shows that there are so many moving parts to making a meal that a wide array of both structural and individual factors can determine the extent to which things go according to plan in the kitchen. High food agency is not a permanent state, rather it is "the dynamic interaction between social structure and individual choice as expressed in the meal making process" (Lahne et al 2017, p.3).

A major concern of those who study structure and agency is avoiding a dichotomous characterization of the two where individuals are either totally free to act and overcome or are entirely restrained by the structural forces around them. Rather, the two forces are interrelated, there is never one without the other. As preeminent contemporary scholar of agency theory Sherry Ortner puts it, "'agency' is never a thing in itself but is always part of a process," a process which is responsible for "the making and remaking of larger social cultural formations" (Ortner 2020, p.682). So, the way in which Americans tackle the daily question of what to cook—or whether to cook—in turn, forges the culture of making modern meals.

Part Two: Back to Wisconsin

In the 1970s, the Women's Auxiliary of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin was tasked with creating an ethnographic cookbook for the state. Rather than attempting to succinctly define a single "Wisconsin food culture," historian Harva Hatchen, the project's lead contributor, opted to cast a wide net and compile as many recipes and histories as would be fit to print. Hatchen's approach was a massive success. Her book, *The Flavor of Wisconsin* (1981; 2nd edition 2009), would become regularly cited by academic historians (Chan 2013; Gilmore 2011;

Allen 2003) and see demand for new editions. The often-disparate amalgamation of food stories depicted in *Flavor* was united by a handful of common themes such as immigration and assimilation or the land and its fertile soil, but one theme stands out to me as particularly relevant to my project on food agency in the state. I will now quote from the introduction to the *The Flavor of Wisconsin*:

> According to Menominee legend, maple syrup used to come out of the tree as sugar. Ma'nabush, the primal folk hero who set life in order, was disturbed by the ease with which this delicious staple could be obtained. So he climbed to the very top of one of the trees and scattered water like rain over the maples to dissolve the sugar and make it flow from the trees as liquid. This was necessary, he told his grandmother, Noko'mis, the Earth, so his people would have to keep occupied and work hard to make sugar. Otherwise they would get into bad habits by spending so much time in idleness (Allen and Hatchen 2009, xiii).

While this story is obscure to today's inhabitants of Wisconsin, it contains prescient insights for navigating the state's modern foodscape. The great agricultural bounties of this land are often difficult to access, and the easiest to access foods can come at a cost to our well-being. Negotiating the trade-offs of food preparation—considering time and knowledge, effort and skills, alongside taste and health—has been a part of the human experience long before anyone called it "food agency."

The generations of diverse peoples who have made their way to Wisconsin since colonization have formed their own strong cultural attachments to food. From church dinners, fish boils, supper clubs, and cheese factories—institutions forged mainly by German- and Scandinavian-American populations—to the Mexican farmers markets of Milwaukee and the

innovative new recipes coming from Hmong communities adapting to a changing food environment (Allen and Hatchen 2009, pp.133-135), expressing one's cultural identity through food is an essential part of being a Wisconsinite.

Wisconsin is a state rich in food resources. There are 64,100 farms in Wisconsin, and although "The Dairy State" is best known for its milk, cheese, and livestock industries, it leads all U.S. states in cranberry and snap bean production (WI DATCP, 2023). Cherries, potatoes, carrots, and cabbage thrive in the southern part of the state, while corn and other grains are more prevalent farther north. Wisconsin ranks 2nd among U.S. states with 1455 certified organic farms (USDA 2022). And while most Wisconsin agriculture is bound for export, there is considerable consumer demand for local produce. Over 300 farmers markets operate all throughout the state (USDA 2017)—including 12 in the Fox Valley (Outagamie, Winnebago, and Calumet counties). Restaurants and grocery stores proudly advertise locally sourced ingredients for sale, and a plethora of "traditional events, businesses, and phenomena have endured [in Wisconsin] despite recent decades of change" to the state's foodscape (Allen and Hatchen 2009, p.141).

Today's State of Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

The most recent (2019) data from the Survey of the Health of Wisconsin (SHOW)—the public health data collection initiative described in detail by Nieto and colleagues (2010)—paints a dismal picture of fruit and vegetable consumption in Wisconsin. Despite Wisconsin's reputation as a bastion of fruit and vegetable production, only 8.9% of respondents say they eat at least one vegetable per day, and just 16.2% eat one fruit per day. This problem is not exclusive to Wisconsin. The CDC (2021) reports that 9% of all US adults eat the recommended amount of vegetables (2 ½ cups for women and 3 ½ cups for men) and 12% eat the recommended amount of fruit (1 ½ cups for women and 2 cups for men). Affordability, availability, time constraints,

and accessibility are commonly cited (CDC 2021; Wolfson et al. 2020; LaVelle et al. 2019; Bhutani et al. 2018; Burns and Inglis 2007) as drivers of low fruit and vegetable consumption (FVC) throughout the world.

The benefits of high levels of FVC are well documented. The CDC reports that "eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can help reduce the risk of many leading causes of illness and death, such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and obesity" (CDC 2021). National health guidelines in the US, Canada, and United Kingdom have all recommended that people increase FVC for decades (Slavin and Lloyd 2012).

Local, state, and national governments have long been aware of this problem, yet the prevalence of nutrition-related chronic diseases like obesity has only increased in recent decades (Stierman 2021). It would seem, despite the best intentions and efforts of public health officials and community leaders, that there are deeper issues at play. Zofia Boni (2023), in her ethnographic exploration of children's food in Poland, points to one of the major modern developments in the global food system: the "growing segmentation of food products according to more and more narrow expectations and wants from more and more specific groups of consumers" (Boni 2023, p.55). Boni identifies the long-term growth of divisions between so-called "normal food" and an ever-increasing number of silos, most notably fast food, "junk food," and children's food (2023). It is within these food groups that nutrition takes a back seat to taste, convenience, and marketing.

In Wisconsin, the spatial distribution of food retailers can also help explain the lackluster FVC numbers. Most Wisconsinites live farther from a grocery store than any other kind of food retailer. 33% of Wisconsin residents live within a 5-minute walk (or 0.25 miles) of a convenience store. 37% are a 5-minute walk from fast food and other restaurants. Meanwhile,

only 12% live a quarter mile from a grocery store (SHOW 2019). And it is reasonable to assume these numbers are more dire in the Fox Valley area. Appleton ranks below the state average in WalkScore, a statistic generated by a private company that measures the walkability of residential areas on a scale from 0 - 100 based on walking routes to destinations such as grocery stores, schools, parks, restaurants, and retail. A below average BikeScore and too little ridership to qualify for a TransitScore, makes Appleton a car-dependent city (WalkScore 2023). 2010 US Census data, the last time this question was asked, shows that 91.8% of people in the Appleton (Fox Cities) metropolitan area primarily commuted by car. If Fox Valley residents lack a car, they surely lack easy access to fruits and vegetables. And if they do have a car, procuring food at a grocery store is likely not their most convenient option.

What Can Be Done?

SHOW data from 2019 indicates nearly half of Wisconsin residents (43%) claim to lack easy access to fruits and vegetables. So, it comes as no surprise that access to fruits and vegetables has emerged as one of the top priorities for the state's public health officials and community leaders. The most recent Wisconsin Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Road Map (WI DHS, 2021) emphasizes "increasing access to fruits and vegetables" as a major goal. But in order to begin to adequately address concerns over access, we must flesh out what exactly access means, and its relation to FVC.

Fruits and vegetables are struggling to compete for a share of Wisconsin consumers' food budgets. Getting a home cooked meal on the table for a family most nights is a difficult endeavor for those lacking knowledge and skills of cooking, resources, time, the right ingredients, and for home cooks contending with the preferences of their families. Why wouldn't you eat out if you are limited in what meals you can make, if you only have 30 minutes, or if your kids are

demanding their favorite fast food? When eating out becomes a frequent choice, health can suffer. As Laxy and colleagues (2015) found in their examination of Wisconsin retail food environments, obesity, and other factors, people who reported more frequent fast-food consumption were more likely to be obese (Laxy et al. 2015).

Anecdotally, as a frequent patron of and occasional vendor for the Appleton farmers market, I am always struck by the juxtaposition of the bounty of farm-fresh produce on one hand, and the long lines for the types of prepared foods served there like chicken wings, donuts, popcorn, or slushies. The fruits and vegetables, ostensibly the things bringing everyone there, are often treated as a curiosity, an aesthetic backdrop to a weekly celebration of sugars, carbs, and fats.

So, the question of access is twofold: 1) is everyone able to obtain fruits and vegetables? And 2) how can we be sure that obtaining fruits and vegetables equates to consuming fruits and vegetables? In other words, the idea of "access" to fruits and vegetables needs to be expanded beyond just the act of obtaining produce. A more useful definition of fruit and vegetable access for the modern cook would be: the ability to reasonably incorporate enough fruits and vegetables into their diets to meet nutritional recommendations.

Looking back at the Wisconsin Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Road Map—among a myriad of goals—non-profit organizations were tasked with facilitating "the implementation and evaluation of community-wide, evidence-based interventions" while universities were meant to "develop and expand partnerships with local coalitions" to support such interventions. The Building For Kids and Lawrence University are attempting to do just that with the Family Meal Workshop and evaluation. We need to elevate fruits and vegetables in the minds of consumers. Instead of being a burdensome reminder of nutritional or culinary

shortcomings, fruits and vegetables ought to be culturally significant symbols of good health, strong social bonds, and tasty food. Improving food agency across the community represents a step toward achieving this by providing consumers with the confidence and skills to effectively prepare healthy meals for their families.

Project Overview

I was invited to join this project in June of 2023, before museum grant funding had been secured and before the plans for Food to Grow Programming had been fully realized. Along with a team of researchers from Lawrence University, I pre-tested a variety of anthropological methods throughout the summer with children aged 6-10 in anticipation of our evaluation of the upcoming Food to Grow programs. I continued my work in the children's museum throughout the fall and winter, beginning to evaluate programs aimed at enhancing the food and nutrition education of children in the Fox Valley area.

I was also privy to stakeholder conversations leading up to the Family Meal Workshops and gained an understanding of the limitations on the workshops. For example, the Building For Kids lacked a large kitchen space that could accommodate dozens of participants cooking at the same time. Families were to be provided with all the ingredients necessary to cook the target meal, but no cooking could occur in the classrooms. Rather, participants would chop, slice, scoop, mix, and bag what ingredients they could, while a pre-prepared version of the target meal would be brought in for participants to sample before, ideally, going home to make the meal themselves.

These experiences helped prepare me to engage in meaningful conversations with families about barriers and supports to cooking with children. Despite the narratives of intergenerational decline in cooking skills and food knowledge, the children we worked with at

the Building For Kids varied greatly in their knowledge of and attitudes toward food, nutrition, and cooking. The cooking behaviors of children and their families cannot be viewed as monolithic. That presents a challenge for the Building For Kids' partners and staff as they continue to develop the Family Meal Workshops. No two families enter the workshop with the same knowledge, attitudes, or skills, so one challenge is ensuring that families across that spectrum feel the workshop speaks to them. And the workshops differ from the other Food to Grow programs in that they serve entire families, not just children. Both kids and their adults are meant to be equally engaged in the workshop, so another challenge is to craft a kid-friendly cooking class that can also provide insights for parents.

My project aims to understand how the Building For Kids is grappling with this challenging endeavor and how they can improve future workshops for all families. To fulfill these goals, a deeper exploration into how Fox Valley families cook and eat together is critical. This means exploring the food and cooking knowledge, skills, and attitudes of home cooks; the role, if any, of children in families' meal making processes; and reflections on what and how adults learned to cook. Put together, this project will identify barriers and supports to procuring and cooking healthy, cost-effective meals for the whole family, and how the Building For Kids' Family Meal Workshops can address barriers and facilitate support.

The following questions drive this research project:

1. What food and nutrition knowledge, cooking and meal prep skills, or other information and strategies did parents glean from their experience? What did their kids learn?
2. How do Fox Valley parents prepare and eat food with their children? What hinders them from doing so? What enables them to do so?
3. Why do Fox Valley families vary in their ability to enact food agency?

4. Does the Family Meal Workshop meet the needs of participating families? What changes could be made to future workshops in order to do so?

Methods

Mixed ethnographic methods are well suited to exploring barriers and supports of meal preparation (Trubek et al. 2017; Carabello 2015; Bowen 2014; Meah and Watson 2011) and have been successfully employed in the context of evaluating a class or program aimed at improving cooking skills and confidence (Pope et al. 2021; Morgan 2020; Morgan 2016). Behavior observation and field notes were used to assess the mechanics of the Family Meal Workshops (henceforth: FMW) while surveys and group interviews were used to assess the longitudinal effects of the programming on attitudes and behaviors.

Recruitment of Workshop Attendees

Attendees of the FMW were recruited to attend via email from the Building For Kids' large membership base. Four families participated in the first FMW (November 15, 2023) and eleven families participated in the second FMW (January 31, 2024). Each FMW began at 4:30pm and was hosted in a Building For Kids classroom space.

The first FMW featured Building For Kids Access Members: museum members who qualify for reduced membership fees. Access Members, who account for 23% of the museum's membership base, must demonstrate financial need to qualify. Those receiving benefits from WIC, Headstart, FoodShare, BadgerCare Plus, free/reduced-price school lunch programs, the Wisconsin Shares Childcare Subsidy, the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program, unemployment, or those with a referral from a local non-profit qualify for Access Memberships.

So do first-time parents and parents of autistic children. All Access Members live within a 45-mile radius of the Building For Kids in downtown Appleton.

The second FMW was open to all museum members. Membership to the museum entitles patrons to free admission, discounted admission to special events and birthday parties, email updates about museum programming, and invitations to members-only events like the FMWs. Memberships to the Building For Kids cost between $140-$190 annually.

Attendees were provided with informed consent forms via email a week before the workshop and reviewed and signed the forms after arriving for the workshop. Attendees were also sent an electronic survey, and those who did not complete it online were asked to fill out a paper version of the same survey prior to the start of the event. I introduced myself—who I am, what I am doing, and my educational background—and this project—its aims and procedures—to each family.

Observing the FMWs: Limits on Participant Observation

Participant observation is often the method of choice for anthropologists in a variety of settings and can be useful in applied or evaluative fields depending on the context (Bernard 2018; Butler 2015). But my role as impartial evaluator and my lack of culinary expertise meant that involving myself too prominently in the FMWs could compromise the integrity of the program. As the FMWs continue to develop and more are scheduled, new evaluators will take on this project. By observing the programming separately from participants, I was able to form an unbiased account of the FMWs that future evaluators can build off without fear that my absence will affect the programming. The extent of my participation in the programming involved aiding Building For Kids staff in setting up the FMW classroom space, restocking depleted ingredients, and answering participants' questions when possible. I was seated on the periphery of the FMW

classroom, but still able to observe participants' actions. I would often leave my seat and walk around the room to better position myself to observe. Any conversations with participants took place just before or after the FMW.

Behavior Observations

The structure of the FMWs, where participants respond to a pre-set series of tasks, requires a more systematic approach to behavioral observation. Such an approach involves the recording of specific behaviors that are precisely defined before the research begins, recording behaviors at predetermined times and places, and standardizing results in a way in which results would not vary greatly between one observer and another (Hintze et al. 2002). Behaviors defined a priori were informed by the scholarly literature on family cooking behaviors (Meah and Watson 2011; Bowen et al. 2014; Lavelle et al. 2017; Trubek 2017; Trubek et al. 2017; Lavelle et al. 2019) and adapted to suit the context of the FMWs. In case studies, parents who struggle to cook with their kids recall their children "fluttering" (Lavelle et al. 2019, p.7) around the kitchen, crying "mommy, mommy" (2019 p.7), or otherwise taking attention away from the meal making process. Additionally, many parents avoid cooking with children to reduce the clean-up time after the meal (Bowen et al. 2014). Children's behavior in the meal making process would ideally include helping—or attempting to help—in some way, indicating their meal preferences, and trying, and hopefully enjoying, the finished product. The coded behaviors are meant to reflect these realities of cooking with kids. There are always complications, and it is unlikely any individuals will be on-task for the entirety of the workshop. The coded behaviors are designed to be exhaustive and mutually exclusive. The following behaviors were coded for:

1. Mechanical meal preparation: behaviors like cutting and chopping, stirring and mixing, use of cooking tools, opening cans, organizing or bagging ingredients, engaging physically and obviously with the meal prep task at hand.
2. Instructing meal preparation for others: namely, adults instructing their kids. Demonstrating, moving slowly so others can see, obviously describing a meal preparation action to kids. Not actively engaged in mechanical meal prep, rather, mimicking meal prep actions or aiding child in their own meal prep behavior.
3. Talking or listening: discussions with their own family, other families, or instructor/staff pertaining to food, meal making, or the workshop. Active listening cues. Not engaged in meal preparation. Not instructing meal preparation. Not off-task or distracting behavior.
4. Off-task: behaviors that are distracting or disruptive. For adults: talking or texting on cell phone, obviously not engaged with instructions or meal preparation task. For kids: running around, making loud noises, drawing or playing, obviously not engaged in instructions or task.
5. Absent: a child and/or parent may have to leave the workshop classroom for any number of reasons before returning. Absent indicates that a participant is not in the room for a behavior to be recorded.
6. Hygiene: washing hands, cleaning table, putting on gloves, or other actions associated with hygiene that are not mechanical meal prep behaviors.
7. Eating: in the last 30 minutes of the workshop a prepared meal is served to all participants. This code allows me to keep track of whether children are interested in tasting the finished meal.

Every one minute, behaviors would be recorded for each family member in one family. Using momentary time sampling (MTS), a recording method in which behaviors are only noted if they occur at a prespecified moment (Meany-Daboul et al 2007), I coded one of the eight prespecified behaviors of participants, taking approximately five seconds to observe and code for each family member, jotting field notes summarizing the observed behaviors together, and moving onto the next family after one minute elapsed.

Direct observation produces more accurate results than having informants recall their own activities (Bernard 2018, p. 341). Furthermore, MTS is generally more accurate in predicting the frequency and duration of behaviors than other approaches such as partial or whole interval recording. (Gardenier et al. 2004; Meany Daboul et al. 2007). Focal follows and continuous monitoring were not feasible methods of behavior observation as I was the only researcher present for the FMWs and had limited time to record my observations. I also did not wish to single out particular families. Utilizing MTS enabled me to record at least three observations for each member of each family at the FMWs and to generate enough data to produce a robust accounting of behaviors at the FMWs.

Analysis of Behavior Observations

MTS is most effectively used to "provide estimations of the occurrence and nonoccurrence of behavior rather than a true measure of behavior" (Wood et al. 2016. p.212); in other words, MTS best measures on-task and off-task behaviors. So, for the purposes of analysis, the target behaviors will include all coded actions except for "off-task" and "absent." The target behaviors, while all different, each represent components of the meal making process. On-task percentages were calculated for each participant and each family by dividing the number of on-task behaviors coded for per participant and per family by the total number of observations per

participant and per family. An overall on-task percentage was calculated for children and adults by dividing the total number of on-task behaviors by the total number of recorded behaviors for each group.

The qualities of coded behaviors, mainly the target behaviors, were analyzed alongside survey and focus group data. Functioning as systematic field notes, the behavior codes and notes from the FMWs were used to corroborate interview testimony, create demonstrative vignettes, and track participant engagement with the FMWs. Additionally, other information I gleaned through observing the FMWs such as those that participants recall in interviews are included in my analysis.

Cooking and Food Provisioning Action Scale and Questionnaire

The Cooking and Food Provisioning Action Scale (CAFPAS) is a 28-question validated (Lahne et al. 2017) psychometric survey aimed at assessing an individual's "Food Agency" (Trubek et al. 2017), that is, their ability to plan, procure, and prepare meals for themselves and others. The concept of food agency has emerged as a driver of numerous food systems research projects in recent years (Wolfson et al. 2023; Wang et al. 2022; Zagata et al. 2022; Pope et al. 2021; Clark-Barol et al. 2021; Green et al. 2021; Garcia-Gonzalez et al. 2018) and is the theoretical lens through which I am viewing this evaluation. Food agency research considers the mechanical, organizational, and creative skills that may enable one home cook to successfully craft a meal alongside external barriers that may prevent that same cook from achieving their desired result. Wolfson and colleagues (2020) found high CAFPAS scores are associated with more frequent home cooking and greater vegetable consumption among adults and their children. Meanwhile, Morgan (2020) emphasizes that CAFPAS is useful for both "understanding and intervening" (p.229) in matters of food agency. That makes CAFPAS a useful tool in this

evaluation project. Identifying specific shortcomings or highlighting the particular strengths and successful strategies of parent-cooks will enable the Building For Kids to target these areas in future programming.

The "structure" subscale of the CAFPAS is based around questions of time constraints (e.g. "I wish that I had more time to plan meals") but does not necessarily identify specific sources of time pressures. Keeping in mind food agency's emphasis on structural factors that may affect the meal making process, the full questionnaire (see appendix A) supplements the CAFPAS with demographic questions pertaining to the gender, race, and occupation. Other factors that could influence participants' ability to procure and prepare food such as hours worked per week, number of meals cooked per week, past experience in cooking classes or nutrition education, number of children and adults in the household, and primary mode of transportation were also included. This information, coupled with CAFPAS scores, helps paint a clearer picture of the structural barriers and supports to meal preparation participants experience. And even though many structural barriers are outside the scope of the FMW and this evaluation, understanding the varied perspectives and backgrounds families bring to the FMWs would serve the Building For Kids well.

Along this line, follow-up CAFPAS surveys were administered to attendees 1-3 months following their FMW experience. Demographic questions were removed from the follow-up survey. This before and after model enables the Building For Kids to better understand the impact of the FMWs and identify areas for future improvement.

Analysis of CAFPAS

Each CAFPAS (Lahne et al. 2017) question comes with three multipliers that represent the three subsets of the scale: self-efficacy, attitude, and structure. Each 1-7 answer—the

wording of half of the items requires they are scored in reverse—produces three values, that, once all answers have been inputted and multiplied by the appropriate factor, outputs total scores for the three subset components. To condense these into one score per participant, I calculated standard deviation of all the scores in each subset, and then, the subset scores from each participant were divided by the standard deviation of that subset, before being added together to produce a final CAFPAS score (Lahne et al. 2017).

Group Interviews

All FMW attendees were invited to participate in discussions pertaining to their experience of the FMW and their experiences cooking as parents more broadly. Semi-structured focus groups and interviews were conducted at the Building For Kids between one to three months following their FMW. As moderator, I followed a deliberately sequenced discussion guide (see appendix B) that began by soliciting feedback on their FMW experience, asking what they and their children learned, how they have utilized or plan to utilize that knowledge, and what they wish they had learned. After that, the discussion transitioned to the topic of food agency. Following the lead of Morgan (2020), I sought to create questions and generate discussions that correlated to CAFPAS survey items. I wanted to learn about the cooking skills and strategies of Fox Valley home-cooks, their attitudes toward and perceptions of cooking, and the structural barriers and supports that affect food agency. The last topic of discussion was the question of children in the kitchen. Inspired by Lavelle and colleagues' (2019) focus groups with mothers who were the primary cooks of their household, I included questions that address the challenge of involving children in meal preparation. I also solicited reflections from participants on how they learned to cook. As Meah and Watson (2011) demonstrate, analyzing food knowledge and cooking skills intergenerationally complicates the pessimistic narratives of

decline that pervade cooking discourse, and it allows parents to identify long-term growth in their own knowledge and cooking abilities.

All FMW attendees were eligible to participate in small-group interview discussions. Participants were recruited via email and phone based on the contact information they listed in the initial survey. A separate informed consent form was provided to participants prior to their participation in the focus group or interview discussion. Written consent was obtained from all participants. All participants consented to have their discussion audio recorded and transcribed. Upon completion of a discussion, participants were awarded a free six-month Building For Kids membership extension as compensation for their time.

Analysis of Group Interviews

Following best practices in text analysis (Bernard 2018; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2009), concepts and key phrases from interview transcripts were identified, highlighted, and chunked into small, descriptive units (e.g. "using slow-cooker"). When these units would become saturated—when new entries no longer added novel information, or when responses become redundant—the items would then be broken down further, grouped into subcategories (e.g. "Time management"), and then larger categories (e.g. "Support"). This work helped ensure my conclusions were grounded in data that had been systematically collected and analyzed (Noble & Mitchell 2011). This process resulted in an extensive codebook of quotations and themes created with MaxQDA software following the group interviews. Once data were coded and analyzed, I identified salient themes and exemplary quotes across all group interviews.

Results

Fourteen families attended the first two FMWs, four Access Member families in the first workshop, and ten member families in the second. One adult from each family completed a demographic questionnaire prior to the start of the workshop (see results in Table 1).

Table 1. Sample characteristics obtained from responses to demographics questionnaire.

Variable	N (%)
Respondents	14 (100)
Membership status	
Access member	4 (28)
Other membership	10 (72)
Gender	
Women	10 (72)
Men	4 (28)
Race/Ethnicity	
White	10 (72)
Latino/a	2 (14)
Pacific Islander	1 (7)
South Asian or Indian American	1 (7)

Hours worked per week[4]	
≥ 40	8 (56)
< 40	2 (14)
≤ 20	3 (21)
None	1 (7)
Number of meals cooked per week	
≥ 14	5 (36)
< 14	5 (36)
≤ 5	4 (28)
Number of adults (age 18+) in household	
2	13 (93)
3	1 (7)
Number of kids (age < 18) in household	
4	3 (21)
3	2 (14)
2	9 (65)
Prior cooking class experience?	
Yes	2 (14)

[4] Includes time spent commuting, or engaged in childcare, eldercare, or other activities not compatible with grocery shopping or meal prep.

No	12 (86)

Behavior Observations: Recording the Family Meal Workshops

Workshop #1: Vegetarian chili - November 15, 2023

The first FMW featured four participating families, one instructor, and a few Building For Kids staff members. Families arrived between 4:30pm and 4:45pm—most kids took some time to play in the museum—and then, at 4:55pm, they were called into the Building For Kids classroom space. Cloth grocery bags were set up on each table. In each bag were the ingredients necessary to prepare the target meal—vegetarian chili—along with plastic kid-safe knives, a large pot, and Ziplock bags. Printed copies of the recipe and the CAFPAS survey were handed out to each family. The instruction got started right at 5:00pm. After introductions, the instructor began by initiating a conversation about the "five food groups." Kids were called on and quickly named the five food groups—fruits, vegetables, proteins, grains, and dairy. Next, everyone was told to wash their hands before beginning the meal making. Since there was only one sink available, it took about five minutes for all families to wash up. In the meantime, families mingled, parents chatted with the instructor or their kids, and some parents would take their phones out.

By 5:10pm families were instructed to go through their bag of ingredients and find an onion to cut. Some kids jumped right in and began chopping as best they could with the dull, kid-safe knives that were provided. Others asked their parents questions and watched a demonstration. Some kids had grown bored with the introduction and sat with their head down or back turned. The next tasks were to bag the diced onions and then cut up the peppers. Many kids were excited to remove the seeds of the peppers, something they probably had not seen done

before. Next, the instructor poured chopped vegetables, canned beans, broth, and spices into a pot. This last instruction was not intended to be done by families during the workshop, but, rather, at home. It took families about 30 minutes to cut up the onions and peppers. By 5:40pm, it was time for everyone to wash their hands and get ready to eat. A preprepared vegetarian chili was served with a spread of sides. All parents and most kids were happy to get something to eat and dug right in. But some kids took more convincing from parents to try the meal.

Both parents and kids were "on-task" for over 90% of recorded observations (see table 2.1). The instructor did a great job keeping everyone engaged, demonstrating meal prep, and answering questions. On the other hand, the instructions in this first workshop were rather repetitive and simple. And although meal prep is often a series of repetitive tasks, kids grow tired of such tasks quickly, and adults did not experience anything with which they were not already familiar. This is reflected (see table 2.1) in the percentage of observations for "talking" or "listening" which accounted for two-thirds of recorded observations of adults, and nearly half of recorded observations of kids. Families—adults and kids alike—were ready to engage, but often did not have anything to do. Typically, one kid would take charge of the chopping, leaving the rest of the family to look on, talk amongst themselves, or listen to the instructor.

Table 2.1. Results of momentary time sampling behavior observations from FMW #1 for adults and kids by number of observations recorded and percentage of total observations.

Behavior recorded	N (%)
Total Observations	
Adults	56 (100)
Kids	75 (100)
On-Task	

Adults	52 (93)
Kids	70 (93)
Off-Task/Absent	
Adults	4 (7)
Kids	5 (7)
Meal prep	
Adults	4 (7)
Kids	22 (29)
Instructing	
Adults	6 (11)
Listening	
Adults	23 (41)
Kids	30 (40)
Talking	
Adults	14 (25)
Kids	7 (9)
Washing/Cleaning	
Adults	5 (9)
Kids	11 (15)

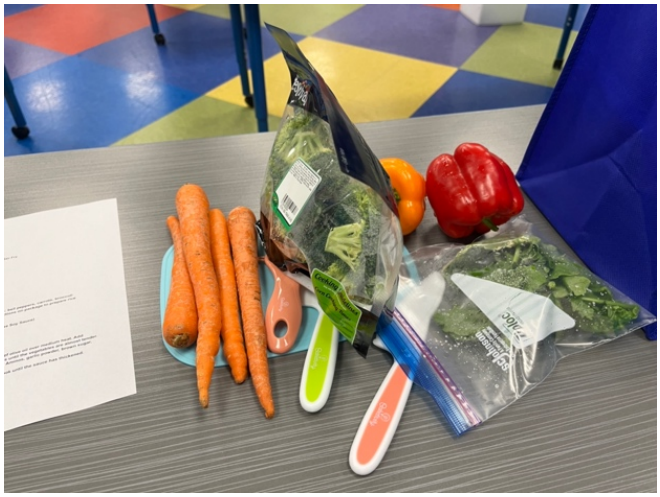
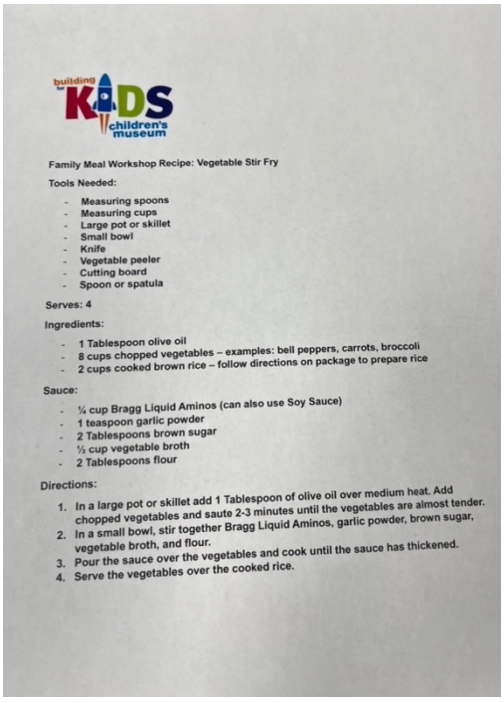


Figure A: Vegetables, cutting board, and kid-safe knives presented before the start of FMW #2.

Figure B: The spatial distribution of families at FMW #2. One family per table. The instructors' table is located at the center of the room.



building KIDS children's museum

Family Meal Workshop Recipe: Vegetable Stir Fry

Tools Needed:

- Measuring spoons
- Measuring cups
- Large pot or skillet
- Small bowl
- Knife
- Vegetable peeler
- Cutting board
- Spoon or spatula

Serves: 4

Ingredients:

- 1 Tablespoon olive oil
- 8 cups chopped vegetables – examples: bell peppers, carrots, broccoli
- 2 cups cooked brown rice – follow directions on package to prepare rice

Sauce:

- ¼ cup Bragg Liquid Aminos (can also use Soy Sauce)
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 Tablespoons brown sugar
- ½ cup vegetable broth
- 2 Tablespoons flour

Directions:

1. In a large pot or skillet add 1 Tablespoon of olive oil over medium heat. Add chopped vegetables and saute 2-3 minutes until the vegetables are almost tender.
2. In a small bowl, stir together Bragg Liquid Aminos, garlic powder, brown sugar, vegetable broth, and flour.
3. Pour the sauce over the vegetables and cook until the sauce has thickened.
4. Serve the vegetables over the cooked rice.

Figure C: List of tools, ingredients, and directions as shown to participants prior to FMW #2

Workshop #2: Vegetable stir fry - January 31, 2024

The second FMW (see set up in figure B.) saw ten families, two instructors, and Building For Kids staff come together to make a vegetable stir fry. Anticipating greater attendance, the workshop was to start earlier, with families entering the classroom at 4:45pm. The set-up was the same—a bag of groceries (see figure A) with recipes (see figure C) and surveys distributed—except this time coloring sheets and crayons were set up at each table for kids to use. After each family had the chance to introduce themselves, and the instructors had introduced the meal, families began prepping their vegetables by 5:00pm. This time, the instructors' introduction emphasized information about the vitamins and minerals found in the vegetables they would be preparing. They discussed the nutritional benefits of brown rice compared to white rice, and they introduced the liquid aminos that would form the base for the stir fry sauce.

Peppers, carrots, and broccoli respectively were cut and bagged. The instructors would interject when most families had finished chopping one ingredient and introduce the next. And though every family moved at a different pace, the quicker succession of directions allowed everyone to get involved. For example, one kid was cutting the peppers while another kid cut the carrots, and all while their parents threw away food scraps and cleaned the table. By 5:30pm, families were lined up at the sauce-making table, the last step before the meal was served. Once again, when the ingredients were ready to be taken home and cooked, a preprepared vegetable stir fry was brought out and consumed. Parents and kids both enjoyed the meal, but the portions were small because there were so many families to serve.

The introduction of the coloring sheets influenced kids' participation in the workshop. Though fewer kids used the coloring sheets as the workshop progressed, many kids spent the

first 15 minutes engrossed in their coloring. These kids may have been restless at the previous workshop and the coloring sheets allowed them to do something fun that did not disrupt the event. Nonetheless, coloring was not a behavior defined a priori and does not contribute to meal prep, so I recorded "off task" when I observed coloring. This resulted in a significantly lower "on-task" percentage for kids in this workshop (see table 2.2).

This workshop moved at a faster pace than the first. The instructors encouraged families to multi-task, and the target meal involved more steps that could be accomplished in the limited classroom environment than the previous. This is reflected (see table 2.2) by a rise in the percentage of observations for "meal prep" behavior, which was 35% of observations for adults, and 53% of observations for kids, compared to 7% and 29% in the first workshop.

Table 2.2. Results of momentary time sampling behavior observations from FMW #2 for adults and kids by number of observations recorded and percentage of total observations.

Behavior recorded	N (%)
Total Observations	
Adults	58 (100)
Kids	62 (100)
On-Task	
Adults	53 (91)
Kids	48 (77)
Off-Task/Absent	
Adults	5 (9)
Kids	14 (23)

Meal prep	
Adults	20 (35)
Kids	33 (53)
Instructing	
Adults	9 (16)
Listening	
Adults	16 (28)
Kids	13 (21)
Talking	
Adults	6 (10)
Kids	2 (3)
Washing/Cleaning	
Adults	2 (3)
Kids	0 (0)

CAFPAS

Fourteen CAFPAS surveys, one per family, were completed prior to the FMW. Eight participants completed follow-up surveys between one and three months following their workshop experience. The average score (see table 3.) of pre-workshop CAFPAS surveys was 14.588 and the average score for follow-up surveys was 15.584. The highest recorded score was 18.588 while the lowest was 8.771. When comparing follow-up surveys to pre-workshop

surveys, three participants scored lower on their follow-up survey, and five participants increased their score the second time.

Table 3. CAFPAS scores by participant, including all recorded follow up scores, and average score for the initial and follow-up surveys.

Par. #	CAFPAS Score	Follow-up Score
1	17.69	16.62
2	16.72	NA
3	15.61	NA
4	15.13	13.43
5	15.22	12.76
6	16.76	18.12
7	8.77	NA
8	15.72	16.07
9	13.37	NA
10	12.49	16.13
11	11.28	15.02
12	18.59	NA
13	14.27	NA
14	12.44	16.52
Average	14.58	15.58
Difference		+ 1.00

Since the formula used to derive CAFPAS results (Lahne et al. 2017) involves dividing subscores by the standard deviation of each subscale, results are only comparable within the population sample they were drawn from. For that reason, these results cannot be directly compared to other studies using CAFPAS. However, the CAFPAS scores—subscores and before and after comparisons—of individual participants are explored further in a series of family cooking vignettes later in this paper (p.55).

Group Interviews

The results from three group interviews (n=7) of FMW participants are organized here by their relation to the major research questions of the project. This is not an exhaustive list of every topic covered in or theme that emerged from the group interviews. This section simply accounts for direct responses to questions. Results will be presented with specific questions and responses and the qualitative themes that emerged from my analysis.

Workshop Feedback

Tables 5.1 – 5.13: Each table represents one question posed to all interview participants with responses organized by their corresponding theme derived from qualitative analysis with MAXQDA.

Table 5.1.

Question: What was the most valuable thing you experienced as a part of the Family Meal Workshop?	
Themes	*Responses*
Kids helping out (support)	Kids chopping or peeling vegetables

	Shared family experience Surprised child enjoyed the workshop
Workshop success	Shared family experience Surprised child enjoyed the workshop
Accessibility (support)	Free equipment
Affordability (support)	Free equipment

Participants were delighted and often surprised by the extent of their child's involvement in the Family Meal Workshop. Some participants noted the potential benefits of their kids seeing other kids participating in meal prep. One common theme that emerged from this question was a desire for kids to help out during mealtime. Later questions refer specifically to the challenges of involving kids in meal prep, but almost all participants indicated here that they felt this experience fostered an interest in meal prep among their kids. Some referenced the kid-safe knives used at the workshop as a support:

"Usually, we're not letting them use sharp knives they can cut their finger off with, so [the kids] were pretty stoked they had those plastic knives so they could kind of saw away at the carrots."

"I would never in a million years have had them cut an onion."

Others appreciated that the workshop provided not just the ingredients, but also the equipment necessary to make the target meal at home, reducing accessibility barriers:

"We got a free pot. When we saw it, we were like 'do we get this?' That was pretty cool."

"I liked that they gave us the ingredients and the supplies to go make it at home, to experience it from home. Because I think all that stuff would probably be expensive, the pot and all that, it's nice that you have the tools and ingredients to go try it."

Table 5.2

Question: How did it feel to cook with so many other families and children?

Themes	*Responses*
Kids helping out (support)	Kids benefit from seeing other kids cooking
	Shared family experience
Workshop success	Fun and entertaining
	Social experience
	Shared family experience
Family (support)	Shared family experience

The atmosphere of the FMW was unanimously lauded as fun and social. Parents chuckled recalling carrots popping off the cutting board when their kid finally cut through it. Others simply enjoyed socializing with other parents with whom they could relate. One parent appreciated the coloring pages available for kids as a means of keeping them entertained and non-disruptive. Many again emphasized the benefits of having their kids observe other kids engaging in meal prep:

"I think it definitely helps kids, in that seeing somebody else do it they're more apt to be engaged and intrigued in it if they see other kids involved, and not just us telling them to do something."

And adults too appreciated seeing how other families practice meal prep:

"I think it was neat to see like how each different family kind of worked on their different things and kind of… you can relate to how they do things at home… it was a nice shared experience."

Table 5.3.

Question: Did you make the workshop meal with your family at home?	
Responses	
Yes	5[5]
No	2

Most participants took their prepped vegetables and equipment home and made the target meal. Experimenting with this new recipe, participants enjoyed adding protein like ground beef, chicken, or other meats. One family added more vegetables to the meal once home. One participant did not cook the meal that evening but made it the next day out of fear it would spoil. The participants who did not make the target meal following the workshop still ate their prepared vegetables:

> *"Our kids ended up just snacking on all the cut-up veggies and stuff. And it just kind of disappeared. The sauce we ended up throwing out, because it sat in our fridge, I think it sat in there for about a month. And then we were like we should probably get rid of that."*

Table 5.4

Question: What about the workshop did not work so well for you and your family?	
Themes	*Responses*
Workshop shortcoming	Did not make whole meal during workshop
	Got hungry/wanted more food

[5] Two participants who responded "yes" are a part of the same family

	Communication of expectations
Nutrition	Not enough protein in meal
Preferences (barrier)	Not enough protein in meal
Kids helping out (barrier)	Keeping kids' attention Vegetables were hard for kids to cut

The most common critique of the FMWs was that families wished they could have completed all parts of the meal making process. As mentioned earlier, the Building For Kids is not equipped to facilitate stove-top cooking. Nevertheless, participants were not always made aware of this and generally expected to experience more cooking than what was offered. One participant sums up this sentiment succinctly:

"I thought, since it was a workshop about making a meal together, it was great to prep the veggies and have them do that, a little disappointing that we didn't actually get to make the meal. And then enjoy the meal that we made. I just kind of assumed that's what we were doing."

Others recalled struggling to keep their kids engaged throughout the workshop. Perhaps related, multiple participants were hungry during the workshop and underwhelmed by the final serving size. And although every kid at least tasted the target meal, parents expressed that their kids had come to expect a meat as a part of their meal.

Table 5.5

Question: What did you learn about cooking, shopping, or nutrition during the workshop?	
Themes	*Responses*

Variety (support)	Soy sauce substitute (liquid aminos)
Nutrition	Soy sauce substitute (liquid aminos) Nutrition information about rice
Cooking skill (support)	How to combine ingredients/flavors Preparing vegetables with flavor
Time management (support)	Cooking does not have to take so long
Workshop shortcoming	Nothing new

Parents generally felt the workshop was beneficial for their kids, but there was less consensus among parents as to whether the workshop expanded their own cooking knowledge or skills. Two participants referenced the soy sauce substitute liquid aminos as something new they learned. Others were surprised with how good they thought the meal tasted despite it being a vegetable-based dish. But others felt the knowledge relayed at the workshop was nothing out of the ordinary for their family. Ultimately, participants took solace in the simplicity of the meal and took away the lesson that tasty, healthy meals do not have to take all day to cook:

"You had your mix of veggies. It still had a nice flavor. And just to know that it doesn't have to be difficult, you know, it was more or less a one pot meal kind of thing."

"I mean, it tasted great. We all enjoyed it very much, so that was nice to know that it doesn't have to be a difficult two hour process to have a good meal."

Cooking For a Family in the Fox Valley

Table 5.6.

Question: What are some of the barriers you face that prevent you from cooking the meals you and your family want to eat?	
Themes	*Responses*
Cooking knowledge (barrier)	Lacking knowledge of how to cook Struggling to find new recipes
Preferences (barrier)	Restricted by kids and family preferences
Time management (barrier)	Time constraints: work, childcare
Nutrition	Dietary needs/restrictions in family
Variety (barrier)	Struggling to find new recipes Restricted by kids and family preferences
Family (barrier)	Restricted by kids and family preferences
Affordability (barrier)	Prices and inflation
Accessibility (barrier)	Prices and inflation

Parents struggle to find variety in meal making, as many participants recalled cycling through the same handful of meals week after week. Some do not know where to find new recipes, while others do not believe they have the cooking skills to expand their repertoire. It is even more challenging to add variety if your kids are picky eaters, as one parent explains:

"Trying to think about variety, because you start to fall back into those routine dinners that go over well because they're simple, they're the least resistant, but it prevents exploring."

The price of groceries and inflation were mentioned as barriers. So too were dietary restrictions stemming from nutrition related chronic disease. But simply being limited on time was the most commonly cited barrier to meal prep. Participants had to juggle their work responsibilities, childcare, and their kids' extracurricular activities, while somehow still finding time to cook. For parents of newborns, the challenge is amplified:

> *"My biggest obstacle is coordinating time between my wife and myself, because we've got a newborn, so, someone's pretty much always taking care of the baby, and then, if the other kids are being wild, they need to be corralled so that doesn't leave anybody to do the cooking."*

Table 5.7.

Question: What is your favorite meal to make for your family?

Themes	*Responses*
Time management (support)	"Straight out of the box" meals
	Slow-cooker/crockpot
	Spaghetti
Preferences (support)	Coconut curry tofu
	Chicken parmesan
	Chicken and potatoes
Food agency (attitude) (inspired)	Breakfast foods
	Grilling
Variety (support)	Coconut curry tofu

Nutrition	Spaghetti

This question served as an icebreaker to open each focus group discussion. Participants were encouraged to elaborate as to why this meal is a favorite of theirs. Responses generally fell into two categories: 1) meals that are relatively quick to prepare, allowing parents to better manage their time. And 2) enjoyment, either enjoyment derived from the meal itself or from the method of making the meal, namely grilling and slow cooking. One participant summed up a common sentiment with regards to slow-cooker meals:

"I also really like using the crockpot with the kids. Like I just put it in in the morning. So basically chilis and soups and things like that in the crockpot. And having it be ready by dinner time, that's my favorite way to cook."

Another participant identified her favorite meals with the meals she hopes her kids will come to enjoy:

"I'm not the best at [cooking], but you gotta feed the family, right? So you do what you can. We love to have a good coconut curry tofu. I absolutely love it. I'm not sure the boys love it, but, [I'm] hoping to develop those tastes."

Table 5.8.

Question: Can you talk me through a meal you made for your family recently?	
Themes	*Responses*
Variety (support)	Jambalaya
	Chicken and sides (slow-cooker)
Variety (barrier)	Meal made with ingredients on hand

Time management (support)	Chicken and sides (slow-cooker) Meal made with ingredients on hand
Cooking knowledge (barrier)	Breakfast cereal
Preferences (support)	Jambalaya

Participants' meal making stories identified several triumphs and failures in the kitchen. Two parents talked about chicken-based meals they had recently prepared for their families. In one of the meals, the parent made pan-roasted chicken breasts with vegetables and tater tots. He mentioned purchasing chicken breasts in bulk, and how this meal serves as one of those "go-to" meals that is easy to prepare and enjoyed by kids. The other chicken-based meal started off on the wrong foot. The parent forgot to set up his slow cooker in the morning, so the meal he had planned to make that day was no longer an option. Instead, he marinated and cut the chicken breasts to use in a salad. These participants, along with two others, did not follow a recipe when making this meal. Rather, they relied on their knowledge of cooking and the ingredients already available to them. Among those who followed a recipe, one parent discussed making jambalaya. This participant followed a new recipe to great success:

"We made jambalaya. And I was kind of nervous about that one. But it was actually a hit when you take out some of the spice, it can be a spicy jambalaya. But gave everybody a bit of what they do like between, you know, they like rice, the sauce was good enough that they enjoyed it, my son likes shrimp, so he got shrimp, and then there was sausage in there that my daughters like, so we got a little bit of everything."

Table 5.9.

Question: Are your kids generally involved in meal prep? and why or why not?

Themes	*Responses*

Time management (barrier)	Only on weekends
	No: Afterschool activities
Kids helping out (support)	Only when kids are interested
	Yes: Only remedial tasks
Kids helping out (barrier)	Only on weekends
	No: Afterschool activities
Preferences (barrier)	Only when kids are interested
Safety concerns	Not near the stove/oven/grill
	Not with knives

Parents expressed their aspirations for getting their children more involved in meal prep. However, when kids are not interested in the meal making process, are occupied with after-school activities, or their parents are too busy to supervise them in the kitchen, opportunities for involvement are limited. One point of contention that emerged in discussions is what the appropriate age is for kids to begin helping in the kitchen. Some feel it is better to wait until middle or high school to begin teaching their kids to cook:

"They've got to learn the safety hazards more… Middle school or high school I think is better to teach your kids to cook because then they know, ok this is hot, I'm not gonna put my hand on it."

The workshop led other parents to think their kids could be helpful in the kitchen now:

"The prep work is the hardest, or the most time consuming, I guess. So, I've often thought like, oh, if someone could be peeling these carrots while I am doing this other thing, that would be awesome."

The State of Food Agency in the Fox Valley

Table 5.10.

Question: What is your attitude towards cooking? Do you enjoy cooking? Is it burdensome?

Themes	*Responses*
Food agency (attitude) (burden)	Burdensome when rushed/limited on time
	Not enjoyable, but necessary
Food agency (attitude) (inspired)	Enjoys feeding the family
	Enjoyable when meals turn out well
Time management (barrier)	Burdensome when rushed/limited on time
Variety (support)	Enjoyable when meals turn out well
	Enjoys cooking intermittently
Cooking skill (support)	Enjoys when meals turn out well
Cooking skill (barrier)	Enjoys cooking intermittently

All participants identified aspects of cooking they enjoy. But most identified structural barriers that prevent them from consistently finding fulfillment in the meal making process. Participants who do not perform the majority of household cooking enjoyed surprising their families with meals of their own creation. Meanwhile, parents who are the household's primary cook experienced negative feelings when rushed, finding motivation to cook by identifying the unhealthy alternatives their family would eat if they do not prepare a meal. Ultimately, parents find fulfillment in cooking when they know their family was fed a decent meal:

"I enjoy cooking because I know I have to feed my family. Is it something that I would've chosen, no… my motivation to cook is because I want my family to be fed a reasonably healthy meal."

"To see that somebody enjoys what I am making for them, that's what I enjoy the most."

…

"Yeah, sitting back and watching them eat, oh, it's just that good feeling"

Table 5.11

Question: What cooking skills or strategies are you most comfortable with? Where do you thrive in the meal making process?

Themes	*Responses*
Equipment (support)	Using slow-cooker; one-pot meals
	Knife skills, cutting
	Pan frying
	Grilling
Time management (support)	Meal planning/organization
	Using slow-cooker; one-pot meals
	Cleaning up; dishwashing
	Occupying kids
Kids helping out (support)	Baking, not cooking
Kids helping out (barrier)	Occupying kids
Cooking skill (support)	Pan frying
	Grilling
	Knife skills, cutting
Cooking skill (barrier)	Baking, not cooking

Food agency (self-efficacy) (support)	Meal planning/organization
	Pan frying
	Knife skills, cutting

Participants each discussed their own unique skillsets in the kitchen. Not all strengths involved cooking. Some preferred baking to cooking, as baking allows more time for childcare. Others excelled at planning and timing meals, a major area of concern for most participants. Though many parents wish their kids would be more involved in meal prep, for some parents, keeping their kids out of the kitchen during meal prep is something they value. While clean-up time is a major barrier to including kids in meal prep, parents who thrive at cleaning and dish washing encourage their kids to contribute to that process. Specific cooking skills participants identified included knife skills, pan frying skills, and utilizing the cooking equipment they have. In particular, slow-cooker, or "one pot," meals are a major support for busy parents:

"We have kind of a good list of one pot meals. We love our instant pot. It allows us to cook a lot of meals and limit the amount of mess and cleanup that we make, that always works out well."

"The way we've been doing the best is using a crockpot. Where we put it in in the morning and it cooks all day. That's super easy and it's convenient."

Table 5.12.

Question: Do you feel you have enough time to make the meals you and your family want?

Themes	*Responses*
Time management (barrier)	No: Work/childcare balance
	No: Afterschool activities

	Not if defrosting and preparing meat No: More convenient options Grocery shopping struggles
Food agency (structure) (barrier)	No: Work/childcare balance No: Afterschool activities Grocery shopping struggles
Food agency (self-efficacy) (barrier)	Grocery shopping struggles
Kids helping out (barrier)	No: Work/childcare balance No: Afterschool activities
Nutrition	No: More convenient options

All participants felt they lacked enough time to make the meals they want. Reasons varied, and some participants mentioned multiple time constraints they face. One participant recalled routinely forgetting to shop for groceries. Another identified convenience foods, like McDonald's, as the quickest but least nutritious option. Kids' afterschool activities, previously cited as a barrier to involving kids in meal prep, affect parents' cooking schedules too. Interestingly, multiple participants mentioned both defrosting and marinating meats as one their most time-consuming cooking tasks. The most salient reason for lacking the time to make the meals their families want was simply the challenge of balancing childcare with life's other responsibilities:

> *"To plan seven days and to do the shopping for those seven days or those meals. And with activities and the kids, are they sick? Are they, you know, all those things considered, my husband traveling, not traveling, all plays into that."*

"I could make the stuff that I enjoy that and everybody likes, but it's a four hour meal."

Workshop recommendations

Table 5.13.

Question: are there any insights you have on how the workshop can be improved going forward? How do you think it could be a better experience or more valuable for parents?
Responses
Cooking demonstrations
Hold workshops more often
Communicate expectations
Seasoning tips
Health and safety advice
More space per family
Draw connections between meal prep and the final product

Despite the overall positive reception the first two FMWs received, participants provided detailed recommendations for improving future workshops. Parents wished the connection between meal prep actions, like chopping vegetables and making a stir fry sauce, were more explicitly connected to the finished meal served to participants, a connection kids did not immediately make. Along those same lines, participants wanted to see more live demonstrations of cooking techniques beyond chopping and peeling. Themes that emerged during discussions, like food and cooking safety or wishing the workshop plan was better communicated, were brought up again after reflecting. One encouraging recommendation is for the Building For Kids

to host more workshops, "maybe one per month." Lastly, a major suggestion, especially for those who participated in the more crowded second FMW, was to give families more space and tools to ensure all family members can equally participate in the workshop:

"Having more space to get things set up, almost like a station. With five of us gathered around a small table it felt very cramped with all the extra stuff. But I understand with the amount of interest, and how many people were in the room, I know there was limited space, so it wasn't bad."

"I think the amount of utensils, I think if we had a couple more, it would be a little bit easier to incorporate everybody together. I think we were trying to focus on one kid at a time because of how many utensils. As long as they continue to be child friendly, and child focused, type options, to do that, I think that's good."

Food Agency Vignettes

Amy Trubek and colleagues, in their assertion of "food agency" as an emerging paradigm in food systems research (2017), use case studies of individual cooks performing meal prep to highlight the qualities of food agency in action. Without the benefit of entering participants' kitchens to observe first-hand their ability to enact food agency, the following vignettes are limited in their scope. Based off interview testimony, these vignettes do not capture every behavior relevant to food agency, but they provide a glimpse into the ways participants decide what to eat, which skills they are most or least comfortable with, and how they organize their time. No personally identifiable information is revealed, and pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of these home cooks.

Home cook 1: Jeremy

Jeremy and his wife both work full-time. They have two young kids in their suburban home. Jeremy, who does most of the cooking and grocery shopping, takes pride in creating meals for his family. He recognizes that his kids are picky eaters, so when he sets out to make dinner his primary goal is to make a meal his kids will eat. But his kids usually have after-school

activities that prevent them from being involved in meal prep, and so, he hopes whatever he makes will not take them by surprise. He sets out to make a simple meal he knows how to make without a recipe, and a meal that he knows his kids like, but with plenty of opportunities to incorporate variety: chicken, potatoes, and veggies.

Jeremy readies the chicken for the skillet, giving him the chance to engage in his favorite cooking skill, using his knives. He cuts away excess fat, tendons, and other problematic "chunks" that could turn his kids away from the texture of the chicken. He "throws" some frozen tater tots in the oven before taking inventory of his "stay-fresh vegetables" in the fridge. He likes to prep his vegetables once, and then store them properly for later use, saving him time along the way. While the chicken cooks in the pan, he adjusts the temperature, adds and then removes a lid over the pan, all in the name of "trying to get the tenderness right."

When it is time to eat, he awaits his family's reactions anxiously. His kids were hesitant to try it, per usual, but after enforcing his "no thank you bite" rule—in which the kids can refuse any meal so long as they take a bite and say "no thank you"—the kids found they liked the chicken and even ate the raw vegetables. Jeremy was most elated when his wife voiced her approval of the meal. Dinner was a success, but he admits not every meal goes this well. Coordinating a time for everyone in the family to eat dinner together is a constant challenge for Jeremy.

Results from the initial and follow-up CAFPAS surveys indicate improvements to Jeremy's food agency. While his scores increased across the board—from a score of 12.44 to a follow-up score of 16.52—most gains were concentrated in the "attitude" subscale. These gains are corroborated by Jeremy's interview feedback. He emphasized what he called a "shared family experience" and how he enjoyed seeing several families all cooking at the same time.

Home cook 2: Emma

Emma is a mother of two young boys. Her husband often travels for work, so Emma is responsible for all aspects of the meal making process. As a stay-at-home mom, she is primarily occupied with childcare responsibilities. While she prides herself on making healthy meals for her family, she is a reluctant cook. Growing up, she was never involved in meal prep at home, and only began to learn to cook once she was living on her own. One aspect of cooking that does excite her is introducing the meals she grew up on to her own kids. Promoting variety and "developing tastes" are her priorities, alongside healthfulness. But always the first thing on her mind is just getting a meal on the table, "you got to feed the family, right?"

Emma relayed the story of quesadilla night. Quesadillas are a go-to meal for Emma because she has "got the supplies on hand." Avoiding a last-minute grocery run is a major time saver for her. The quesadillas are easy to prep, allow her kids to involve themselves in meal making, and present an opportunity to use up the vegetables from her refrigerator. Emma admits her strong suit in the kitchen is not her cooking skills, but rather, organization is where she thrives. She is a proponent of "cleaning as you go," allowing her to avoid the big messes that are common when kids get involved in meal making. She has a list of "one-pot" meals that are easy to prepare and do not require her to be in the kitchen the whole time the meal is cooking. And she utilizes her "gadgets" to full effect; she knows how to use every tool in her kitchen, and she does not let them "collect dust." These strategies elevate the meals she makes. Emma comes from humble culinary beginnings, but her approach to cooking maximizes her potential.

Like Jeremy, Emma's CAFPAS score increased post-workshop, from 12.49 to 16.13. Emma's largest gains came from the "structure" subscale. Her favorite meals to cook are "one-pot" meals, so the relatively quick and simple stir fry meal from the workshop was well suited to

her cooking preferences. Always looking to let her kids contribute to meal prep, Emma remarked that her kids all enjoyed the FMW, allowing her to involve them more easily in meal prep at home.

Home cook 3: Kate

Kate is a teacher, a mother of two, and cooks just about every meal for her family. Her husband is retired and is responsible for the childcare and grocery shopping. Kate feels she is a talented cook, but she struggles to work around the barriers her family faces. Two of her family members are diabetic, and another is very picky, often requiring a separate meal. When she gets home from work, she hopes for a "leisurely" meal making process, but often dinner time turns into a rush to feed the kids before bedtime. Her kids participate in different after-school activities, often arriving back home hours apart from each other. One kid prefers an early bedtime, while another will stay up later. All of this means it's rare for her whole family to eat the same meal together at one time.

On those special occasions when everyone is home for dinner, Kate likes to put her kids to work on simple kitchen tasks like measuring ingredients or washing vegetables. She is making mostaccioli, a family favorite. She likes cooking this meal because she has most of the ingredients in her pantry from the start. If she has time, she will send her husband to the grocery store to pick up some fresh vegetables to add to the dish. When making a rich, cheesy dish like mostaccioli, she is cognizant of the need to add nutritional value. She gets creative to ensure her kids are eating enough vegetables, preparing kebabs of cucumber, cherry tomato, and olives as a side dish. She knows what meals and vegetables that her family cannot, or will not, eat and plans accordingly.

Meals like this are contrasted with "weeknight rush jobs," where the delicate balancing act between preferences, dietary needs, nutritional value, and time tends to fall apart. Kate mentioned choosing fast food or ordering pizza on nights like these. The alternative is for her kids to stay up later and wait for a homemade meal to be ready. When there is not enough time to cook, compromises must be made. Nutritional value for convenience is the most common trade-off she makes. The family's preferences and dietary restrictions take precedent. But when given enough time, Kate thrives at putting complex meals together. She wants the time to think deeply about what she cooks and how the meal will come together.

Kate's CAFPAS score in the follow-up survey was lower than her initial survey, a decline from 15.30 to 13.43. Her "self-efficacy" subscale scores improved slightly, while her scores in the "attitude" and "structure" subscales decreased. As alluded to in her vignette, Kate's time pressures limit her enjoyment of the cooking process. She excels in most aspects of the meal making process, but barriers to meal prep can encroach into other arenas of food agency, especially attitude. Kate's hoped for more demonstrations of the whole cooking process in the workshop. She hopes this would introduce her kids to more aspects of cooking, encouraging them to help. One of Kate's most effective time management strategies is to have her kids help with simple kitchen tasks. Expanding the variety of tasks that kids engage in during the workshop could help support Kate.

Discussion

Food Agency: From Practice Back to Theory

Wolfson et al. (2020) and Morgan (2016) have called for further food agency studies that explore the meal making processes of parents with young children. The case studies above provide insights into the unique relationship between childcare and meal prep. Parents are never

just cooking. Each of the case studies show parents both cooking and parenting, scheduling and planning, overcoming obstacles by using the resources at their disposal. Knowledge of food and cooking is certainly present in each case, but more important for family cooks is knowledge of the particularities of their household. Who will eat what foods and when? Can my kids help me in the kitchen? When will the kids get home? Am I feeding my family a nutritious meal? How can I fit all this into my schedule? These are the questions parents must ask themselves every evening as they prepare to cook.

All FMW participants interviewed unknowingly discussed many of the key components of food agency. Food agency helps to explain how adults might 1) choose between cooking or eating out, and 2) how not just cooking skills, but navigational, time management, and organizational skills affect the meal making process (Trubek et al. 2017). Most participants recalled evenings when making a meal at home was not an option, resorting to more convenient options. And all participants discussed their meal making process in ways that went beyond just food knowledge and cooking skills. Qualitatively, food agency theory helps situate the decisions and actions of these parents within a social context that accounts for complications outside of their control.

That FMW participants saw only incremental change in their CAFPAS scores post-workshop is unsurprising. Wolfson and colleagues (2020) found that, on average, parents of children aged 2-9 scored significantly higher on the CAFPAS surveys than the adults without kids. The parents I studied all possess the requisite qualities of "empowered actors" (Trubek et al. 2017) in the kitchen, and their shortcomings were often the result of structural barriers like work and childcare that prevented them from being able to make the meals they want. Structural barriers only account for a small portion of the overall CAFPAS score (Lahne et al. 2017) and

are unlikely to be altered by a single workshop. However, as the 'food agency vignettes' demonstrate, seemingly small changes to one's attitude or skills can reverberate positively into other realms of meal prep.

The concerns of parents who cook differ from those of other adults. Childcare completely reorients one's schedule, requiring parents to put the needs of others above their own, and to develop a deep knowledge of their own household dynamics. This presents a problem for the CAFPAS as an accurate measure of parents' food agency. For many parents, "cooking is just something to get through as quickly as possible," but this is a necessity rather than a sign of a negative attitude as the CAFPAS frames it. Parents may feel they "can solve most problems with enough effort," but not without enough time. Perhaps a new version of the CAFPAS is in order; one that is adjusted to reflect the special contingencies of cooking as a parent.

Emergent Themes: Time to Cook

All study participants indicated that they regularly do not have enough time to prepare the meals they want to make. Additionally, time management worked its way into many responses to seemingly unrelated questions. When asked to describe their favorite meal to cook, multiple participants chose the meals they felt were most compatible with their schedules and with childcare. The prevalence of slow-cooker or one-pot meals in interviews follows the same trend. Finding and using new recipes, too, was often discussed in relation to time. Participants often discussed their "go-to" recipes in a negative light and looked for ways to avoid eating the same meals each week, but time constraints often prevented them from doing so. One participant summed up the deflating effect that time management can have throughout the meal making process:

"If there is a day where I'm feeling adventurous and I say, 'Hey, you know what, we're gonna try a new recipe.' And you look for a recipe, ***which takes time****. And then you see, oh, I*

don't have all the ingredients. And so now you're discouraged. Because do I really wanna run to the store to buy whatever, oh forget it. I'll just go back to the list that I have and just make something. ***Because this is too much, and I don't have the time for it."***

This participant's experience is not unique among family cooks, but it is an experience that many cookbooks, cooking shows, and health-food blogs neglect to mention. Family cooking case studies have, in the past decade or so, emerged as a welcome rebuke of the more elitist trends in health-related media. Bowen and colleagues (2014)—building off Julie Guthman's (2007) critique of Michael Pollan, Marion Nestle, and other proponents of organic, "mindful," or "slow" eating practices—use the place of the family kitchen to complicate the conventional understanding of what is or is not possible at mealtime. Many of those parent-cooks regularly engaged with "the literature on the latest and best healthy foods" (2014, p.25), and subsequently felt a heightened sense of frustration when barriers prevented them from achieving their desired results.

Time was a major barrier for the families in these case studies as well. The pressure to cook—and to cook healthy, tasty meals—is omnipresent in most families. But increasingly, there is less and less time available for families to pursue their culinary goals. Plessz and Étilé (2018), using time-use surveys, found an average decline of 19.7%, or about 20 minutes, in time spent cooking among US households between 1985 and 2010. Meanwhile, Liana Sayer's (2005) time-use study determined that US adults, and especially women, saw their "access to free time" (p.296) decline substantially between 1965 and 2000.

Question 24 in the CAFPAS survey prompted participants with: "I wish that I had more time to plan meals." The average response on the 1-7 disagree-agree scale was 4.74, with responses ranging from 1 to 7. The difference between participants' survey responses—which indicates time is moderate barrier—and their interview statements serves to highlight an

important facet of food agency theory: cooking never occurs in a vacuum. Parents may be able to allocate just enough time out of their days for meal prep, but when it is actually time to cook, it may no longer feel that way. Daniels and colleagues (2012), studying the relationship between time constraints and meal making, found that "people frequently feel they fall short of time to cook when facing problems with the temporal organization of daily life" (p.1051). Something that could exacerbate "problems with the temporal organization of daily life" is childcare. Many FMW participants recalled eating dinner at different times than their children due to their kids' changing appetites, extra-curricular activities, or their own irregular work schedules.

Beyond preventing regular family dinners, time constraints can have implications for health and nutrition. Welch and colleagues (2009) studied nutrition and exercise outcomes in women who experienced time constraints, finding "women reporting time pressure as a barrier to healthy eating and physical activity are less likely to meet recommendations than are women who do not see time pressure as a barrier" (Welch et al. 2009 p.888). One reason for this may be found in Jabs and colleagues' (2007) study of time constructions among mothers, where the authors found "nutritional advice typically focuses on what to eat, but seldom on how to fit those recommendations into busy daily lives" (Jabs et al. 2007 p.20). The stakes of this problem are great. Lacking enough time to cook is both common and harmful to health. And if the corrosive effects of time pressures are only heightened by parenthood, then a logical next step towards understanding precisely what barriers to meal prep Fox Valley families face would be to explore the relationship between childcare and cooking.

Emergent Themes: Kids in the Kitchen

There is debate over the extent to which children have participated in meal prep historically. Lavelle and colleagues' (2019) focus group study of mothers in Northern Ireland

found that most mothers learned to cook by being involved in meal prep with their parents from a young age. Meanwhile, Meah and Watson's (2011) family cooking case studies indicate that previous generations of adults struggled to teach their kids cooking skills, mainly as a result of their own lack of knowledge. There is not a clear answer. In fact, there is little agreement among parents as to whether they would even prefer their kids to be involved in meal prep.

When asked how they learned to cook, and whether they were involved in meal prep at a young age, most FMW participants recalled they were told to stay out of the kitchen during meal prep. A typical experience was for one parent or grandparent to perform the majority of the meal prep work, while kids would only help out on special occasions. Two participants remarked that the desire to involve kids in meal prep is a modern trend:

"I think years ago the kids weren't interested in cooking or getting involved in the kitchen because [parents] would always tell [kids] 'you get out, we don't want a bunch of people in the kitchen.' Especially if it's small, they probably didn't want their kids in the kitchens as much because if their trying to prepare food or something, they don't want a whole bunch of kids running around the kitchen while cooking."

...

"Back in the seventies, eighties, you know, that wasn't really a thing. That's more of a modern concept, I think, like having your kids in the kitchen and that."

Parents may not always want their kids in the kitchen during meal prep, but there are certain behaviors parents would prefer to see from their kids. Lavelle's (2019) focus group respondents were divided on the issue. Themes like "children in the way" (Lavelle et al. 2019 p.7) and "kids keep out" (pp.7-8) emerged from discussions, but so too did "involvement means eating" (p.8) and "kids' 'interest' in cooking" (pp.8-9). The mothers here simply wanted their kids' behavior during meal prep to make the process run more smoothly, one way or another. If kids are interested, they can get involved. But if they are not interested, then they should stay out of the kitchen and eat what is served.

FMW participants often credited the workshops with piquing their kids' interest in meal making. If these kids are becoming interested in helping in the kitchen, then what should parents, weary of the messiness and safety concerns that come with kids in the kitchen, do to involve their children in meal making? Regardless of parents' attitudes, cooking is an important skill for children to learn. Ronto and colleagues (2017) point out declining rates of food literacy among Australian youths could have implications for health down the road. Not only does a "failure to learn food preparation in childhood" (Ronto et al. p.20) hinder one's development of this skill as an adult, but their "inclination to purchase, prepare, and consume fruits and vegetables" (p.20) may also be limited by this lack of knowledge in addition to the effects of time constraints.

One participant identified a strategy that could both alleviate issues of time scarcity and promote the development of cooking skills in their children:

"I learned that the kids were more capable of doing things than I thought because, you know, they do help in the kitchen, especially my daughter. But I was giving her very remedial tasks, you know? I didn't realize that they could cut up green peppers." ... "I don't have to go so remedial with it. They're capable of more advanced tasks than I expected."

And other parents too were surprised by their children's proficiency in the kinds of tasks performed at the FMWs:

"It's kind of hard to know what they can and cannot do. Sometimes you're like, 'oh, no, no, you can't do that. You're just eight.' But then they are capable. And they show you that, 'Hey, I can do this right. I can peel something or'... sometimes just washing something like, 'can you scrub these potatoes clean or something?' Just to get them involved in some way."

Another idea that emerged from these interviews is that when kids are involved in the meal making process, they are more likely to eat the meal they helped make. Building off Lavelle's (2019) theme of "involvement means eating," where parents' expectations for their kids' mealtime involvement was limited to trying the meal that was served, perhaps involvement

in meal prep facilitates eating. Kids are picky eaters, and FMW participants often recalled balancing their kids' preferences with other factors like healthfulness and cost when deciding what to cook. Kids having some stake in the outcome of a meal, however, may make them more apt to try the meal. As one participant puts it:

"They're not as picky when they can put what they want on there. And they can say 'I made my pizza today.' Or 'I made my pancake today.' Because they're craving their own, what they like."

...

"When they make their own stuff they're more excited about it. It's just about getting them involved."

Conclusion: Returning to Research Questions

Parents appreciated the FMWs primarily for introducing their kids to the meal prep process. In that regard, the FMWs were in touch with what parents were looking for. However, the workshops were less valuable to parents themselves. Parents remembered the pieces of information and advice provided by instructors—like how to use liquid aminos as a soy sauce substitute, or why brown rice may be the better option over white rice—but they hoped for more. During the FMWs, kids were more often engaged in meal prep activities than parents, perhaps the Building For Kids could capitalize on that down time to address parents specifically, and provide the kinds of nutrition education they hoped parents could glean from the workshops.

In addition to expanding food and nutrition advice, effective time management strategies are desired by parents. The meals from the first two FMWs were both one-pot meals. This trend should continue. A support of time management that many parents mentioned was slow-cooker or one-pot meals. These meals allow parents to engage in childcare while meals are cooking, and some participants mentioned involving their kids in the preparation of such meals. Exploring the variety of nutritiously valuable meals that can be prepared this way could help parents overcome many of the most salient barriers to meal prep.

Kids, on the other hand, learned and experienced a lot. Many participants provided accounts of their kids' interest in meal prep increasing following the FMW. For many kids, this was their first time cutting or peeling vegetables. Parents were surprised by the number of tasks kids could competently perform. A key for future workshops should be to build upon this base of kid-friendly meal prep activities. Not only would this provide benefits to kids through experience of and exposure to meal prep, but parents' ability to involve their kids in meal prep activities at home could improve as well.

Involving kids in meal prep activities was identified as a support of food agency among participating families. However, doing this is not always possible. In fact, for many families, it is rarely even an option. The time pressures that individual families face often influence several other aspects of food agency. If your kids' need rides to and from afterschool activities, you may be limited on time and unable to involve them in meal prep. If you are limited in time, that will affect your enjoyment of the meal making process. If you are no longer enjoying the process, you are less likely to take risks and "explore" new recipes, ingredients, or flavors. The effects of the FMWs on CAFPAS scores are encouraging, but more research is needed before definitive conclusions can be drawn as to the efficacy of the FMWs as a food agency intervention.

Parents need all the help they can get throughout the meal making process. Gauging their children's level of interest in meal making and identifying the skills kids are most comfortable with may be a key to overcoming many barriers. Parents have limited time to procure and prepare meals, they want to explore new recipes and eat a variety of meals, and they also want their kids to learn to cook. It all starts with involving the kids. If kids' involvement means they are more likely to try a meal, that solves one barrier to promoting variety and introducing new

foods. If kids' involvement can be productive, as many FMW participants experienced, then that can reduce time-related barriers as well.

This is by no means a definitive solution to the innumerable barriers home cooks face. Bowen et al. (2014) suggest "thinking outside the kitchen" (p.25) for solutions to more pressing food systems issues. The FMWs, a public, shared experience, where participants are united by the common aim of providing quality meals for their families, seems to fit with Bowen's hope for "more creative solutions for sharing the work of feeding families" (p.25). However, participants' recommendations indicate the FMWs could offer more. By the end of the workshop, participants are still expected to go home, grapple with time, equipment, or childcare barriers, and cook the meal themselves. If the strengths and weaknesses of one's kitchen, with all the associated inequality and variation, is to be the sole arbiter of what their family gets to eat, then, as research into the "best" and most nutritionally valuable meals progresses, the gap between those who can take advantage and those who cannot, will only grow. But the FMWs succeeded by engaging children and showing parents that their kids can be valuable contributors to meal prep. That alone may lead to positive effects on children's health and nutrition and may also enable parents to better enact food agency.

Recommendations for the Building For Kids

Successes

The first two FMWs met many of the goals the Building For Kids had in mind when designing the program. Most participants interviewed made the workshop meal at home following the event, and those who did not make the meal still ate the cut-up vegetables. This aligns with one of the most important goals of the workshops, to increase the number of meals

families eat together at home. More study would be needed to assess the long-term affects the workshop had on the eating practices of families, but many participants noted the workshops taught them that tasty, nutritious meals do not have to take so long to prepare. It is less clear whether the other major goal, to expand participants' confidence and skills in preparing healthy meals, was met. The results of the CAFPAS follow-up survey found a slight increase in CAFPAS scores post-workshop. However, the improvement in CAFPAS scores falls short of the gains other cooking classes have achieved (Pope et al. 2021). But parents developed their cooking skills and behaviors over many years and it is unlikely that one workshop would produce significant changes to those skills and behaviors. As more workshops are held, tracking the CAFPAS scores of participants attending their second or third FMW could yield interesting results.

The FMWs succeeded in other ways as well. Participants lauded the fun, social, and welcoming atmosphere fostered by the Building For Kids. Many participants used the phrase "shared experience" to describe the benefits of the program. Parents are hopeful their kids will be more interested in getting involved in meal prep after witnessing so many other kids and families doing so. And parents, too, appreciated the opportunity to see how other families approach cooking. Many participants were thrilled to receive a pot alongside the ingredients needed to produce the target meal. While many participants wished they could have prepared the entirety of the meal at the Building For Kids, the program adequately provided the materials necessary to make the meal at home. Ultimately, the consensus among participants was a desire to see more FMWs, and more often.

Next Steps

Participants provided several recommendations for future programming. And while some may not be feasibly implemented, others are small changes that could make a big difference in future workshops. Most recommendations could be split between kid-focused and adult-focused. Many participants noted that their kids did not always draw connections between the vegetables they were preparing and finished meal that was served at the end of the workshop. To better introduce children to the meal making process, future workshops should include more demonstrations of the cooking process, not just vegetable prep. Although the Building For Kids is limited in its cooking infrastructure, a cooking show-esque transition where the raw meal is swapped for the finished meal in a way that implies it is the same meal only now cooked, is something participants would like to see. Other participants mentioned that to be able to smell the finished meal throughout the workshop would help to better intrigue kids with the process.

Among parents, not everyone learned specific information they could use to improve their ability to prepare healthy meals for their families. For some families, the kind of nutritional information relayed at the workshop was "nothing new." The use of liquid aminos as a soy sauce substitute was something most participants agreed was new, applicable information they could use. More information like that, where parents are presented with new ingredients and how to use them, could help address this shortcoming. Another recommendation from parents of larger families is to provide such families, if possible, with more space and utensils to allow each member of the family to stay involved.

But the most pressing concern raised by parents was communication of workshop expectations. Many expected to prepare the whole meal with their families at the museum, rather than at home. Some parents recalled their kids getting hungry during the workshop and feeling pressured to seek out a quick bite to eat. Two ways the Building For Kids could address this

concern are 1) making clear in all communications leading up to the workshop the limitations on the cooking infrastructure of the classroom space, that families will not be cooking the meal but just preparing to cook the meal. And 2) provide larger portions of the target meal to families. Another solution could be to move the workshops earlier in the day so families do not come expecting to be provided with dinner.

Limitations

This study has many important limitations worth discussing. The small sample size of the study—14 CAFPAS surveys and seven interview participants—means the results are limited in their significance and applicability to other families in the Fox Valley and elsewhere. The Building For Kids anticipated greater attendance numbers, especially in the first workshop which only included four families. This meant my study was confined to just the 14 participating families. But with more FMWs forthcoming, there is an opportunity to build on these data with additional feedback from new participants. Furthermore, during the writing of this report, a third FMW was held on March 18, 2024. I was unable to attend the workshop and thus, cannot speak to changes already implemented by the Building For Kids. In addition to more FMWs, a variety of other nutrition education programming efforts, largely serving children, are already underway. The evaluation of those programs alongside the FMWs could offer greater insight into the development of food and cooking knowledge among kids in the Fox Valley. And, lastly, when this study was designed, the hope was to conduct focus groups featuring at least six participants per group. However, the small sample size and limited availability of participants only allowed for smaller group interviews. Because of this, the inter-participant dynamics and exchanges of a focus group were limited.

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Appendix A. CAFPAS survey and demographic questionnaire.

Family Cooking Workshop Evaluation Survey

Thank you for taking this survey prior to attending the Family Cooking Workshop hosted by the Building For Kids. You will be asked to answer questions regarding 1) your thoughts on food and cooking and 2) demographic information about you and your family. Please answer honestly as this survey is crucial to our evaluation of the Family Cooking Workshop.

Part 1: Food and Cooking

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Circle a number on the 1-7 scale.

Strongly **Disagree** Neutral/unsure Strongly **agree**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1. I feel limited by my lack of cooking knowledge.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I can always manage to decide what I would like to eat at any given time.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. When preparing food, I am confident that I can deal with unexpected results.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. When preparing food, it is easy for me to accomplish my desired results.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. In preparing food, I can solve most problems with enough effort.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I am comfortable preparing food.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I know how to use the kitchen equipment I have.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. I am involved in daily meal preparation.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. When I shop for food, I know how I will use the ingredients I am purchasing.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. I am confident creating meals from the ingredients I have on hand.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. Before I start cooking, I usually have a mental plan of all the steps I will need to take.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. When presented with two similar products to purchase, I feel confident choosing between them.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I know where to find the ingredients I need to prepare a meal.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I find cooking a very fulfilling activity.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. For me, cooking is just something to get through as quickly as possible.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. Compared to other activities, cooking brings me little enjoyment.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. If I try making a new type of food and it does not come out right, I usually do not try to make it again.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. I think a lot about what I will cook or eat.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. I prefer to spend my time on more important things than food.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. If everything else is equal, I choose to cook rather than have food prepared by someone else.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. I feel like cooking is a waste of effort.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. I am inspired to cook for other people, like my family or friends.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. I feel burdened by having to cook for other people, like my family or friends.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. I wish that I had more time to plan meals.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. I have a hard time finding enough time to prepare the food I'd like to eat.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. My family responsibilities prevent me from having time to prepare meals.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. My social responsibilities prevent me from having the time to prepare meals.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. My job responsibilities prevent me from having the time to prepare meals.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Part 2: Demographic information

1. Please write your first and last name.

---

2. What is the best way to reach you for a follow-up survey? Please write your preferred email or phone number in the space below.

---

3. What is your age?

4. What is the age of your child (or children) who will attend the workshop with you?

5. What is your race/ethnicity? (Circle your answer)

   - Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American
   - East Asian or Asian American
   - Latino or Hispanic American
   - Multi-racial
   - Native American
   - Pacific Islander
   - South Asian or Indian American
   - Southeast Asian or Asian American
   - White, non-Hispanic
   - Other _____

6. What is your gender identity?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Other_____

7. What is your primary mode of transportation? (Walking, car, bike, bus, carpool…)

---

8. About how many hours per week do you spend at work, at school, or fulfilling obligations like commuting, childcare, eldercare, or other essential activities that are incompatible with meal planning, shopping for food, and meal preparation?

    - None, unemployed, or not seeking employment
    - Fewer than 20 hours per week
    - Fewer than 40 hours per week
    - More than 40 hours per week
    - Other (please explain below)

      _____

9. On average, how many evening meals (or the main meal of the day) per week do you cook at home?

---

10. Other than yourself, how many people aged 18 or older live with you?

---

11. How many people under the age of 18 live with you?

---

12. Have you participated in a nutritional education program, cooking class, or other culinary training before?

    - No
    - Yes (Write the name of the program/class or describe the program/class below)

---

13. What is your occupation?

You have completed the survey. We will contact you approximately four weeks from now to ask you to complete a follow-up survey. Thank you for your time and we hope you enjoy the Family Cooking Workshop!

Appendix B. Focus group discussion guide.

Building Food Agency in the Fox Valley
Focus Group Session

Date:
Time:
Place: Building For Kids, 100 W College Ave Appleton, WI
Moderator: William Brenneman

Post Focus Group Field Notes:

Focus Group Sign-in and Consent Form

Welcome to the Family Cooking Workshop focus group discussion. You were invited to participate because you attended the family cooking workshop, completed our survey, and have expressed a willingness to participate in this discussion. We will be discussing various aspects of cooking for your family. This discussion will enable us to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop.

Let's take time now to read over the informed consent form again. By signing the document and participating in this focus group session, you agree to be digitally recorded so that we can ensure accuracy in understanding your responses. Your participation is entirely **voluntary**. If you wish to stop at any time, simply tell us that you no longer wish to participate. Let me know if you have any questions.

Family Cooking Workshop Focus Group Session

Preliminaries

· Welcome of participants: Hello everyone and thank you for participating in this focus group discussion about your experience in the Family Cooking Workshop.

· Introduction of facilitator: My name is Will, I'm an anthropology major in my senior year at Lawrence University. I will be moderating this audio recorded discussion and jotting notes.

· A quick overview of how the process works:

This study is being conducted as a part of the Building For Kids' Food to Grow Initiative evaluation and is being supervised by Professor Mark Jenike of Lawrence University.

The purpose of this focus group is to gather information from Family meal Workshop participants related to:

- Your experience of the Family Cooking Workshop
- Cooking for a family here in the Fox Valley
- Recommendations you have for how the Building For Kids can improve the workshop

Participation in this focus group is crucial to the evaluation process and gives you all the opportunity to share your unique perspectives. This focus group will consist of a series of

informed questions designed to encourage open and honest responses. The discussion will last approximately one hour and 30 minutes.

· Verify that audio recorder(s) are turned on and functioning

I will be facilitating this discussion. Additionally, the audio of this discussion will be recorded. Your voice recordings will not be shared beyond the research team. We use the recording only to verify the accuracy of the transcription. Quotes from the transcription, without anyone's name or identifiers attached, may be included in our reports on this research. I would like to check again that you all are comfortable with the use of the recording device.

· Review of confidentiality safeguards and limitations using informed consent form; opportunity for questions

1. Are there any questions about the informed consent form?
2. To re-emphasize it, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time.
3. If you have any questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints, let me know or address the contacts listed on the form.
4. Every effort on my end will be made to keep your participation confidential.
5. We ask that you do not disclose any information shared in this discussion. However, because this is a focus group study, we cannot guarantee this request will be honored by all of the other participants.

· Collection of signed forms with instructions for participants to keep one copy

- To explain the "ground rules" for the discussion:
    - Everyone should participate.
    - All ideas are equally valid.
    - There are no right or wrong answers.
    - Each person's view should be heard and respected.
    - Confidentiality should be preserved: do not disclose any responses from your fellow participants after the discussion.

· Introduction: Let's start by introducing ourselves: Tell everyone your first name, which community you live in, and anything else you'd like to share before we get into the discussion. I'll go first…

- Ice Breaker: To get us started, what is your favorite meal to cook?

Topic Questions:

Reactions to Family Cooking Workshop

- What was the most valuable thing you learned in or took away from the family cooking workshop?

  Probe: What did you learn about cooking nutritious foods?
  Probe: What did you learn about grocery shopping on a budget?
  Probe: Are you more confident in your cooking abilities?
  Probe: What did your kids learn?

- What else did you like about the workshop?

  Probe: What is something you learned at the workshop that you didn't know before?

- What didn't work for you? What could be done differently in the future?

  Probe: How did it feel to prepare meals with so many families?
  Probe: How did it feel to prepare meals with your children?

Food, Cooking, and Agency

- What are the biggest obstacles to cooking the foods that your family wants to eat? Did the workshop helped you overcome these obstacles?

  Probe: Is it easy to plan meals that meet your family's needs and/or preferences?
  Probe: Do you have enough time to prepare food?
  Probe: Are you able to acquire all the ingredients needed to make meals for your family?

- Talk me through a meal you have made or would make, from finding an idea to serving the dish.

  Probe: Which parts of the process are easiest, which parts are harder?
  Probe: Where did you learn [X] skill/recipe?
  Probe: Have you changed your meal making process since the workshop?

Cooking skill

- How often do you cook for yourself or others?

  Probe: Has this changed since the workshop?
  Probe: Are you spending more, less, or the same amount of time in the kitchen?
  Probe: Do you have help in the kitchen? Who helps?

- How do you decide what to cook?

  Probe: What is most important when deciding what to cook: taste/personal preference, health, convenience, or some combination of these?
  Probe: Do you typically follow a recipe? Why or why not?

- How would you rate your own cooking skills 1-10?

  Probe: Which skills or strategies are you most comfortable with? Whether it's mechanical skills like chopping and slicing, resourcefulness when shopping or procuring ingredients, adapting to challenges, etc.
  Probe: How have your cooking skills improved following the workshop?

Attitudes toward cooking

- Do you enjoy cooking? Why or why not?

  Probe: What do you enjoy most about cooking?
  Probe: What makes cooking burdensome for you?
  Probe: Are there moments of triumph in the kitchen? Moments of defeat?

- Do you like to try new foods? Why or why not?

  Probe: How often do you experiment in the kitchen with new recipes, techniques, or strategies?
  Probe: How do you feel about the meals you make? Are you typically satisfied with the end result?

Cooking with kids

- Are your children typically involved in meal prep to some extent? Why or why not?

  Probe: How do you manage your time between childcare and cooking for your family?
  Probe: How does having kids make planning and preparing meals more challenging?
  Probe: Do your children seem interested in the meal making process?
  Probe: How did your kids feel about the workshop? Were they engaged? Bored?

- Think back to when you were a kid. To what extent were you involved in meal prep?

  Probe: How did you learn to cook?
  Probe: How do you think your child will learn to cook?
  Probe: How important of a skill do you feel meal preparation is in the grand scheme of things?

Final thoughts

- Of all the things you've learned in the workshop, what is something—a new skill, ingredient, or recipe—that you would/do utilize to make family meals healthier or better tasting?
- As we wrap up the discussion, what are your final thoughts on the Family Cooking Workshop?
- Are there ways in which we could improve future workshops to make them more valuable to participants?

· Thank you for your participation.

  - I would like to thank you all for participating in our focus group. The information you have given will be very helpful to us.

  - Reminder on confidentiality: We would like to remind all of you that what we discussed should remain confidential and the privacy of all participants should be respected.