Quarantine Kitchen: Examining the Role of Food and Food Experiences in Meaning-Making During Covid-19

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A thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Washington

2021

Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

University of Washington

Abstract

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This research questions how people made meaning of the COVID-19 pandemic through foodways and foodstuffs and explores the ways in which food operates as a symbol in cultural and social practices, fosters identity, and serves as a communication tool in the setting of the pandemic. This research has four key questions: 1) How are people employing food to make meaningful connections with others during the pandemic and quarantine? 2) In what ways do people return to food traditions or employ new foodways in creative ways when other options are not available? 3) How have the meanings, tensions, and significance of foodstuffs and foodways changed and grown during the pandemic? And 4) During the pandemic, what are the immediate and long-term impacts of interactions with and around food, both individual and communal? The data from this research were comprised of forty-two survey responses, six semi-structured participant interviews, and four semi-structured informant interviews. This research functions

within the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism and constructivism to examine the role that food played in the construction of cultural and individual meaning-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused great upheaval, and food offered a way of creating meaning within this complex situation. The results of this research demonstrate an important aspect of individual and communal response to the pandemic including the individual and collective foodway challenges, food-related solutions, and changes to foodways caused by the pandemic.

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Acknowledgements

I want to take a moment to thank some specific people who have helped me immensely over the course of completing this thesis and the MAIS degree.

My advisor and mentor, Dr. Ellen Moore.

My committee member and reader, Dr. Jeff Crane.

My cohort of fellow amazing students – especially Kelsey and Sharon.

My research participants - it's such a gift to hear their experiences and be entrusted to share them with you.

My best friend and partner, Connor.

My immediate family and pandemic pod, Faith, Off, Ben, Christie, and Maris.

My wildly encouraging friends who've asked great questions and reminded me of my abilities.

My supportive supervisor and friend, Sarah, who has been so accommodating as I've been in school for the last three years and the TCD family.

And my wonderful friends/neighbors/copyeditors Danielle and Reid.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Dave, an Information Technology employee in Olympia, Washington, started baking sourdough bread early in the COVID-19 pandemic because there was a shortage of yeast. Over the following year, Dave became a home baker. Inspired by friends who were bakers and his own success with recipes like pizza crust, he found the process of making sourdough approachable and the result delicious. Sourdough also served as a symbolic way for Dave to communicate care for his friends and family. He shared:

> I tend to be... a bit of a curmudgeon...I don't like people that much. But actually, I sort of love people, if it's the right people...So not being around people made me want to appreciate the people that I do appreciate a lot more. And so, sharing food was a real tangible way of doing that. So, you're like, "I made this with my hands. And I'm giving it to you because you matter to me." And just being able to share that. I don't know, it felt really good. And I, you know, I hope that I continue to do it … One of my friends is going through a divorce, and work has been really stressful- they're in a position of responsibility. And just being able to stop by when they're having a bad day be like, "I made you some bread," and just being able to lift them in that way…. I mean, that's, COVID or not, I think that's the way everybody should be, you know. So, I'm trying to embody that as much as possible.

Dave's story is a perfect instantiation of the productive and overlapping ways in which food operates as a symbol, identity, and communication tool. His story provides an example of how these three ways of food operating have helped individuals make meaning of their pandemic experiences.

Scope of Research

Dave's opening anecdote reveals how his experiences with food were impacted by - and intertwined with - his life during the pandemic. For Dave, these impacts ranged from the yeast shortage to the socially distanced drop-off of bread for his friend in need. Dave's story provides examples of food operating as symbolism in cultural and social practices, fostering identities formed around foods and food practices, and serving as a communication tool. Food is an integral part of culture, and culture is the production of shared meaning. Foods and food practices are woven into how people make sense and order in our world: food is meaning-making in action. The COVID-19 pandemic is an experience that, for many, caused great upheaval. Food offers a way of creating meaning out of this complex situation.

This thesis is centered on exploring how people, both individually and collectively, turned to food as a tool to create meaningful experiences, connect across distances, and foster community security during a time of extreme upheaval and uncertainty. The results of this research demonstrate an important aspect of building a resilient human community that is prepared to face this present challenge and future known challenges. It is a vehicle for communicating to each other the individual and collective challenges, solutions, and changes the pandemic has brought to people's foodways. For this reason, the research is inherently interdisciplinary and functions within the theoretical frameworks of constructivism and symbolic interactionism. Through surveys, individual interviews, and specific informant interviews, this research questions the role that food played in the construction of cultural and individual meaning-making during the global crisis that has left no one untouched.

In 2020 and 2021, news has been full of examples of food playing a significant and meaningful role in the daily lives of people, both in direct relation to COVID-19 and not:

"C.E.O.s Rediscover the Family Dinner Table" (Gross, 2020); "A New Front Opens in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Borscht" (Varenikova & Kramer, 2020); "Food as Medicine on the Navajo Nation" (Greenaway, 2020). These stories reveal that the varying human relationships with food are often not mutually exclusive. It is the complexity and layering of these relationships that lays the foundation to study food as a tool for how people and communities had made sense of the pandemic.

It is important to note that the pandemic has not affected people in an equal or equitable way, including challenges with food access and security. I recognize that the pandemic has revealed and exposed many inequities. It's clear that food collides with race, class, gender, etc. My research touches upon this, but it is not of central consideration; instead, this research lays the foundation for future research on these topics.

The ubiquitous and nutritional value of food means that people may relate to - and employ - food in all kinds of ways. With this in mind, my research asks, how does food interact with one's life when the world's population is experiencing a global pandemic? For example, when seeing others in person is not safe, food may become one of the few ways to physically express care and love (Laskey, 2020); when many people are facing financial and health hardships, food can provide a welcome (and vital) form of assistance (Specia & Stevis-Gridneff, 2020); and when home is the safest place to be, family dinner may take on a new importance (Brody, 2020).

The direction for this social research is supported by recent scholarship. Parasecoli's (2011) work focusing on food as a symbolic resource that can be employed in symbolic and meaningful ways in communication and identity is operationalized in the work of both Gill (2018) and Shade-Johnson (2018) – both examples of food as a significant contributor to identity

construction and maintenance. A 2006 study by Locher, Yoels, Mauer, and van Ells explores the social and emotional role of comfort food in stressful situations, such as illness. This previous research documents uses of food as a symbolic tool in identity construction and reinforcement, and food as a tangible method for soothing emotions in stressful times. It is with these ideas in mind that this research questions how individuals' experiences with food, and their thoughts about those experiences, can serve as an accessible lens to view how food might serve as a community-wide tool for responding to and making meaning of crisis.

This research aims to answer four questions:

1. How are people employing food to make meaningful connections with others during the pandemic and quarantine?
2. In what ways do people return to food traditions or employ new foodways in creative ways when other options are not available?
3. How have the meanings, tensions, and significance of foodstuffs and foodways changed and grown during the pandemic?
4. During the pandemic, what are the immediate and long-term impacts of interactions with and around food, both individual and communal?

These questions frame this research and are revisited as it progresses from informant interviews to surveys and participant interviews. These questions have been formed with the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism and constructivism in mind: they are specifically aimed at soliciting responses that communicate participants' personal realities of the pandemic and how food has symbolically functioned in their lives during the pandemic. In asking these questions and collecting answers from community members, this research offers insights which are

intended to be accessible and available tools for my local community of Thurston County, Washington to learn and use moving forward.

My Background and Positionality

I am a white cis-gender woman. I grew up in the South Puget Sound and now work as a farmer raising meat (lamb, turkey, and chicken), wool products, and hay with my partner and parents. I am invested in this work because it offers rewarding, enjoyable, and visible experiences and outcomes – such as preparing and eating food I have raised or grown. Our farm is dedicated to regenerative stewardship of the physical landscape and ethical treatment of our livestock. We hold a lot of gratitude for the privilege to explore our cultural foodways from the production side of the table. In addition, I work off-farm as an environmental/agricultural educator and communications specialist within my local community.

This personal background and my own feelings about food systems work and consumptions plays a significant role in how I work as a researcher. I am privileged to have access to food and to find my own foodways a calming aspect of my life - especially during the pandemic. Being able to spend time working on my farm, away from people and the news, was a stress relieving and seemingly productive way for me to personally make meaning out of the pandemic time. These personal experiences and feelings with food, as well as my professional work as an educator and communications specialist, also certainly influenced the kinds of questions I asked and how my research unfolded - from recruitment to analysis.

From Personal Background to Research Questions

I have chosen to undertake food-based research because I find great opportunity in my own reaction to food for exploring the meaning-making and community building capacity of food during a crisis. In conducting this research, I seek to better understand others' reactions to

food and the potential for community support through those reactions. Understanding how my community is making sense of this pandemic, supporting each other, and finding meaningful moments amidst hardship is a useful tool for surviving future crises. This research is intended to grow that knowledge and document examples from within my community. It is my hope that we will collectively do better next time if we pay attention and ask good questions now. I aim to ask some of those good questions, and I bring my passion and experience working within the food system to the asking.

Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Food in 2020 – 2021

It is important to situate this work in the context of the global pandemic. The pandemic intersected with people's lives in numerous ways. This research focuses on individuals' relationships with food during a time when other hobbies, activities, relationships etc. became less available. This research, conducted during spring of 2021, took place almost exactly one full year into the pandemic and explored the relationships with food that people in my own communities in Thurston County, Washington had cultivated during the last year. As a result, this exploration is situated within a larger body of work about living during the COVID-19 pandemic that is actively growing and changing nearly every day during the course of this research.

The broader context of news articles and stories related to food and eating published during the pandemic is helpful when situating the responses from participants in this research. It also presents an opportunity to see how food performs as symbol, identity marker, and communication tool in the setting of the pandemic and quarantine outside of the community centered in this research. Nationally and internationally, there are numerous examples of how food interacted with the coronavirus and the people living through it. Articles with titles like

Organic Farmers Fill National Food System Holes Revealed by COVID-19 (Polito, 2020), *Community Supported Agriculture Is Surging Amid the Pandemic* (Ricker & Kardas-Nelson, 2020), and *COVID-19 Sparks a Rebirth of the Local Farm Movement* (Hiller, 2020) started popping up regularly in early spring 2020 and illustrated a common theme: consumers with financial means were looking locally for food that felt safe and reliable, and they were looking for it close to home. The usual avenues of procurement no longer felt secure.

A full year later, the topics of these stories were revisited, and the trends seen in 2020 continued and adapted to the ever-changing reality of the pandemic (Held, 2021; Shirvell, 2021). For example, there was concern that the demand for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares was peaking because of COVID-19, and that it would prove unsustainable for small farms (Shirvell, 2021). The acute lack of diversity in revenue streams for farmers in 2020 due to wholesale accounts closing could translate into greater uncertainty in 2021 as restaurants, schools, and farmers markets opened in different ways due to county-by-county re-opening tactics (in Washington State, specifically).

Policy and infrastructure were made immediately flexible when the unprecedented pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, but financial markets began leveling off and the crisis was normalized such that producers found that the infrastructure and support for sustained growth or rebuilding was minimal and unsustainable. Decision making began slowing down again. This left consumers and potential future consumers in the lurch as producers navigated what could be possible amid another busy growing season. Things like food hubs, cooperative buying organizations, and projects focusing on processing facilities, along with non-profit social service agencies, are repeatedly turned to as the solution for local food systems and customers are

invited to participate as they are able and interested. No lasting change in local food systems is guaranteed because of the pandemic.

Large-scale food production and processing has also been heavily impacted by the pandemic and the ripples of that are felt widely. Meat packing plants were forced to close due to virus outbreaks (Kludt, 2020), and migrant farm workers were denied assistance and health coverage, even while acknowledged as both an essential and a vulnerable population to COVID-19 (Jordan, 2020). This population was made more vulnerable during wildfires in the West in summer 2020 (Mizes-Tan, 2020). A lack of organization, unclear communication, and contradictory rules contributed to farm workers' vaccination rates continuing to trail other groups of people (Ricker, 2021), and the place of restaurant and food service workers in the vaccine priority line was disputed and different from state to state.

The production and supply chain disruptions have human faces and one way that became apparent was a surge in the use of food banks and food assistance programs along with the unemployment rate (Abou-Sabe, Romo, McFadden, & Longoria, 2020). The gap in people's food related experiences continuously widened, and portrayal of food and food-related experiences in the media made that especially clear. This gap is evident when turning from articles about the production and procurement side of the food system to the preparation and consumption side.

Throughout the pandemic, financially-stable consumers used food for fun and creative purposes: Hrishikesh Hirway and Samin Nosrat started a quarantine podcast called *Home Cooking*, taking callers' questions about how to use their pantry to find delicious and nostalgic moments through food in quarantine (Hirway & Nosrat, 2020), the New York Times reported that more people were cooking at home with positive results for health (Brody, 2020), and

community built around sharing food persisted in the form of porch drop offs and guidelines about how to do that safely (Laskey, 2020). The 2020 home gardening trend in particular continued to ripple into 2021:

> Interest in gardening—in backyards and community gardens and on kitchen windowsills— skyrocketed last March. Then, many first-time gardeners planted out of panic. Now, a year later, the interest persists. And while most gardeners no longer fear food shortages, they're drawn to the sense of stability and control that producing food provides during still-uncertain times. (Held, 2021)

Some seed companies saw up to 600 times as many orders in 2021, and lots of new and experienced gardeners expanded their home gardens into community resources and spaces for things like seed saving and food sharing (Held, 2021). Food growing, preparing, eating, and sharing continued to be portrayed as an escape and outlet amidst peoples' various pandemic experiences.

The often disparate and extreme representations of food during the pandemic– as both an outlet for cooped up creativity and a bare necessity in short supply begot through a problematic food system– illustrate that food and the ways people are interacting with it are interconnected with experiences of the pandemic and quarantine. It also illustrates the breadth of ways that food has been shown to serve as a symbol, identity marker, and communication tool during the pandemic. COVID-19 exposed the United States food system as incredibly vulnerable and inequitable. The long century of ever-expanding and intensive industrial agriculture has separated individuals from their food, their farmers, and the rhythms of harvest that were once known by all people. There has been a loss of community food sovereignty.

By doing this research during the COVID-19 pandemic, this research is able to offer insight that can be used to justify change at a faster pace than has historically been seen. This is applicable to systemically solve community-level problems such as food access. The field of Food Justice acknowledges that academic research about such topics often lags behind activism and on-the-ground solution generation. But "COVID-19 has generated new and renewed scholarly interest in defining, measuring, reporting, and fostering food system resilience" (Glaros, Alexander, Koberinski, Scott, Quilley, & Si, 2021). What's more, specific recommendations coming from researching such as, "disrupt[ing] the existing system in relation to: (a) increasing the means and places to grow food; (b) rethinking food waste; and (c) disrupting supply chains by building supply networks" (Glaros, et. al., 2021) are surfacing and directly intersect with the trends and topics appearing in popular news media. These recommendations show even more ways in which foodways and foodstuffs can continue to be operationalized as symbolic and communication tools in community-based work and individuals' lives. The application of these ideas and the research findings are explored in Chapter 6.

COVID-19 in Washington State

The complexity and tension in food access coupled with a rising interest in local foods was seen locally in the Thurston County area as well as nationally. Within weeks of this being written, multiple articles were published in the local paper – *The Olympian* – about these same issues: *The pandemic revealed the need for locally produced food. This Matlock woman stepped up* (Gilmore, 2021); *Food insecurity a problem in the US military, and local food banks and aid groups see it.* (Shull, 2021). And my research during spring 2020 about the impacts of COVID-19 on local farmers and ranchers and their resiliency found a home in the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* (White, 2021) in their COVID-19 special issue.

Washington State saw some of the first outbreaks of COVID-19 in the United States. Chapters 4 and 5 will examine the results and responses I gathered through my research, and it is in this local and national context of food and the pandemic that they are to be read and understood.

Qualifications to Research and Terminology

It is important to note that this research did not explore individuals' problematic relationships with food such as eating disorders, diet culture, or dietary restrictions. The issue of lack of access to food, though not a primary focus, was a topic that participants did discuss. Also, during the course of this research, the world has been experiencing another global civil rights movement that is intertwined and connected with people's culture, identity, and daily life. Additionally, across the West Coast in 2020 there were tangible experiences of the impacts of climate change in the form of mega fires. And finally, the United States also had a contentious presidential election in 2020. These environmental and social experiences contributed layers to individual participants' responses, and they also create potential for areas of further research that will not be answered by this thesis. Due to the constraints and scope of this study, questions regarding connections between food and human rights, food and climate change, food and politics, and food and health will need to be left unanswered and create opportunities for further research in the future.

Also vital to understanding the scope and intent of this research is an active acknowledgement that the research is not specifically looking at the intersections of participants' identities, such as their gender, age, sexuality, economic situation, race etc., with food. Food overlaps with these socialized experiences in extensive and complex ways, and to include them purposefully would require a broader range of research questions and participant pool than the scope of this research. Because a specific diversity within my participant pool was not a goal of

this research, the survey participant pool is anonymous and may represent some voices more than others. Of those participants who gave self-identifying information, the majority were female adults over 30. This leaves ample room for further investigation and insight into food experiences and the COVID-19 pandemic, especially related to different ages and genders. Similarly, this research could be expanded in the future to address racial inequality in relation to food and the pandemic as well as food access and class during the pandemic. Indeed, as additional research is produced by other scholars about this unique time, a revision of the existing literature would be necessary to investigate where new gaps may emerge.

It is also important to note that at the time of completion, the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing. That said, discussion of participant experiences and media regarding the pandemic is written in the past tense to prolong the applicability of this research. I acknowledge that when reading this shortly after publication it may read as if I assume the pandemic is over – this is not the case. This is a unique challenge presented by doing research about an ongoing event.

There are a few notes on terminology and formatting that are helpful in following this research. First, the words “foodways” and “foodstuffs” are used purposefully to indicate the broad spectrum of cultural food customs and practices and food items that make up the varied food related practices and traditions from around the world. Second, I use the term “pandemic pod” to indicate a participants’ closed social group of people they interact with face-to-face. And third, racial and ethnic identifiers - such as Indigenous and White - have purposefully been capitalized in both an acknowledgement of respect for the participants' identities and as a grammatical acknowledgement of their role in language as proper nouns.

Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 includes a discussion of the interpretive framework and methodology used in this research. This research employs constructivism and symbolic interactionism in its analysis of informant interviews, survey responses, and participant interviews. The chapter provides details of participant recruitment and coding and analysis methodology.

Chapter 3 contains a discussion of scholarly and popular literature on food serving as a symbol, identity marker, and tool in communication. The context and background of previous research supports this thesis' employment of food in these three ways when discussing the findings of the informant interviews and participant surveys and interviews. This scholarship is also essential in identifying some of the gaps in prior food related research that this thesis fills.

Chapter 4 contains four informant interviews and is broken into two sections. The first section, "Feeding Community," highlights two individuals who worked specifically on programs and projects that addressed food access during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their work helps to answer two of the research questions of this thesis: during the pandemic, what are the immediate and long-term impacts of interactions with and around food, both individual and communal? And, how have meanings, tensions, and significance of foodstuffs and foodways changed and grown during the pandemic?

The second section of Chapter 4, "Creativity in the Kitchen", includes the profiles of two individuals whose personal and creative relationships with food influenced their experiences of the pandemic. Both of the individuals in this section created media about food, and their stories and insights help to answer the other two research questions of this thesis: how are people employing food to make meaningful connections with others during the pandemic and quarantine? And, in what ways do people return to food traditions or employ new foodways in creative ways when other options are not available?

Chapter 5 contains a complete analysis of the survey data and interview data from the general pool of participants. Here the main findings of the research are discussed and presented. This chapter is organized around the challenges, solutions, and changes to foodways illuminated by participants' food experiences during the pandemic. The collective responses from the data and the emergent themes help to answer all four of the research questions. This chapter also addresses how the theoretical frameworks of this thesis support the findings.

Chapter 6 concludes this thesis with a discussion of what questions remain and where future research could continue exploring this topic. This chapter also explores the ways in which Food Justice research and the paradigm of Equitable Food Oriented Development could be applied to future research. This includes a discussion of gaps in the research and discusses potential action that could be supported by these findings.

Chapter 2

Interpretive Framework and Methodology

It is important to have a clear understanding of the interpretive framework that grounds this research and offers support for the analysis. Within this chapter, I address the ideas from symbolic interactionism and constructivist framework that are applicable to the research. The latter part of the chapter discusses the methods used for data collection and analysis.

Interpretive Framework

Symbolic Interactionism

The theory of Symbolic Interactionism rests on the assumption that we create meaning out of objects through interactions with them and that those meanings arise out of social interactions and "on-going negotiations in a cultural context" (Greider & Garkovich, 1994, p.1); these meanings are interpreted by each of us as individuals and subsequently categorized for future use and application (Blumer, 1986). Symbol and meaning are core tenants of the paradigm: "A symbolic interaction framework emphasizes...the importance of shared symbols and meanings, the importance of symbols and meanings in a group's definitions of the situation, and the negotiation of meaning as a change in context occurs (Stryker 1987)" (Greider & Garkovich, 1994, p.9). It is the human response and interaction with items that give them meaning and, within my research, the placing of those meanings in the rapidly changing context of the pandemic.

Blumer (1986) highlighted how interpretation is not an automatic process but rather a formative process that is responsible for guiding future actions. Meaning is seen as a social product constructed through individual and group interaction and interpretation. Maines (1977) also saw meaning creation as a social interaction that may be more closely akin to negotiation.

These meanings are not fixed in perpetuity, but rather continue to exist because of maintained social interpretations and are thus subject to change and fluctuation over time. A food-related example of this could be the personal and collective meaning ascribed to Thanksgiving turkey and the ways in which that meaning has evolved socially over the years.

Symbolic Interactionism highlights the origin of meaning and interaction that humans construct and interpret around both the mundane everyday objects that are often overlooked as well as the fantastical. I apply this concept of the symbolic importance and transformation of the "taken-for-granted nature of everyday life" (Greider & Garkovich, 1994, p. 9) to foodways and foodstuffs and the active meaning-making possible through participants' interactions with foodways and foodstuffs. We renew our relationships with food objects daily through necessary preparation and consumption. I argue that this kind of repetitive interaction makes food one of the strongest symbolic resources in our daily lives, whether we actively acknowledge it as such or not. When our daily lives have narrowed because of necessary and mandatory travel and socialization restrictions, these daily objects and tasks take on even greater importance as we construct meaningful experiences and interpretations of our pandemic experience.

Constructivism

The origins of constructivism can be traced to Socrates and the idea that learning occurs through questioning, but the foundational principles of the framework that are known and used today are more closely related to the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, Perkins, and Bruner (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Amineh and Asl (2015) explained that constructivism is thought of as both a theory of learning and a theory of knowledge. Their work serves as a recent cumulative look at the framework and provides a clear, applicable, and operational definition:

> In constructivism, learning is represented as a constructive process in which the learner is building an internal illustration of knowledge, a personal interpretation of experience. This representation is always open to modification, its structure and linkages forming the ground to which other knowledge structures are attached. Learning is then an active process in which experience has an important role in understanding and grasping the meaning. This view of knowledge does not necessarily reject the existence of the real world, instead it agrees that reality places constraints on the existing concepts, and contends that all individuals' knowledge of the world is the interpretations of their experiences. (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p. 11)

Constructivism rests on the assumption that an individual's knowledge is constructed and based on personal experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). Applied to the idea of social constructivism in communications, this idea of self-constructed and negotiated knowledge is extrapolated to include knowledge building through social interactions and action (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Meaning and significance are created through regular interaction with other members of the community or culture such that norms of truth and reality are constructed, built upon, and maintained. The work of constructivism is grounded in the idea that people actively construct knowledge through a constant process of interaction, interpretation, and modification of our social environments (Howell, 2013). Constructivism affirms that their knowledge is a form of a valid reality and values this subjectively created reality. As Howell (2013) detailed, constructivism holds up and values subjectivity while neither denying nor embracing the idea of an objective reality.

The constructivist paradigm supports the idea that people across the world are experiencing the pandemic and yet interpreting it differently. Each person is constructing an

individual subjective reality based on personal and societal variation in reactions to the pandemic; a variety of realities are valid interpretations of the pandemic. This thesis explores the variety of different realities people constructed, revised, and experienced during and because of the pandemic and the degree to which food experiences were integral to those realities. Constructivist paradigm allows for a wide variety of valid experiences and expressions of meaning-making through food for individuals during the pandemic. Additionally, constructivism confirms that learning is an active and iterative process. Knowledge is not static, and everyone is capable of active and continuous learning throughout life. My research hinges on an assumption that we are actively experiencing, incorporating, and learning from our daily life, and that food, as a necessity *and* symbolic tool, presents an opportunity to explore the variation in those experiences. The more knowledge we gather about how we are experiencing and making meaning of the pandemic experience, the more knowledge we have in the future to apply to future crisis situations.

Interpretive Frameworks in Combination

The purposeful use of multiple frameworks allows for a complex interpretation of the data. Food as a symbolic resource for individuals holds personal and individually constructed importance and meanings that are validated as aspects of their personal realities through a constructivist framework. The meaning and significance people associated with food during the crisis of COVID-19 hold symbolic importance in their constructed interpretations of the pandemic. Grounding this purposeful combination of frameworks in symbolic interactionism and socially defined nature of reality (Greider & Garkovich, 1994) allows for the acknowledgment of the personal and individual nature of foodstuffs and foodways, the cultural realities and

importance associated with food, and the necessary, critical, and often unequitable reality of food consumption.

Methodology

Whether in relation to someone's identity or as a tool for communication, food frequently acts as a symbol – one that creates many different meanings in different contexts. Food becomes part identity or a tool in communication *because* it is serving as a symbol for greater concepts, whole histories, or whole schools of thought. Looking at foodstuffs and foodways from a symbolic perspective positions food to be understood as a tool for humans practicing sense-making when confronted with new and unfamiliar food sensory experiences (Parasecoli, 2011). This idea shows how individuals can interpret new food items and customs so that they are incorporated or not into their personal food *semiosphere*. People also turn to familiar foodstuffs and foodways – comfort foods – during times of psychological distress (Locher et. al., 2006), such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the social isolation of quarantine. Cultural visitation and self-soothing through a food experience are both addressed within my research. The qualitative data analysis processes described below were used to seek and recognize patterns in individuals' experiences of food during the pandemic, examine what those might mean, and identify some of the symbolic ways that food has operated in participants' lives. During the design and implementation of this research, people's varied experiences, comfort-levels, and place-based experiences of COVID-19 were all important considerations. Because I could not conduct in-person research, I had a greater opportunity to conduct research with individuals who otherwise may not have been physically available or interested in participating. The details of people's experiences and the specific identities, practices, and feelings around them are the aspects of the food system that I chose to focus on within my research. Considered through the lens of

symbolic interactionism, people have personal and culturally-situated experiences with food. These experiences can translate into specific ways in which people were making meaning of and coping with a time of global pandemic. This research thus contributes to a larger field of scholarship on food systems and records some of the ways in which people have been both impacted by COVID-19 and how they survived it.

Data Collection

This research draws upon three methods of data collection: qualitative surveys, semi-structured respondent interviews, and informant interviews of specific individuals. Each of these methods will be discussed in turn, focusing on their purpose and how they were utilized in my research. Together, these three methods support a constructivist-focused framework for data gathering and analysis that is focused on systems of cultural symbology and culturally defined meanings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019).

Qualitative Surveys

Qualitative survey tools are utilized as methods of gathering data from a larger group of participants about a specific topic (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). I used a survey to help me gather primary data to determine patterns or common experiences between participants' when discussing their experiences of food during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants' survey responses were also utilized to gather topics for interviews and create interview questions. This process allowed for "systematic and precise sampling" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 142) such that both typical- and atypical-case sampling could be utilized based on survey responses to identify interview participants.

I created a qualitative nine-question survey on Google Forms based on my four research questions (Appendix A). This survey was administered via an electronic "snowball" sample

method, which is commonly used to sample dispersed groups of people (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). In this case, the dispersed group was people in quarantine and snowball sampling allowed for voluntary participation at the level that participants were interested in engaging. A statement of consent was part of the survey. I sampled two populations of residents of the South Puget Sound area (focused in Thurston County). First, I made a post on the Olympia *Nextdoor* forum available to residents of Olympia based on their residential address. Second, I posted in the Facebook group *Tenino Talk* for people who self-identify as a member of the Tenino, Washington community. I have access to both of these online platforms because of where I live and farm.

Forty-two people participated in the survey and fifteen of those gave identifying information in order to participate in a follow-up interview. I chose not to ask my participants for demographic or identifying information, such as age, race, or income, unless they chose to share it in their survey responses, because I was not looking at the nexus of specific demographics and their food experiences. Rather than focus on obtaining a specific kind of diversity within my respondents, my research instead focused on the geographic location of participants and was not focused on age, gender, or racial diversity.

Semi-Structured Participant Interviews

As a data collection tool, interviews serve to describe "meaningful dimensions of their [respondents'] lived experience…designed to reveal how people express their emotions and thoughts, how they construe their actions, how they conceptualize their roles, how they formulate a philosophy or worldview" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 229). I conducted semi-structured interviews designed to provide interviewees opportunities to share ideas, express opinions, and offer more in-depth insights. Each interview and set of inquiries were unique to the interviewee

(Esterberg, 2002, p. 87) and included questions related to food access, food preparation, food sharing, and family dynamics related to food. The choice of semi-structured, sometimes called in-depth, interviews is critical to my data analysis because this form of interview often allows for unanticipated topics and information to arise. As Esterberg (2002) highlights "in-depth interviews are particularly useful for exploring a topic in detail or in constructing theory." (p. 87). All interview participants had answered the same survey questions ahead of time, and their interview questions followed up on those responses. I also asked all participants to share a food related memory from the last year of the pandemic. Some participants chose to share demographic or social identity information in their interviews, and that is noted where known. A summary and description of interviews can be found in Appendix C.

Six semi-structured respondent interviews were conducted either via Zoom or over the phone. Interviewees were selected from the fifteen survey participants who self-identified as being interested through a combination of typical-case sampling, where respondents represented typical responses found in the surveys (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), and atypical-case sampling, where the 'outliers' or most unique responses (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019) were able to be further explored through the interview process. Interviews lasted anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour. Before the interview I shared information about my research, verified that they had received the consent form and understood it, and verified with participants that they were comfortable being recorded. Interviews were recorded using Zoom and Otter.ai which both offer immediate transcriptions. Audio and written transcription files were saved directly onto a secure private hard drive.

Informant Interviews

I also included four "informant interviews" of individuals – defined as those whose work and lived experience positions them to be knowledgeable insiders and connectors within the topic of this thesis (Lindloff & Taylor, 2019, p. 227). The specific individuals were chosen because of their personal or professional experiences in food systems work or with food that give them insider status. The informant interview profiles are split into two categories: people who work in food distribution, and people who create media about food. These informant interviews were conducted to supplement the survey and semi-structured participant interview data. These were also semi-structured interviews and were conducted and recorded in the same manner as the participant interviews. These interviews lasted about an hour each. A non-recorded pre-interview conversation occurred with each informant to chat about their work and experiences, and these conversations were used to form some initial questions for the interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on grounded theory as made available by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory asks researchers to develop theory and meanings from the data through a process of coding rather than imposing themes on the data in advance of collection (Esterberg, 2002). This mode of ground-up theory creation via inductive reasoning, called the *constant-comparative* method (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), is "a process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation." (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2016, p. 319). The process of open coding survey responses allowed me to organically develop themes in the participant responses that could be aggregated into categories to be analyzed as potential answers to my research questions. I then used a process of high-inferences categorization to organize my data into categories that connect with my research questions and themes.

My informant interview and participant interview transcripts were coded in a semiotic coding process by which the symbolic importance of the interviewees' statements was determined in the context of the coding from the surveys (Esterberg, 2002). This process of coding for the interview data was helpful because it allowed for multiple and layered meaning(s) to be found in the interviews while also assisting in data reduction such that I was able to call out "meaningful data from the surrounding sea of raw, uncoded data." (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 319). The use and interpretation of multiple kinds of data (survey, participant interviews, and informant interviews) allowed me to triangulate data.

The use of these methods in recruitment, data collection, and analysis is influenced by my academic background and experience in the field of anthropology and my current work as a community educator. My position within the community I have been researching has also certainly influenced my participant recruitment. My informant interview subjects are all individuals who I knew or was aware of prior to conducting my research; my own interest in the subject of food and community positions me to have access to these individuals. My job as a farmer and community educator in the field of food systems work has impacted my communication and outreach style for recruitment of participants as well as my reading and coding of the data. This background, while an asset in many ways, also precludes me from some observations or connections that someone else would make. Before addressing the specific data found through this research, the next chapter will explore the existing literature related to food serving as a symbol, identity, and communication tool.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

The literature review contains three distinct categories: food as symbolism, food as identity, and food as communication. In this research it is the nexus of these ways in which food operates within cultures and communities that interests me and where I looked at the overlap of food with individual's experiences of COVID-19. It is important to note that the areas of symbolism, identity, and community are interwoven and dependent upon each other. Because of this there is overlap of these three within the literature review, in discussion of the context of food and COVID-19, and in answering the research questions.

This chapter describes in detail the existing literature on food's role as a symbol, identity marker, and communication tool. Understanding how food has been utilized as a symbol, identity marker, and communication tool prior to the COVID-19 pandemic offers an understanding of the ways in which it may be doing so during the pandemic. This understanding is also important when examining participants' food and pandemic-related experiences shared in Chapters 4 and 5.

Food as Symbolism

Food serves as a symbol within all cultures and can be discovered by others, used to find common ground, or used to practice a cultural identity for oneself and/or with others. Over and over, foodstuffs, foodways, and food consumption is demonstrated to be a metaphor with greater cultural meaning and representation that is interpreted and enacted through identity construction and representation, food-based communications, and systems of power (Chou, 2015; Gill, 2018; Harvey, 2017; Padolsky, 2015; Parasecoli, 2011; Rosenblum, 2015; Shade-Johnson, 2018; Tibère, 2016). My research addresses how foodways interact with and are influenced by huge societal experiences such as a pandemic and resulting quarantine.

The work of Gill (2018), Harvey (2017), and Shade-Johnson (2018) examined food as a symbolic representation of greater cultural identities or economic situations. Gill (2018) explored the pairings of food that indicate "working-class" in American culture and how the meanings associated with those foods' structure narratives and backgrounds that inform identity. Gill's work is predicated on an idea that resonates with my research: "in those moments, over food, about food we seemed to learn so much about each other." (2018, p. 2). In Gill's research, as in my own, food serves as an accessible portal into individual experiences and moments where people make grounded meaning of their circumstances in their kitchens, gardens, dining tables etc. The work of both Gill (2018) and Shade-Johnson (2018) began to look at place- and economic-based conceptions of food culture and the importance that it plays for specific communities. Shade-Johnson (2018) examined how American Indians use traditional and Indigenous foodways to resist, disrupt, and survive settler colonialism while also preserving their culture into the future. The foodways examined speak to the broader practice of meaning making through everyday reciprocal relationships with the land and traditional foodways. Shade-Johnson wrote:

> Settler colonialist policies that affect land and water rights disrupt not only our access to our traditional foods but also our ways of practicing our food, the meaning-making of our foods, our cultural foodways. When our cultural practices are erased, so are our identities as Indigenous peoples. (p. 4).

Shade-Johnson (2018) highlighted food justice related research that is action-based and functioning from a constructivist standpoint of socially and community created knowledge being a powerful source of knowledge that should be shared and utilized in making change. This

concept is increasingly important to building place- and community-based resiliency to an event like a global pandemic.

Tibère (2016) also added to the literature on food as symbolic resources in addressing the ways in which cultures utilize food as a symbol for multi-ethnic identities, specifically applied to Creol cultures. Tibère's work found that food plays a central role for individuals in Creol societies as they navigate their multi-ethnic identities because food symbolizes and names both what is shared and what is different. Food serves as a symbol within all cultures which can be discovered by others, used to find common ground, or used to practice a cultural identity for oneself or with others.

One striking example of food as a symbolic resource in times of disaster and the ability for its symbolism to change comes from Harvey (2017). Harvey explored the ways in which food was seen as a "cultural performance" for volunteers who came to assist after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana. Volunteers came expecting to contribute to the rebuilding of New Orleans, and they had expectations about what they were rebuilding it to become/return to that did not always correlate with community needs or goals. Harvey showed that food quickly became a symbolic tool for performances of reciprocity and solidarity when other means were not necessarily available; food served as a symbolic resource in the navigation of community (re)building and cultural politics. Within this context, food started out serving as a powerful tool of welcome and thanks (Harvey, 2017, p. 498). But, Harvey noted, these performances of gratitude and solidarity took a different turn as time went on and the expectations surrounding the performances of solidarity and reciprocity became fraught with notions of cultural appropriation and obligation. (Harvey, 2017, p. 499). Harvey emphasized the ways in which food behaves in performance, from the preparation to the consumption, and how that performance is

structured and dictated by cultural norms which translate into customs and mores of behavior around preparation, presentation, and consumption. The type of meal and the intention of the preparer helps to dictate both the menu and the script that surrounds the meal being performed. Issues of authenticity surrounding the foodways and foodstuffs being presented to volunteers are central to the performance. Negotiation of authenticity and place and/or class related identity became a central contributing factor.

Harvey's work (2017) is particularly important for this research because it serves as a case study wherein food was seen as a symbolic resource with both positive and negative outcomes for the community in need. The work demonstrates a common misconception that good intentions will be seen for just that, when reality shows that the impact of someone's actions is much more lasting. I think this realization and the commentary on food's role in community-based work is what helps to propel Harvey's work into the realm of food justice as well, and enters larger conversations of power, debt, and obligation that are extremely relevant to a COVID-19 present day reality and the widening disparity in wealth and food access. Harvey's work leaves me with continuing questions about how discrete communities can function well together and utilize food as a tool for mediating difference and fostering equity without wearing out or tokenizing the practice.

The above-mentioned literature illustrates that there is an abundance of examples of food serving as symbolic resources for negotiating and interpreting identity and communication in a variety of settings and moments. This culturally situated understanding of food as a symbolic tool for meaning making is close in meaning to Greider and Garkovich's (1994) concept of landscapes, or "symbolic environments created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment…these landscapes reflect our self-definitions that are grounded in culture."

(1994, p.1). Greider and Garkovich use nature and the environment as an example of a sociocultural phenomenon that can be found in cultures world-wide as holding symbolic meaning; it is this very idea of symbolism that this research applies to foodways and foodstuffs during the pandemic. Both the environment surrounding people and the food in front of them has the potential to be a sociocultural phenomenon that is both functionally important in influencing our cultural definitions but which we take for granted because it is ubiquitous. It is the ubiquitous nature of food as both a biological necessity and a symbolic resource that make it useful for examining people's varied experiences of COVID-19. My research fills a gap in food symbolism scholarship by overtly drawing out and recognizing food as a symbol and signifier within the specific moment and experience of the global pandemic.

Food as Identity

Within existing literature, foodstuffs and foodways are identified as central components of and/or signals of someone's individual, cultural, and/or place-based identity. For example, connections to particular foods are so strong that they shape cultural history (Chou, 2015; Padolsky, 2005), aid in dementia care (Hanssen & Kuven, 2016), help individuals navigate multicultural boundaries and identities (Parasecoli, 2011), and serve as justification for environmental and social policy and action (Poe, Donatuto, & Satterfield, 2016). This variety in identities related to food allows for teaching/learning through recipe sharing, cooking, and eating and is one of the only modes of virtual travel or exploration that was safely available during the pandemic and quarantining. The validation of self-identity and the self-soothing possible through learning about, cooking, and eating traditional foods for oneself or community is a practice that was available during COVID-19 and has been illustrated in popular media throughout the pandemic (Manjoo, 2020; Nosrat, 2020). The idea of deepening a connection to self and

expanding/learning through food is central to this research. This is also an area where there is significant overlap with food serving as a symbol.

The work of Gill (2018), Harvey (2017), and Shade-Johnson (2018) examined food as a symbolic representation of culturally specific individual identities and/or economic situations, often with a food justice and action-research oriented perspective. In these studies, food is a symbolic tool in constructing identities and responses to specific situations. This same way of operationalizing food can be expanded to include the building of place and community-based resiliency to something like a global pandemic in this moment and is supported by the positive physical and psychological impacts of culturally specific diets found in the work of Hanssen and Kuven (2016), Locher et. al. (2006), and Poe et. al. (2016). Hanssen and Kuven (2016) examined the role traditional foods play in creating joyful and high-quality experiences for people living with dementia. They argued that access to traditional foods increases feelings of belonging, well-being, and nutritional intake. The increased nutritional intake is attributed to a higher interest in consuming the traditional foods. These findings are interesting in relation to the work done by Poe et. al. (2016) on access to traditional foods and food practices for both Native and Non-Native residents of the Salish Sea and the positive impacts to human well-being that occur because of sustainable and environmentally sound access to foodstuffs and foodways that are intimately connected to someone's place-based identity. In combination, these studies support the idea that access to traditional foods and foodways increases health and well-being both mentally and physically because they connect to individual's nostalgia for culturally specific foodstuffs and foodways. The importance of these foodstuffs is further supported by Locher et. al (2006) in examination of comfort foods as nostalgic foods, indulgence foods, convenience foods, and physical comfort foods that are positively connected to psychological wellbeing and mood.

Access to and consumption of nostalgic and culturally important foods has been shown to be an accessible self-care practice during COVID-19 (Stewart & Heisler, 2020).

Central to my research is the question of how individuals have been impacted by the food system. Their choices related to their own personal, communal, and cultural foodways and foodstuffs during the pandemic are also key features of the research. Understanding how foodways and foodstuffs have shown up as key components of identity in previous research helps me in identifying those instances within my participants' responses.

Food as Communication

Because people all need to eat, food facilitates opportunities for conversations to be started, divides to be bridged, or to strengthen and create relationships – even during experiences such as the pandemic when people are encouraged to be physically distant from one another. Often, people participate in this practice through things like dinner parties, meeting for coffee or drinks, potlucks, sharing food when someone is in need, bake sales etc. Food as a tool and social lubricant for communication is not new or unique to one culture (Brown, 2011; Harvey, 2017; Jones, 2007), and with this common use of food in mind, it makes sense that people continued to seek meaningful shared food experiences or food-related avenues of caring when they could not physically interact with everyone they want to due to COVID-19.

In the work of both Lindén and Nyberg (2009) and Wenzel (2016) it is central that someone's personal or cultural identity associated with food fosters individual senses of well-being and belonging which can open an opportunity for fruitful and positive communications between people. These same traits of food sharing could be put to practice during the pandemic by gifting food through meal trains or delivery. Indeed, sharing food has sometimes been the only means of communicating support for sick individuals, new parents, grieving or celebrating

people, and many others during the pandemic. The fact that the Center for Disease Control, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and U.S. Department of Agriculture all created web pages dedicated to food safety and COVID-19 and the presence of articles in popular press such as Laskey's (2020) New York Times piece and Masur's (2020) article in The Kitchn on how to safely share food during COVID-19 indicates that people were asking these questions and seeking safe and healthy ways to share food. The many ways in which food acts as a cultural identity marker, symbol of personal identity, communication mechanism, and a physical necessity have been explored and brought into my interviews with participants. Chapter 4 contains the informant interviews that begin to explore these ways of food being used during the pandemic. The informant interviews serve as a bridge to the data explored in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Informant Interviews

In placing the focus on informant interviews, this chapter moves from the past theoretical discussion of food's function as a symbol, identity marker, and communication tool into specific examples. The purpose of these interviews is to provide context and nuance for later chapters. They serve as a bridge to understanding the data from survey questions and interviews discussed in Chapter 5. The inclusion of specific individuals and examples of food connecting to peoples' experiences of the pandemic are essential in addressing the key research questions. The informant interviews help to illustrate emerging trends in the interconnection of food and the pandemic that were recognized in the popular press during 2020 and 2021. These include but are not limited to immediate concern over access to food (Specia & Stevis-Gridneff, 2020); supporting elders and other vulnerable populations (Greenaway, 2020; Laskey, 2020); sudden increases in home cooking and eating (Brody, 2020; Gross, 2020), and ways of filling time that were not as available as before (Manjoo, 2020). The informant interviews described in this chapter have been chosen because they offer examples of how food has been employed as a symbol, as an identity marker, and as a communication tool during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of food being used as such weave their way through my work and show up in overlapping ways in all the participants' answers to my research questions, including within these informant interviews.

As shared in Chapter 1, I came to this research with a background and daily life that is often centered on food because of my work as a farmer and agricultural educator and my personal passion for growing, cooking, and eating food. This means I talk about food with friends and co-workers, community members, and seek out stories and examples of other people

doing work with food in my free time outside of academia. I knew of these four individuals through my own social and professional network prior to beginning this research. They were chosen because they publicly work or volunteer in fields related to food, and they were impacted by COVID-19. These informant interviews have been included because they were guaranteed to offer insight into my research questions that survey and participant interviews might not. The semi-structured interviews conducted to create these informant profiles consisted of questions tailored to their work and lives.

The informant interviews are broken into two sections. “Feeding Community” - interviews one and two - highlight work done on food access in the last year and address the following research questions: 1) During the pandemic, what are the immediate and long-term impacts of interactions with and around food, both individual and communal? and 2) How have meanings, tensions, and significance of foodstuffs and foodways changed and grown during the pandemic? “Creativity in the Kitchen” - interviews three and four - discuss creativity through food and media created about food. They address the remaining two research questions of this thesis: 3) How are people employing food to make meaningful connections with others during the pandemic and quarantine? 4) In what ways do people return to food traditions or employ new foodways in creative ways when other options are not available? The content of these informant interview profiles offers concrete examples of answers to the research questions and contextualizes the food related experiences of other participants by highlighting common themes that will be seen again in Chapter 5. This chapter centers the interviewees’ voices and experiences.

Feeding Community

Both Erika and Elizabeth worked and volunteered in programs and organizations that focused on supporting communities by improving access to food during the pandemic. Their informant interviews exemplify the disparity in access that was a theme of food consumption during COVID-19. Since they both lived and worked in my local community, their experiences help to tell the story of how local organizations and individuals responded to issues of food access. The work and experiences of both Erika and Elizabeth also touched on immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on food access, tensions related to food access, and cultural norms.

Erika Warren

Erika Warren is a citizen of the Quinault Nation and worked as the Indigenous Ecology and Foods Program Manager for the Na'ah Illahee Fund in 2020 and 2021. Much of her work was redefined because of the pandemic, but generally encompassed all things related to food and restoration, with a focus on direct community connection and service. At the beginning of the pandemic, Na'ah Illahee received funding from Native Community Crisis Response Fund to support the distribution of food and necessity boxes to Native households in King County and in rural Tribal communities. These boxes each included nearly $200 worth of staples from Costco, a variety of Indigenous foods that were purchased directly from places such as Quinault Pride Seafood, Sakari Farms, and Bow and Arrow Blue Corn, facemasks, medicine, and teas. In addition to food items, Na'ah Illahee also offered non-food support such as toiletries, winter coats, gift cards, and assistance with presents over the holidays. Through direct surveys of participants, they learned what additional things folks needed and worked to make them available in subsequent boxes.

Initial distribution started with 50 – 60 people and quickly grew to 300 requests that would come in within hours of publishing the sign-up form. Erika primarily worked alone doing the coordination of boxes and hired individuals to help shop for, assemble, and distribute boxes. Paying people for their time was an important part of the food box program, and Erika made sure to hire individuals local to the communities receiving the food boxes to do that distribution. The early success of the program translated into additional philanthropic donations that allowed the distribution to be state-wide, and even led to a few out-of-state shipments. As of March 2020, the program had served over 700 Tribal families across Washington State.

During the pandemic, Erika also coordinated and led an effort to build and install garden boxes or raised beds for those interested in growing their own produce. This was part of a broader effort to build greater food sovereignty and increase participants' self-efficiency regarding accessing healthy food. They offered themed garden boxes: salsa boxes, tea boxes, medicine boxes, and salad boxes. Erika highlighted the installation of gardens and outdoor visits with people focused on gardening in our interview. Those events were described by Erika as incredibly joyful community moments where people were able to temporarily escape the intensity of the newly developing pandemic in spring 2020.

While it was easy to assume COVID-19 was the cause of the changes to Erika's work, she was also instrumental in finding new opportunities and creating a greater impact because of the pandemic. She shared:

> The one thing that the pandemic has done is allow me to use unrestricted funds to actually serve Tribal community…So often grants are tied to deliverables and objectives and different things that oftentimes get thrown on your desk, because you didn't actually write the grant, which is something [we] have really transitioned this year to where

> there's not any grants that were submitted, that I wasn't a part of writing… So, I think that COVID was a real blessing in being able to reach outside of King County, which we typically can't do with funding, which also builds relationships, and kind of gives a clear picture [of] how Tribes can even work together…With a lot of our other grants that we were just awarded, part of that is really building a food sovereignty network between Indigenous food distributors and producers. And really looking at old trade routes and how to support Tribal community in that way of being interdependent that we haven't functioned in for a long time. And so, I do, I think that COVID kind of opened the doors in a lot of ways for me to be able to work the way that I like to work and to connect with all of my community.

In many ways, what Erika articulated is that COVID allowed for things to be sped up because the immediacy and urgency of the need for assistance cleared the way of barriers that would usually dictate how an organization spent money, who they partnered with, or who they prioritized serving. The pandemic helped center the people who really needed assistance without asking them to justify or prove their need. Erika highlighted in her interview that the large number of separate and diverse communities who worked on similar projects and initiatives found opportunities to collaborate and connect through community during the COVID-19 pandemic, and around food in particular. For example, Na'ah Illahee's initial support for the gardening at the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) translated into a partnership with Blackstar Farmers, a collective group that came out of the CHAZ, and the UW Arboretum to grow and distribute food. Additionally, the container garden project expanded in 2021 in partnership with the Canoe Journey Herbalists: "All of the partnerships that have come through the pandemic [have

included] people really just thinking about “who can I work with to do this work bigger, and better?” [and] really utilizing what people are good at and supporting organizations that way.”

Being involved in this food systems work as a frontline worker offering direct assistance in the form of food, cash, and toiletries allowed Erika to witness a community response that was “heartfelt and so magnified” and touched her personally. She shared:

> It feels like it just kept hitting home, you know, like being that single mama that struggled for years and years, and also being able to really serve the community in ways that I know they need to be served…. I'm really grateful to be able to do this work. And it also feels like, “I can't believe this is my actual job!” And COVID has really helped shape my career and what that looks like so much: just really being able to see the need in the community, and then to base everything on that. And it never works like that in nonprofits, so that it feels really good.

The ways in which Erika’s direct service and administration of Na’ah Illahee’s program impacted her community is vast and interconnected. The direct assistance through the food boxes, successful fundraising and partnerships, and creative ways that this work will continue translated into jobs for others. Erika stressed the importance of this outcome, especially the ability to hire elders and others who needed the work, which allowed Na’ah Illahee to put money in peoples’ pockets *and* healthy foods into peoples’ lives. Again, Erika attributed this ability to address the immediate needs of the community through direct assistance and funding to COVID-19 and the reduction in bureaucratic barriers to support services.

Throughout my research, I asked all my participants to recall a food-related memory from this past year. Erika’s response really summed up both the structural and emotional aspects of the work that she has done for Tribal communities during the pandemic.

> We went up and built raised beds at Eagle Village in Seattle. And then a couple weeks later, I had 10 cases of smoked clams and smoked salmon delivered. And, you know, this is like traditional foods that are expensive, and people don't have access to because of their costs, and also folks being in the city. And people [were] talking about, “Man, I used to eat this with my grandma!”, and “I haven’t had this since I was five!", and just hearing people make those connections…It's really awesome for people to have these memories of these things that they're so disconnected from just because of access… Creating points of access is so important, because it's something that we always strive to do, but then like, a lot of times we fall short, because it just never works out the way that we want, or it's not really reaching what we want it to reach. [Now] it just feels like shit’s actually happening.

So much of Erika’s work during the pandemic is encapsulated in this response and shows the connection between her work experiences and this research. She was able to emphasize and center connections with individuals and Tribal communities, both rural and urban, through food. The evidence of positive impacts from this work has the potential to change how work is done in this social services support sector in the future. Already, the positive impacts of loosened funding restrictions and the partnerships that have emerged in the last year are changing both the present and long-term scope of work and the kind of impact that will have for Tribal communities. Additionally, access to funding and prioritizing a specific population in her work allowed Erika to support access to Native and traditional foodways through purchasing from Native food distributors, supporting food sovereignty and education about medicine and food growing, and connecting individuals with traditional foodways and foodstuffs directly. As she repeatedly shared, this was all only possible because of the pandemic.

Other Tribal assistance programs, such as those on the Navajo Nation and the Pine Ridge Reservation, have been shown to offer direct food assistance, the ability to work around bureaucratic technicalities, and increased access to traditional foodways. These programs have given both hope and direct support during the COVID-19 pandemic (Greenaway, 2020; Krishna, 2020). In Washington State, programs like those at Na'ah Illahee were essential in filling gaps in assistance for Tribes such as the Chinook, who are not federally recognized and thus receive none of the federal assistance, and urban and diasporic Indigenous communities (O'Neill, 2021; Seeley, 2020). The long-range impact of Erika's work specifically is unknown, but at the time of our interview she was excited about the potential for future work through project and grant applications submitted which she had the opportunity to be actively involved with. Erika hoped these positive changes in the reach of her work would be here to stay.

Elizabeth McDaniel

Elizabeth, a White woman, started Olympia Food is Free – now Food Freedom South Salish – in 2019. An Army veteran, Elizabeth was originally inspired by a similar project in Austin, TX started by a man named John. John's project was to build front yard gardens and have them serve as a tool to connect community members with each other; soon his whole street had front yard gardens and one result was greater community interaction and cohesion. Other 'Food is Free' projects exist in many locations (including Tacoma, Washington), but they are not umbrellaed under one organization. Most 'Food is Free' projects operate in a similar capacity which is to offer food via free tables or shared garden spaces - often hosted at private homes. Elizabeth described them as an ungoverned grassroots operation.

Food Freedom South Salish originally started out also building front yard gardens. With the help of her children, Elizabeth spearheaded building in-ground or raised bed gardens for

community members and planted them for folks the first year. They asked that garden recipients help with construction if physically able and that they tend the garden and share the produce during the growing season. In 2019, they built eight gardens and supported an additional four food-drop sites where people could access the produce. Elizabeth was motivated to find ways to connect community members with each other and found that gardens and food were "the answer to what is wrong with a large part of our society…if we can get reconnected back to each other, then we'll find more value in each other." The project was poised to grow with greater involvement in 2020, but they could not have anticipated the ways in which it would grow!

In March 2020 "it became really obvious really quickly, with my own health crisis that was happening and with the national health crisis, that we needed to alter course, and put building gardens as a secondary mission. But our first mission needed to be to feed people." Elizabeth realized that the hardships felt from COVID, including loss of jobs, were showing up all over the community, even among people who did not appear food insecure. She stressed that people with nice cars and fancy clothes might also be in need, and the impact of that hunger was very real. Elizabeth saw food and food access as the immediate and necessary building block that made everything else possible – without food, she said, you cannot parent as well and kids will act out or have trouble if they are hungry. In response to this immediate need for food relief, the Food Freedom South Salish project pivoted to a focus on free food tables that were hosted by community members at their homes and advertised largely through Facebook and a Google Doc. At first, people were self-conscious about taking advantage of the food tables and would only take food at night, but as people realized that it was truly a gift with no strings attached, they became more comfortable and less self-conscious. Under the loose umbrella of Food Freedom South Salish, there were roughly 12 table locations in the greater Olympia area and an active

Facebook page with roughly 1,600 members. Other individuals and groups also organized free food tables locally that were not included in that count.

The food distribution project expanded when Food Freedom South Salish partnered with Zsofia at Farmer Frog in Woodinville, Washington to capture and distribute extra food that was suddenly available because of supply chain disruption. Zsofia had coordinated a partnership with East West Food Rescue to connect with Eastern Washington farmers and sought funding to distribute USDA food boxes. Huge deliveries of produce, such as onions and potatoes, would arrive from Eastern Washington and would be handed out at mass-distribution sites, such as those hosted at the Tacoma Dome in spring 2020. Some of that captured food and the USDA boxes were then routed down to the Olympia area through the partnership with Elizabeth and Food Freedom South Salish and made available through the distribution tables. This arrangement, in Elizabeth's opinion, became politicized and tied up with government funding and programming in a manner that disrupted simply distributing food to people who needed it. Several months into the pandemic, East West Food Rescue stepped back and Zsofia and Elizabeth connected with producers and suppliers more directly to continue offering food through distribution events and at the privately hosted food tables. With the help of her children and volunteers, they distributed nearly 200 tons of food between March 2020 and March 2021 to South Sound residents.

Elizabeth also coordinated distribution events locally – especially out of the old Sears parking lot in Lacey, Washington. At times in 2020, the Olympia Lions Club supported them through the rental of a Penske truck and fundraising for gas. The 26-foot truck, when full, could feed 400 families at one distribution event if it was full of USDA boxes and up to 800 families if they were distributing loose produce. Elizabeth was also able to connect with other food

programs locally, such as Heroes Promise and groups who do street feeds in downtown Olympia, to distribute even more food directly. She hoped these connections would continue in the future to expand the community building capacity of the project and increase food security for more community members.

Elizabeth saw the mission of Food Freedom South Salish as continuing to offer direct food assistance to feed people as they got back on their feet post-pandemic. As long as food was available through the partnership with Zsofia and Farmer Frog, Elizabeth would continue making that available to the local community through distribution events and the free tables. At the time of our interview, because of some other groups doing similar work locally and meeting the need in the more urban areas of Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater, Elizabeth had been focusing on food distribution in more rural communities. This expansion helped spread the mission and reach of the project to more rural parts of the community. She shared her anticipation that as the pandemic crisis became less acute, garden building would again become an important part of her work: “That way we can not only take care of that immediate need, but build a resilient, self-sustaining source of food.”

The political and organizational aspects of this work is not where Elizabeth’s interests or goals were focused, and she articulated that very clearly:

> What matters is feeding people and integrity to that mission, integrity to the mission of building our community by making connections with our neighbors, around food and gardens…I could give a hill of beans about the business part of it that some people have taken it to… if that's what their goal is, and what speaks to them -that's awesome, and I support that. But my heart speaks to no strings, and no business, and not being on paper. Because when the zombies come, or the when the government tries to shut us

> down…shut what down? There is no organization to shut down. This is grassroots and neighbors helping neighbors…being invisible in plain sight gives you a nice ring of safety…it takes the power back from corporations…Corporations shouldn't own our food system, and they do, and they leverage that against Americans.

This idea of mutual aid forms of assistance really shone through in Elizabeth's work and how she spoke about it. It is abundantly clear that the connections and personal relationships, the tangible changes in someone's hunger, and the growth of support networks is what motivated Elizabeth in her work. This was again clear in her response to my question about a food related memory from 2020. She shared that a woman started showing up at the food drop sites in June or July of 2020:

> She's a wife of a retired soldier, and her husband struggles with a lot of service-related issues. They have five children…She came towards the end of the food drop and you could tell she was very unsure. She looked like she was embarrassed. I'd already finished unloading the food truck, and this is when I was doing the food drops at my house - I would fill up my whole driveway and the street with food boxes. So, I went to her, and we started chit chatting, and you know, they were really food insecure, you'd never know it by looking at her, or the kids. You'd never know it by looking at their car. And so, we spent some time talking and she just talked to me a little bit about their situation. And I've seen her every month since then, and things have gotten a lot better for them. Their food insecurity is getting better, slowly. But she brought me a really precious gift. She brought me a big quart jar of pickled beets. The beets were beets she'd gotten off of one of our food trucks. And knowing her and her family's story, [it] spoke to me twice: once because it…reminded me that you can't tell who's hungry just because of the way somebody looks. And that there were other people in the same position that I was: scared,

> unemployed because of health, and not sure how to feed my kids. And again, when she brought me that gift of the canned beets…what a precious gift. She gave me the thing that was most dear to her family at that point in time, and that was food.

Food held a specific meaning in Elizabeth's work. It functioned symbolically as a tool for community building and also being actively acknowledged as the nutritional requirement that it is. Her work with Food Freedom South Salish and the partnerships she formed in 2020-2021 speaks to the tensions and significance that foodstuffs took on because of COVID-19. Her passion for maintaining a strong and focused mission of feeding people for free demonstrated her drive to work for and with her community to resolve that tension. The connections and community Elizabeth built around gathering and distributing food was shown to have an immediate impact on those accessing the food, but also played into the long-term experiences of those participating by offering support with no strings attached for as long as they needed. The universal availability of the food distributed through Food Freedom South Salish helped to cut across some of the cultural norms associated with hunger and who is food insecure- a point Elizabeth made sure I captured and understood. In these ways Elizabeth's work and this interview helps to answer my first two research questions.

Feeding Community Significance

Elizabeth and Erika's informant interviews offer two examples of different kinds of programs and projects that have been utilized to help feed people during the pandemic. Each profile shines a light on some of the food access related gaps that became evident because of the economic and social impacts of the virus. They also help to show how different responses suit different kinds of community needs.

The experiences of both Erika and Elizabeth help answer two of this research's questions. First, during the pandemic, what are the immediate and long-term impacts of interactions with and around food, both individual and communal? Capturing these success stories of feeding communities illustrates the immediate impacts that food can have on someone's life and hints at some of the long-term solutions and impacts possible because of these food related experiences in the past year. The second question they help to answer is, how have meanings, tensions, and significance of foodstuffs and foodways changed and grown during the pandemic? Both of these profiles clearly show tensions and cultural meanings around food – for Tribal communities, military families, and those who are suddenly food insecure alike – shifting and adapting to available resources and foodways during the pandemic. Considering these key examples is helpful in understanding some of the themes that will arise when discussing the larger participant pool of data in Chapter 5.

Creativity in the Kitchen

The next two informant interviews offer a different perspective than the previous profiles on interactions with foodstuffs and foodways during the pandemic. The next two examples - a food blogger, Julie, and a poet, Melanie - both found comfort and symbolic importance in food during the COVID-19 pandemic when it came to food creativity. Julie and Melanie wove food into their personal and professional lives in ways that supported them and their immediate pandemic pod. Their personal experiences highlight many of the common ways in which people considered, consumed, and thought about food during the pandemic. Themes including recipe creativity, using food as an emotional and creative outlet, and food as a coping mechanism when feeling stuck at home emerged from these two informant interviews. Their profiles help to address the following two research questions: 1) How are people employing food to make

meaningful connections with others during the pandemic and quarantine? and 2) In what ways do people return to food traditions or employ new foodways in creative ways when other options are not available? Julie and Melanie's creative uses of food in media serve as examples of communication focused on and about food.

Julie Dahlen

Julie Dahlen, originally from Olympia, Washington, is a White woman who has worked in kitchens and restaurants for many years. At the time of our interview, she was in the final stages of becoming a registered dietician through Bastyr University. Julie was also the co-creator of a multi-platform cooking show with her best friend, Dakota, called *Dak and Ju*. Julie and Dakota started the project in 2018 to stay connected and spend intentional time together. The two foodies met through a study abroad food program in Italy during college and their shared food interests became the foundation of their friendship. *Dak and Ju* was a fun side project for Julie and Dakota, and also a way to actively try new recipes, to be creative in a time when neither was feeling especially passionate about their day-jobs, and ultimately, to make a helpful resource for their viewers. Julie described the project like this:

> The main foundational piece of *Dak and Ju* is the video content that we create. So, when we're actually able to be together, we're usually filming about once a week, and we'll film ourselves cooking and preparing a recipe. That [recipe] could be one that we love that we have made up ourselves, it can also be one that we've seen on the internet, …or it'll be … a recipe that's like a tried-and-true staple in our home. And so, we'll make the video about that, add in our fun tips and tricks, things we've learned along the line. Just trying to make it entertaining, but mostly, we're just entertaining ourselves. And so, we'll put the video out. And then along with that, we also have our website blog that has the video, the

> recipe, and kind of just all of our content stored. We are pretty active on our Instagram. We will post funny clips that Dakota has edited out of the video or beautiful photos of food that we've taken. And then we also do post the full video on Instagram and also YouTube. So, we're kind of spamming some platforms.

Dak and Ju played to both of their strengths: Dakota worked in technology services and Julie worked as a bartender, in kitchens, and in catering jobs. Dakota's skills in video editing and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for their website and YouTube channel was immensely helpful and often helps boost their video views into the thousands. While their initial audience was primarily friends and family, their viewership continued to expand. Julie shared that depending on the platform, they get different kinds of viewership – YouTube in particular was where they gained followers who do not already have some connection to them as individuals. Regardless of platform, on screen their friendship shone through and their shared love for food and flavor was very evident.

I have known Julie since high school and was an early viewer of *Dak and Ju*. During the pandemic, their online presence did not slow down, and in fact, any change in their content seemed imperceptible to a regular viewer. During our interview, we discussed how *Dak and Ju* transitioned during the pandemic and how Julie's interactions with food changed during the pandemic. Julie described their transition and method of media creation:

> It's been really challenging, obviously, because the magic, I would say, of *Dak and Ju* is us being together and interacting and just being silly and having fun together and cooking in the kitchen- which has been just such a staple of our relationship in general. So, you know, we've done several episodes where it's like this, you know, we're Zooming each other and cooking a recipe. It doesn't quite translate as well, you know, and it's harder to

> show what we're doing. And it's harder to show the food, and Dakota always complains that she doesn't have her hand model anymore for photographing, because I'm the person who's always holding the food, and she's taking the photos…But we did get together one weekend in October. We quarantined, tested, we're like, "Okay! This is our weekend!" And I spent the night three nights, and we filmed like eight videos to just kind of have a backlog of content. And we're gonna do the same thing again in April [2021]. And probably again, sometime in the summertime, just kind of like, stockpile [content].

The duo had to be creative in the past year of the pandemic. The logistical challenges of creating content where the magic is in being together were further complicated when Julie moved out of Seattle and further away from Dakota. Stockpiling their creative content was a good in-between solution for the team. They coupled releasing that content with re-posting past outtakes and popular previous posts. One fun example of this was when they "did a pleasure series where we posted all these like moments of the [past] video[s]… [where] we're just like in total ecstasy while [we're] taking this bite of this delicious food… trying to get creative and entertain ourselves." If they did a Zoom episode, they focused on simple two-minute recipes like a cocktail or salad dressing that were easier to share on screen and were not time consuming.

Rather than focus on food fads that sprang up during the pandemic and early quarantine—such as sourdough and Dolgona coffee—they chose to focus on comfort foods. "I think a lot of what we've focused on is comfort foods, like things that we really enjoy, and that we love, and that are things that we are turning to often while we've been in quarantine." Some of the comforting foods *Dak and Ju* featured include focaccia bread, imitation Twix bars, pizza night, and a special Mother's Day edition where they made Swedish pancakes with Julie's mom. Additionally, sharing and featuring family recipes through *Dak and Ju,* such as Julie's family's

gingery Peppa Kaka cookies, brought special joy and pleasure for Julie because she would get a flood of messages from folks sharing that they made them and loved them. It introduced Julie's love of a food or a particular recipe into another person's life. It was clear in speaking with her that maintaining that kind of connection with others throughout the pandemic was important to her.

Julie often wove ideas of friendship, connection, and comfort into her descriptions of food and cooking. She described food as a "quintessential component" of her relationship with Dakota and talked about her food experiences in multi-sensory and vivid descriptions. It is in these moments and descriptions where Julie's information profile helps to answer one of this research's primary questions: how are people employing food to make meaningful connections with others during the pandemic and quarantine?

Julie has used food as a tool in making meaningful connections for much of her adult life, but it served her especially well during the COVID-19 pandemic. Planning and creating *Dak and Ju* with Dakota, as well as the connections formed with their virtual audience, grounded both her flavors and inspiration. She shared that in this last year, as the primary cook for her household, she focused on nourishing foods and felt gratitude to be able to provide that nourishment to her family during the pandemic. Julie invested in a summer Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share of fresh vegetables from a local farm in 2020, and she found ways of recreating meals and dishes using the produce from that box, such as a homemade version of ramen.

> I loved our CSA this summer. I know it's from a really awesome couple, down in the [Skagit] Valley. And it was just the joy of getting this big bag every week and just like opening the bag and smelling the freshness of the produce you're getting for that week. That brought me so much joy in like a weird transition time. Because over the summer

> we were moving from Seattle up here, and we were just kind of like in this weird limbo staying in a family friend's house, but there was something about going and getting my produce box every week that just I was like [paused] giddy to get it, and it was like this bright light in my week of kind of like stress - stressful time… I think Mark got so tired of me being like, "Look at these carrots! These are what carrots are supposed to look like." Or "Have you ever smelled tomato this fragrant before?!" [laughs].

It is in this memory that Julie also helps to answer another research question: In what ways do people return to food traditions or employ new foodways as a tool for expressing themselves when other options are not available? Her evident experiences of joy and enthusiasm over her weekly produce box and the meals she was able to make during a stressful time stood out to her as one of the most memorable moments from the pandemic. Food, as such an integral part of Julie's life both professionally and personally, has understandably influenced how she connected with others and how she expressed herself during the pandemic.

Julie and Dakota frequently discussed the future of *Dak and Ju* and how they wanted to proceed. Their hopes included growing the project and becoming a larger and more popular platform for sharing recipes and cooking techniques. But the pandemic year had obviously slowed some of their potential growth and goals of publishing or gaining affiliate sponsorship packages. Since our interview, Julie was been placed in her dietetics internship in San Francisco for the 20201-2022 year and *Dak and Ju* formally announced a hiatus while she was away. But at its heart, Julie said *Dak and Ju* is simple: "We do this because we really believe in our project…we do it because it's important to us. And it makes us happy…It's about eating food and enjoying it." Whether through *Dak and Ju* or another platform, Julie exemplifies ways that

some people employ food symbolically and literally to foster community connections and express themselves.

Melanie Tafejian

In her 2020 poem, *How to Be,* Melanie Tafejian explored the repetitive and isolating feelings that many people lived with during the COVID-19 pandemic, and she used food imagery and analogy into her verse. She wrote:

In isolation, you too

will wake, and pull your body

from each vivid dream. Like the sea,

the dough continues to rise. Listen

for the garbage truck— Thursday again. Notice

black olives, wrinkled in a white bowl.

Melanie, a White woman, is a poet living in Raleigh, North Carolina who is originally from Olympia, Washington. She earned her MFA in poetry from North Carolina State University. Melanie's profile here serves as a bridge between these informant interviews and the participant data discussed in Chapter 5. She described personal experiences with food during the pandemic as "normal" and unremarkable, and yet she had a personal passion and practice of using food in symbolic and creative ways in her poetry.

As *How to Be* demonstrates, Melanie centered food in her poetry during the pandemic. This food focus was not new.

> When I started my MFA, I had been writing for a long time, just sort of privately but not in a formal sort of way. And so, when I got to the MFA, I was just producing a lot more work than I ever had before and reading a lot more poetry. And I felt like, of course, I was writing about food. Doesn't everyone write about food? Like that just felt like that's a huge part of life, like, how could that not be central to poem making?

Melanie was surprised to get comments from classmates and mentors about how notable her inclusion of food was in her work. Their feedback helped her to realize this as a defining feature of her poetry.

Much of Melanie's poetry draws from her own life, and food analogy and imagery helps her to share those personal experiences in relatable ways. "I'm really a visual person. So, when I'm thinking about images of an event, or something, food just feels like it's always there…When you're remembering a memory, it's like food is in most memories, in my opinion. It's always around." The inclusion of food in poems helps to incorporate many senses into Melanie's writing. Food imagery connotes sight, smell, taste, color etc. without using too many words at once. This is demonstrated as *How to Be* continues:

> *a car— honks. Do your work.*
>
> *At night, the flan will not firm, eat it anyway.*
>
> *Spoon the liquid custard to your lips, delight*
>
> *in vanilla flecks scraped from the bean.*

With these words she recalled working from home, experimenting with recipes, and finding 'delight' in failed cooking experiments that may be relatable experiences for others from the year plus of the pandemic. This way of writing about life via food was possible for Melanie because

food is such a multi-sensory experience. For Melanie, it was entangled with meaningful memories because food is smelled, tasted, prepared, touched, and shared.

Much of Melanie's artistic and personal connection to food was also linked to community and the sharing of food, and this was significantly impacted by the pandemic. During the pandemic, food played a different role in Melanie's life than at other times:

> One of my loves of cooking has been sharing it with other people. And I feel like I don't have that right now… I have found myself cooking a lot less…I think I was cooking a lot in the beginning. Like I made a bunch of pies…it was a way to keep myself busy for maybe the first month or two. And then I just got like, I don't know, tired of it maybe? …It just has felt like, I don't know, there's just people always here and I feel like I can't get into- sort of like poem writing-like I can't get into like a baking focused headspace, so I just haven't…I cook to eat but I haven't been like doing anything too extravagant…It's been almost a year, so there's been a lot of different phases.

While Melanie self-described her cooking and eating as less inspired, she continued to find ways of incorporating the symbolic and metaphorical impacts of food in her daily life in her poetry. Her poetry helps to answer my research question, in what ways do people return to food traditions or employ new foodways in creative ways when other options are not available? While she may not have been feeling creative in the literal kitchen, Melanie found the language and symbolic importance of food to be a vehicle for expression during the pandemic. Melanie used her food experiences and analogies, like the rising dough and the un-firm flan, to creatively express herself and to articulate a common experience of quarantining and isolating that was felt by many during the pandemic. In the closing lines of *How to Be* she reminds readers:

> *Remember your life, this one*

the one you're living.

Melanie asks readers to take stock of their pandemic year and to realize it is not lost or inconsequential, instead, it is part of living life.

Food in Meaning Making: Creativity and Community

These four informant interviews were chosen because of the individuals' food related experiences and how their work helps to answer the four primary research questions of this thesis[1]. There is productive overlap in the four informant interviews and all four could be applied to each of these research questions because of the ubiquitous importance of food and the interconnected nature of the research questions. For the purposes of this thesis, they have been divided into the two categories.

The profiles of Erika and Elizabeth in "Feeding Community" help to answer questions one and two. The community-based work of Erika and Elizabeth speaks to how taking direct action is impactful at a community level. Documentation of significant tensions surrounding food and the immediate impact of their programs propels this research into the realm of Food Justice and supports further avenues for research discussed in Chapter 6. The structure of Erika and Elizabeth's projects during the pandemic was different because of the pandemic, and their demonstrated success in feeding people and building community connections was impossible to deny. The long-term impacts of their food related work are to be determined.

Though less overt, Julie and Melanie interviews illustrate the equally important personal side of food's role in making meaning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The profiles of Julie and

[1] 1) During the pandemic, what are the immediate and long-term impacts of interactions with and around food, both individual and communal? 2) How have meanings, tensions, and significance of foodstuffs and foodways changed and grown during the pandemic? 3) How are people employing food to make meaningful connections with others during the pandemic and quarantine? And 4) In what ways do people return to food traditions or employ new foodways in creative ways when other options are not available?

Melanie in “Creativity in the Kitchen” help to answer questions three and four. Whether filming a how-to video or writing a poem, both Julie and Melanie offer examples of food being used in a creative way to connect with an audience. Their artistic and personal relationships with food showed up in how they talked about relationships, community, and comfort. Their informant interviews offer a more personal look at these themes and connects with themes that arose in the participant data discussed in Chapter 5. Both Julie and Melanie were obviously impacted by the social and physical distance imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and both found creative ways of using food to express themselves, comfort themselves, and maintain their connection with others.

Collectively, these four informant interviews share examples of community programming, volunteer projects, artistic expressions, and sensory and pleasure focused experiences of food. All informant interviews demonstrated how food operated as a symbol, identity marker, and communication tool during a time of unprecedented disruption. In placing the focus on informant interviews, this chapter moves from the past discussion of food theoretically functioning as a symbol, identity marker, and communication tool into specific examples of real interviewee experiences and stories. They serve as a bridge to understanding the data from surveys and interviews discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Survey and Interview Data Analysis

This chapter discusses the survey and participant interview data gathered through this research. The survey data (table of survey responses in Appendix B) reveal broad themes, while the interview quotes and insights give more in-depth analysis of these themes. Surveys and interviews are complementary methods which, when combined, allow for more complex and thorough exploration of the research questions[2].

The responses from participants, both in the survey and the interviews, revealed overlapping themes: 1) the food-related struggles participants experienced during the pandemic; 2) food-related solutions participants discovered as coping mechanisms over the course of the pandemic (2020-2021); and 3) the changes both those challenges and solutions had on their foodways. This chapter first discusses the broad responses to these themes from surveys and then dives deeper into these themes through interviewees' stories and examples. Collectively, the data offer insights into the research questions and additional instances of how food operates as a symbol, identity marker, and communication tool.

Qualitative Survey Data

Forty-two individuals responded to the qualitative survey. It can be assumed that these individuals live the Thurston County, Washington area because of the targeted outreach via *Nextdoor* - which requires a verification of community residence - and through the Facebook group *Tenino Talk* - also targeted to specific residents who are asked to verify that they live or work in and around Tenino, Washington. Demographic information is unknown for all survey

[2] 1) How are people employing food to make meaningful connections with others during the pandemic and quarantine? 2) In what ways do people return to food traditions or employ new foodways in creative ways when other options are not available? 3) How have the meanings, tensions, and significance of foodstuffs and foodways changed and grown during the pandemic? And 4) During the pandemic, what are the immediate and long-term impacts of interactions with and around food, both individual and communal?

participants. Additionally, details and specifics varied in participants' survey responses; some individuals chose to answer in longer paragraphs and others offered shorter phrases or single word answers. While no questions were marked as 'required,' most survey takers chose to answer all questions that focused on their food experiences during the pandemic and the impacts those experiences have had on their lives. A full version of the survey instrument and the aggregated responses can be found in Appendices A and B.

When analyzed and coded as a whole, the survey responses offered three broad areas of focus and a variety of sub-themes within those. The three main areas were foodway challenges faced by individuals because of the pandemic, food related solutions that participants employed, and the changes those challenges and solutions had on their daily lives. The following survey data show a broad overview of these themes.

Foodway Challenges

The challenges and struggles participants felt related to food and the pandemic included concerns over physical and health safety related to food, struggles with food access, and the loss of gathering socially over food. It is significant to note that nearly every survey respondent named one kind of loss, challenge, or stressor related to food and the pandemic in their responses. The challenges faced by participants informed the food related solutions and changes that will be discussed in the next sections.

Food Safety

A primary theme in survey responses was the tension felt between safety and food consumption/acquisition. Eighteen participants specifically mentioned safety in some way related to their shopping, eating, or food socializing practices. Historically, discussions of food safety have focused on the metabolic impacts of foodstuffs and FDA level standards for safe

food consumption. In the pandemic, these discussions of food safety have shifted to primarily focus on the method of procurement and potential for the coronavirus to be passed through food. Participants shared that they addressed this new food safety concern by choosing to shop less frequently, voicing concern over access and sources of food to others, and taking advantage of food mail ordering and delivery services because they were reliable and seen as worth the cost (eight participants discussed this specifically). For one survey taker, choosing to subscribe to a local farm's Community Supported Agriculture vegetable share felt like a way of both accessing healthy local veggies, ensuring access to food in case of supply chain shortage, and supporting a local business. The tension between safety and food acquisition was sometimes expressed as a struggle between what people wanted to do versus what they felt they should or could do.

In discussing sharing food and the potential risks involved, one survey taker offered, "Now, everyone has such varying comfort levels with COVID. We just don't do things like that anymore. It's really sad." But interestingly, another participant voiced a similar concern but with a personal workaround that had made this tension more bearable for them: "We stopped getting together with most friends for meals. However, one family that we knew had been very vigilant about staying away from any high-risk people, so our two families have gotten together more for dinners." This internal struggle between what is safe and what was pleasurable was also found in discussions of where participants procured food. Many participants discussed getting takeout as an option that was fun and rewarding, safe, and a way for them to financially support local businesses. Similarly, choosing to procure groceries from familiar local and smaller businesses, local farms, and delivery services was repeatedly mentioned as a safer alternative employed by participants.

What all these examples demonstrate is a certain degree of personal risk assessment that people have become accustomed to in the last year. Rationalizations such as shopping where the cashier is known, choosing just one other household to socialize with, or judging the safety of food by a gut feeling are all examples of individuals grappling with the tension between food safety and food consumption/acquisition in new ways. It is a tension that has become normalized and was universally discussed to some degree among participants.

Food Access

As seen in the informant interviews of Erika and Elizabeth in Chapter 4, food access programs became an important part of community responses to the pandemic. Several survey and interview participants also discussed food access and the importance of food in making them feel in control of their health during the pandemic. Participants shared experiences from the last year of receiving food boxes from their Tribe, seeking out bagged lunch programs for their kids, witnessing immigrant and student populations they work with struggle with food access, and using food assistance programs themselves. These struggles with food access set up a tension between the physical need for food security and the role that food can play in someone feeling in control of their health through their food choices.

For other participants, being able to access food brought up memories and a sense of gratitude that influenced how they were preparing and consuming food. Examples from survey responses include: “I was raised in a low-income family, so to be a parent now during the pandemic and being able to amply provide for our kids above and beyond their needs is a good feeling,” and “I’m just grateful to be able to obtain good food and have the money to buy it. Many people aren’t as fortunate.” These responses were coupled with participant assertions that food was something health related that was in their control and could be focused on during the

health-related crisis largely out of their control. This correlation contrasts with the category of 'health food' that is often more expensive and seen as inaccessible to many. In total, eight survey takers shared either personal concern with accessing food during the pandemic or a broader community concern with food access. These examples show the tension felt by participants between food access and health.

Social Distance and Food

Many participants, eighteen in total, overtly highlighted that one of the biggest struggles imposed by the pandemic on their foodways was the loss of social connection over food. While they may have made new or deeper connections with those in their pandemic pod, participants greatly missed the act of being in a public space to eat or drink, the connections and camaraderie created when eating out with friends, and making and having meals with a broader circle of friends and family. Other specific examples from survey takers included the loss of lunch time visits as a part of the workday and an inability to gather with family for holiday meals and special occasions. One survey taker specifically highlighted: "We moved here to be close to grandkids we rarely see…Thanksgiving was just our household." The loss of these customary ways of connecting with others over food has supported the development of alternative ways of connecting for participants instead, such as Zoom virtual visits and physically distant forms of sharing food.

It is noteworthy that so many participants called out missed connections with specific people and food experiences. It is also significant that for many participants finding ways to bridge that gap and reveling in opportunities to again connect were noteworthy. Food is a physical and visceral thing to interact with – the antithesis of the intangible Zoom world many found themselves in during the pandemic. This theme of missing those physical food related

experiences indicates that food is usually a strong connector for people – a finding that is supported in the works of Brown (2011), Jones (2007), and Locher et al. (2005). Additionally, the publication of articles during the pandemic about how to safely share food (Laskey, 2020; Masur, 2020) supports the reality for many participants that they were willing to find pandemic-adaptive ways of still making connections. This indicates the importance of the usual connections over food made by participants and the potential role for such connections to play in the future.

Food-Related Solutions

Though never named as 'solutions,' many participants described workarounds and alternatives to their foodways that had helped them to cope with the challenges and changes brought on by the pandemic. These included a focus on food creativity and comfort, practices of food resourcefulness, alternative ways of connecting either virtually or distanced, and daily foodways playing a significant role people's lives during the pandemic. While some of these food-related solutions addressed food related challenges specifically, it often seemed that they were also symbolically or materially addressing other challenges brought on by the pandemic such as mental health, boredom, or a lack of resources.

Creativity, Comfort, and Resourcefulness

Survey responses indicated participants turning to food as an outlet for creativity, as a tool for creating comfort, and as expressions of resourcefulness and ingenuity. Twenty-nine participants answered, 'Yes' to the question "Have you experimented with food during the pandemic?" New exploration of resourceful and creative foodways were used by participants to combat boredom, stay interested in their foods, explore other cultures, express personal identity, and comfort themselves and their pandemic pods. These themes of creativity, comfort, and

resourcefulness found in the data help to highlight how food has operated as a symbol and identity marker throughout the pandemic.

Some participants shared that the increase in free time during the pandemic, especially early in the lockdown phase, made it possible for them to try out new recipes and be more creative with food. Sixteen participants further explained their food experiments by sharing experiences of cooking foreign cuisine, trying out new techniques, or seeking out new recipes during the pandemic as a way of combating boredom or food monotony. For these participants, the variation in flavor and the intentional and tangible outcome of a successful food experiment were notable points of enjoyment and forms of self-expression during quarantine and the ongoing pandemic. The association, by participants, of these cooking experiments with an increase in unstructured time because of the pandemic helps to solidify the relationship between these experiences and makes it clear that one is responsible for the other. For other participants, a similarly intentional return to specific comfort foods helped them to weather the pandemic and supported their mental health.

The increase in unstructured time during the pandemic also initiated another food expression theme that became apparent in reviewing survey responses and interviews – food ingenuity, or resourcefulness. Canning their own food, baking more, making homemade yogurt, buying and storing bulk quantities of food, and cooking 'from scratch' were all practices mentioned by participants. These instances were shared as creative and innovative ways they found to eat and feel productive during the pandemic. Other participants shared about their home gardens and expressed joy at this creative and outcome-oriented food practice. Survey responses included: "Growing a small portion of our food was extremely joyful, even the inevitable new gardener mistakes," and "Growing food is amazing. Plants are magical."

One survey taker mentioned their sourdough habit as an important food component of life during the pandemic, but they specifically called out their practices around using the 'cast off' from the starter to make sourdough waffles with their housemates each week. The process of growing a sourdough starter results in excess starter which can be used for a variety of other things. This participant and their housemates have frequently made Saturday sourdough waffle breakfasts a focal point of their weeks. This participant was one of six survey takers who mentioned sourdough bread as a specific pandemic-related foodway. And indeed, sourdough is a nationally documented trend during the pandemic – it was mentioned in 264 articles in the New York Times between March 1, 2020, and May 30, 2021. A shortage of baking yeast, early in the pandemic, helped to influence this national trend. Sourdough in made without yeast and instead relies on a starter made of a living culture of flour. Sourdough starters are dependent upon regular 'feeding' of additional flour and can survive for many years. Starters can be family heirlooms and are easily split and shared as they ferment and grow. The sourdough trend during the pandemic is especially interesting because it weaves together several impacts of the pandemic on foodways: supply shortages, increased time spent at home, a foodway that feels traditional and ancient, and the creation of something like a baked good that can be easily shared – as Dave's anecdote in the introduction indicated. For these reasons, it makes sense that sourdough specifically offered a solution to the challenges of quarantining and the pandemic.

Socially Distant Connections Through Food

Cooking together over Zoom, sharing food pictures and recipes on social media, and finding distant ways to still connect over food were all mentioned by participants as methods of bridging the food connection gap. The idea of 'porch-drops' or other no-contact ways of still sharing food were mentioned by several participants. Additionally, many participants

emphasized foods' importance when people and places were less available due to quarantine restrictions or health and safety concerns. Examples from survey takers include: "I have fantasized about all the food in places I would otherwise have traveled [to] but can't," "It's felt more important to know the source of the food. To be able to name the farm(er) has been a sense of security and familiarity through food that has brought me comfort in the isolating time," and "Meals were the task; not a by-product of getting through the day. We were all home from March – June. The gardening and food gathering was the center of the day." These quotes reveal that food was something people were imbuing with meaning and significance in the absence of other daily routines and activities. The symbolic importance of connecting over food, as seen in the display of challenges faced by participants, makes the variety of ways in which people did connect that much more significant.

Whether cooking and enjoying new and different foods, finding comfort in familiar and tasty foods, finding new ways of staying connected over food, or structuring another day spent working from home around planning dinner, it is clear the food helped participants find solutions to their personal struggles during the pandemic. Sometimes these solutions were in direct response to the challenges presented earlier – as with having a Zoom dinner date instead of meeting to go out to eat – and sometimes food was filling a gap in participants' lives that was caused or exacerbated by the pandemic, such growing a new garden. The food-related challenges and solutions shared by participants overlap as changes to their foodways during the pandemic. The immediate changes experienced by participants are described in the next section.

Changes to Foodways

The immediate changes the pandemic had on participants foodways were numerous. Some of the biggest categories of immediate changes included changes in participants' food

routines, an increase in connecting with family over food, and an increase in community connections because of food. Nearly all these changes have been noted in popular media as trends seen in foodways during the pandemic (Abou-Sabe et al., 2020; Brody, 2020; Gross, 2020; Manjoo, 2020; and Ricker & Kardas-Nelson, 2020). The impact these changes have had on participants' lives was sometimes merely logistical and a change in routine, while other times offered an example of overlap with the ideas of 'challenges' and 'solutions.'

Changes in Food Routines

For some participants, the pandemic influenced their foodways to be more structured. The pressure and necessity of shopping less frequently led them to meal plan strategically: seventeen participants specifically shared that they have engaged in meal planning during the pandemic. This was also identified as a way of reducing stress and led them to be efficient and comprehensive in grocery shopping in order to reduce unnecessary and risky trips outside the home. Participants also highlighted that they were more willing to make do with the groceries at home and cook from their pantry than to run out for a single ingredient or last-minute meal idea. Change in routine foodways was also seen in participants' decreased instances of eating outside the home and increased consumption of takeout food. For other participants, the major change in their food routines was in where they were accessing food because of financial need for food assistance during the pandemic. Whatever the immediate changes to individuals' foodways, many participants still felt that "food has provided peace and moments of calm during this time."

Connecting with Family

Many participants shared that through food they have found themselves connecting more directly with those that they saw daily during the pandemic. As a habitual and daily necessity, food offered opportunities for households to connect regularly. By trying to make family dinner

special, having a weekly household meal tradition, or intentionally using food to support their pandemic pod's health and mood, participants purposefully engaged with food to support connections with their immediate companions. Nineteen participants emphasized shared meals with their household/family during the pandemic; one participant shared that through these family meals "food has been a way to show love and hopefully provide health."

Food as Community Connector

For some participants, the pandemic has supported them in associating with new parts of their community that they might otherwise have not. Some survey takers shared that intentionally choosing to purchase produce and other foods from local farms was a marked change in their community interactions that was seen as positive. And for others, their vegetable gardens proved to be a point of community connection. One survey taker shared:

> Because of growing and harvesting my own food, there are so many more people to connect with. Veggie growers, organic CSA farmers, flower farms, my neighbor, Bob, who gave me winter garlic that's currently growing. We met (after living close for 4 yrs, I know, shameful) during a walk when he caught me scoping out his raised beds. We all exchange veggies and growing tips now.

It seems that food has provided an allowable point of contact with those outside the home because it is necessary and because it already holds symbolic power as a communication tool. Participants emphasized that food offered an opportunity to connect more with their community, even if it was simply running into friends at the farmer's market, because of this perceived allowability. The limits put on socialization made these points of contact that much more notable for participants. Eleven participants noted ways that they had connected more with their community over food because of the pandemic.

The food related challenges, solutions, and changes shared by participants are echoed in the cited popular media that has shared similar trends. Understanding the role of these themes in participants making meaning of their pandemic experiences is central to the future potentiality of developing community responses to crisis through foodways. The expansion on these themes and specific examples from participant interviews offer more in-depth data to be used in the future.

Expansion of Themes Through Participant Interviews

Of the forty-two survey participants, fifteen shared contact information and expressed a willingness to participate in an interview. Of these, six survey takers were chosen to interview based on their survey responses. Interviewees gave a variety of responses to the questions and/or mentioned the primary themes that the aggregated survey data show. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each interviewee, and the interview questions were based on their specific survey responses (a summary of participant interviews can be found in Appendix C). All interview participants were asked to describe a food-related memory for the past year of their lives. The interviews offered more substantial examples and gave depth to the themes found in the survey responses. The six participants included:

- Dave, a male IT employee living in Olympia, Washington with his wife and young adult son.
- Amy, environmental project coordinator and mother who also lives in Olympia with her two teenagers and husband.
- Linda, a retired older woman living in the Olympia area with her husband.
- Debra, a newly-retired woman living in Tenino, Washington with her adult son and daughter-in-law.

- Beth, a female professional working from home and living with her husband in the Olympia area.
- Día, a 2020 college graduate who is from Olympia originally and has lived in Portugal, Portland, Oregon, and Olympia during the pandemic with a variety of friends and family.

Any demographic, social identity, or additional personal information known is because they chose to share that during their interview and is noted where known.

As with the survey data, the interviewees' experiences are organized around pandemic related food challenges, solutions found in foodways, and the changes the pandemic had on their foodways and foodstuffs. Through the inclusion of their quotes and stories, greater insight into these themes can be found and used to address both the four research questions and the broader theme of how food has been a tool for individuals to make meaning of the pandemic.

Foodway Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic caused people to change so much and impacted individuals' personally significant foodways. The stories of Amy, Beth, and Día provide relatable instances of pandemic-related challenges to individual foodways. Their stories expand upon the themes of loss of connection with others, concern over food safety, and food access.

Amy

Connecting through food was a big part of Amy's life. Usually an avid cook, much of Amy's inspiration and excitement around cooking came from being able to share her creations with friends and coworkers. The monotony of the pandemic and the inability to socialize over food because of health and safety concerns had at times stifled her creativity and made her feel taxed. She said, "For me, feeding people - that's how I show love, and having that truncated - it's been really hard." A couple of times, Amy found creative ways to express care and love for

others through food, despite distance. Around the Christmas holidays she created goodie packages of cookies and candies that she drove around and distributed to folks she worked with. And in early spring 2021, Amy was able to host her co-workers outside for a birthday meal. Amy shared that it was a process of negotiation to convince her co-workers that it was safe. They agreed to a meal cooked by her and eaten outside; no one entered her house, and all the food was dished-up inside and brought out to the distanced co-workers. But, once everyone agreed to these parameters and Amy was cleared to cook for them, she said she "went crazy" with excitement. As she told me about this meal she had made for others, she became more and more animated.

> I made homemade pasta and made homemade pesto…and Alfredo sauce. And then I made this thing that I found in *Cooks Illustrated* that was flank steak [that] you pound really skinny and then you schmear it with this yummy delicious paste and a slice of prosciutto and provolone and like roll it up and tie it, and cook it in the sauce for all day. And it was insane. I never even tried it before, but it was so damn delicious. And it took me days to make everything…Oh, and I made peach pie! But it was like, "Oh my god. We haven't gotten to eat as a collective in ages." You know? …It just felt so good to make food for other people and have them enjoy it…It's got all that love all mixed in. So that was really lovely.

This memorable experience for Amy speaks not only to the year-long challenge of not cooking for others, but broaches on the realm of solutions to those challenges as well. Amy had been struggling with a lack of food connections in the last year and a resulting lack of inspiration in the kitchen that she usually counted on to make her feel more like herself. The experience of again cooking for others seemed to underscore and illuminate the importance of cooking and sharing food for Amy.

Beth

Beth had been fairly isolated during the pandemic, and by and large described the year as pretty positive for her husband and her. A long-time vegetarian, Beth loved to experiment with food and would often rather cook than go out to eat. She mostly felt that her foodways had not been challenged or even largely impacted by the pandemic. But her food-related memory from the past year of the pandemic spoke directly to the challenges around food safety that survey takers had mentioned. She shared:

> One day, toward the beginning of the pandemic, I was like "I really want doughnuts." So… we got in our car. There's a doughnut place not too far away with a drive thru. And we went through the drive thru and then the cashier wasn't wearing a mask or gloves, and we basically just got home and put the doughnuts in the garbage. Yeah, so that was kind of a bummer. That's a memorable moment… At least we don't know the doughnut person and doughnuts are cheap, right? So it's, you know, $2 on the doughnuts, but I don't like to waste food so I felt bad. And now, I don't know what I would do because I feel like now most of the research says that you can't really get COVID that way. I still might [throw them away]. I don't know.

Beth's relatable story highlights the role that fear has played in people's lives during the pandemic and the complexity involved in trusting other people. Food, once an unchallenged source of community connection and multi-sensory experience of enjoyment for many, was turned into a potential threat by the pandemic. Her story also illustrates the changes in perception over the course of the pandemic: the fact that she was uncertain if she would behave the same later in the pandemic given new scientific evidence that food is not a common way of transmitting COVID-19 is also relatable. A huge challenge during the pandemic was to regularly

adjust perceptions of threat and safety in the face of regularly updating information. Beth's story and the challenge to her values that it presented (seen in her mention of the cost of the doughnut, the lack of personal relationship to the employee, and the perceived wasting of food) speaks to the constant internal dialogue around food, safety, and risk that many people engaged with throughout the pandemic. Beth's story is illustrative of the complexity involved in the challenges faced during the pandemic and the mental gymnastics involved in addressing them.

Día

Día, a 2020 college graduate, began the pandemic in Portugal. In her last quarter of college during spring 2020, the study abroad experience was already paid for, set up, and underway when things began shutting down. Fearing being stranded overseas for an indeterminate amount of time, Día bought a ticket home to the Pacific Northwest. She lost the pre-paid fees to the study abroad program for room and board and returned to find her food industry job had evaporated in the emerging pandemic restrictions. Suddenly a low-income student, Día chose to access SNAP food benefits early in the pandemic to help ensure she had access to food. She shared:

> I signed up for food stamps right when I got back [from study abroad], which has been definitely a lifesaver and also has changed how I look at food and my access to it. Because having a couple hundred bucks a month that's just reserved for food when I go shopping, I'm like, "Oh, I should buy what I want to eat, and... I should pick the treats that I want for myself and go for it because I have this money." And it's enough to get me by on food. And if it were just me spending it out of my pocket, I know from experience, I'm not as likely to spend as much money or spend it on the things that I want to splurge on or spend it more ethically because I just feel like every cent is coming out of my rent.

Día was able to prioritize her health and wellbeing through food choices because she accessed available financial supports in the form of food stamps. This not only helped her nutritionally but allowed her to prioritize purchasing food that felt comforting and was desirable – a form of mental health care. The need for this financial support was a direct result of her unexpected circumstances caused by the pandemic. Día was able to address the challenge of food access directly and whether parts of the pandemic with less stress because of this available resource

Food-Related Solutions

The challenges that Amy, Beth, and Día's stories highlight are counterbalanced with some instances of food-related solutions. Interviewees' stories also expand on the solutions gleaned from survey responses. These include finding moments of personal inspiration and self-expression in the kitchen, exploring foreign cuisine and other new foodways during the pandemic, turning to comfort foods in the face of uncertainty, and connecting with loved ones through the sharing of food. In these instances, food is a solution for some of the losses brought on by the pandemic.

Inspiration and Self-Expression – Amy and Día

Amy. Having dinner parties, DIY pizza nights, and getting up early to make fresh baked goods for a staff meeting were all parts of Amy's pre-pandemic life. The loss of her communal food activities was hard, but holding onto food as a form of self-identity offered Amy moments of peace and comfort during a challenging year:

> I think, for me, that the sense of calm has been because... it seems like everything's in flux, like, everything's in transition and kind of chaotic and such... I love to eat, I love to cook. And, finding that space, like in the kitchen, where, you know, you get a moment like you're thinking about what you're going to make and it's kind of fun and exciting… It

> does feel like it's a moment of peace. But it's also like a moment of like, "Oh, this is something I can look forward to," you know, when there's so... many things [that] have gotten taken away from us, in terms of what we look forward to. But yeah, for me like that calming piece, is like that sense of stability, I think through all of the chaos that's been going on through the year.

Throughout our interview, Amy mentioned small moments where a food or a cooking experience sparked a moment of joy or calm for her. These moments included the seasonal availability of an herbed goat cheese through their milk delivery service; the moment her son – an extremely picky eater – asked her to try baking cheese sticks and he loved them; and finding a moment to read through her monthly issue of *Cook's Illustrated* and getting inspired. Being able to access those moments of peace and stability in the kitchen helped Amy to stay connected to herself and foundational parts of her identity during the pandemic.

Día. Food was a way for Día to foster a connection to her Mexican heritage during the pandemic. The upheaval in Día's life because of the pandemic meant that she spent more time at home with her parents than she had for several years. These prolonged stays enabled her to engage in cooking cultural foods with her mom. Tortilla soup, homemade tortillas, flan, and tamales were all named as cultural foodstuffs that helped her connect to her ancestry and bridge the diasporic gap in her family's biography. Día shared that the practice of cooking with her mom made her feel more connected to this part of her heritage and the cultural significance of the specific foods and the related foodways, however different or removed they were from versions of these foods made in Mexico.

When not staying with her parents, Día lived in Portland, Oregon with a variety of friends. Bringing these cultural foodstuffs into her shared meals with friends helped her to

develop a sense of personal closeness to her heritage that she had not explored as fully before. Realizing the significance and importance of her own cultural heritage through food was both a result of the circumstances caused by the pandemic and a solution to some of the uncontrollable components of Día's life during the pandemic.

New Foodways – Linda, Dave, and Debra

Linda. An excellent example of the employment of new foodways for creative purposes came from my interview with Linda. She shared that "Food preparation and eating have been highlights of our experience." as she and her husband have collaborated in exploring new cuisine. Linda's husband enjoyed learning new techniques and getting into the science of cooking - an especially uplifting pandemic experience for him. Linda took on the research aspect to discover recipes from unfamiliar cuisines, learn about the cultural origins and customs associated with the food, and find musical accompaniments for their themed meals.

> This has gotten us through this full year of being isolated. And we generally have food from all different ethnicities in different countries…we have the Google and the Alexa devices in our house, and so we ask one of them to play the music that corresponds to the country that we're eating the recipe from. So, like I had stroganoff last night for dinner and we played Russian music. So each day is different and each country that we visit through their food we listen along, you know, with the music. And sometimes we'll do a little bit of research online about the country and, you know, little known aspects of it and stuff so it's bringing the world closer to us in a really wonderful way… When we're doing the research online about the country or the locale we find videos that show different festivals or different origins of why they're celebrating in the way that they are, and so it really makes it feel like we're traveling, even though we can't leave our house.

Linda was adamant that some of the new dishes they had tried would stick around in their cooking repertoire, as they had become new favorites. Their experimentations included seeking out new traditional holiday meals as well: they chose to celebrate Passover with Sephardic Jewish foodways instead of the Ashkenazi Jewish foodways that they were more accustomed to. She reported that during the pandemic their home-bound lives centered around food and they often enjoyed the leftovers of their dinner meals for lunch. In fact, during our interview, Linda's husband interrupted her momentarily and when she returned she said "My husband was asking me if I'm hungry, which is so sweet." It was clear that food offered them a creative form of expression and connection during the pandemic enforced isolation from others.

Dave. As introduced in the opening anecdote to Chapter 1, Dave began baking sourdough bread during the pandemic. In both his survey responses and interview, Dave kept coming back to sourdough as one of the most positive highlights of his quarantine and pandemic experience. Dave shared: "It's deeply satisfying for me to engage in the life cycle of sourdough and to make the beautiful and delicious loaves for my family and friends." Dave specifically named the sense of accomplishment he got from completing the task of baking bread and the tactile and hands-on aspects of the process as components that were meaningful to him. The short timeline between preparation and completion, the deliciousness of the finished product, and the ability to bake extra and give it away to friends and neighbors were also components of baking sourdough that he brought up. Because Dave was working from home, he said that a weekly baking routine with his sourdough starter helped to break up his day. A few minutes spent taking the starter out of the fridge to wake it up and feed it or taking several minutes to mix and shape loaves were opportunities to step away from virtual work and instead focus on this tangible foodway. He said

the experience was highly satisfying. Sourdough served Dave by offering him a personally gratifying practice that also helped him express his care for others.

Debra. Gardening also emerged as an innovative foodway that supported participants' creativity. Debra, her son, and her daughter-in-law lived together for much of the pandemic. Early in the pandemic, inspired to garden for the 2020 season, they successfully revived an old garden on Debra's property. With the help of a neighbor, they cleared and tilled the old garden, removed fallen trees, and made a growing space. Debra's son and daughter-in-law started many vegetables by seed – filling the front window – and in their eagerness successfully grew more starts than their small household needed. As spring turned to summer, they had so much extra produce that they had to find creative ways of safely giving it to neighbors. Bags of produce hung on fence posts, drops to the neighborhood sharing stand, and their neighborhood Facebook group all helped keep them connected with their community and share their gardening successes with others. At the time that I spoke with Debra, she was getting excited about starting their 2021 garden and her window was again full of seeded starts. Here again this foodway employed by Debra and her family served as a way of expressing creativity and direct care for others.

Comfort Foods – Dave

As a way of supporting their mental health, Dave and his family focused on comfort food in the last year. The emphasis on flavor, enjoyment, and comfort was seen by Dave and his family as a reasonable response to the uncertainty of the pandemic and offered a multi-purpose solution to some of the uncomfortable and uncertain aspects of the pandemic. This focus on tastiness was not unique to Dave and his family, or even to this pandemic. Snyder's 2020 article tracks the ways in which a focus on enjoyment and comfort foods has been symbolically connected to wellbeing since as early as the 14th century and has repeatedly been seen in

correlation to past pandemics. Both the Yellow Fever of the 1700s and Spanish Flu of 1918 had popular diets associated with wellness that consisted of rich broths, custards, and toast (Snyder, 2020). Even the well-known adage ‘feed a cold, starve a fever’ is connected to this idea of consumption of rich foods and health (Snyder, 2020).

Dave’s recounting of the comforting foodways he and his family focused on made a real correlation between enjoyment and living. He shared:

> My wife has made a lot of chocolate chip cookies. They used to be sort of a special event kind of thing, and [now] there's more like, “The special event is we're alive today. Okay, let's make some cookies.” And eating more…pasta with sauce, or you know, making a casserole – lots of cheese. Way more cheese in our diet than there was previously. Because for a while there we were trying to eat more consciously, you know, healthy…And then…healthy was, I guess a little bit paradoxically, less important and the comfort was sort of more important. So it's like, “Let's eat something that we like.” So rather than just roasting some chicken and some broccoli…, “Well, let's dump a bunch of cheese on that and have a big casserole.” So that feels better to eat…More carbohydrates and cheese in our diet than there was pre-COVID. And more snacks! …Because, you know, when things were really uncertain and shitty, a handful of M&Ms will go a long way to picking up your day.

The prioritization of comfort foods has a long legacy as an accessible tool in combating illness (Snyder, 2020). The intentionality of Dave’s family in making food choices was one of their personal solutions to the uncertainty of the pandemic. They made conscious choices about the food they cooked and ate because of the flavor, enjoyment, and comfort offered by those choices.

Sharing Food – Debra, Día, and Dave

Homemade edible holiday presents were an affordable and meaningful offering mentioned by Debra, Día, and Dave. The example from Día's interview especially indicates how food helped her communicate care for her friends across distance, while also sharing an important part of her self-identity with them. Día made tamales with her mother over the Christmas holidays and found ways of sharing them with her social network. She shared:

> This last holiday season, I decided I wanted to make more tamales than usual… I just really wanted to give out a lot of them this year. So we made a ton, and I bagged them up and I sent them out to the usual folks that we send them out to, and then I also drove down to Portland one day and did porch drops of tamales for, I don't know, six different group households that I am close with and just wrote them little letters with instructions on how to prepare them… It was a really sweet feeling all around. And I think it felt really nice to everyone who got them too, because it's an easy treat. And it's been made by a friend. And they're easy to heat up, but there's such a process to make. So I think people don't make them that often.

The richness of this experience for Día was especially connected to her ability to give this handmade 'treat' to people she loved. The social connections sustained through this food gift was of significance to her.

Dave and his family also found the holidays were a time to seek out creative distanced meal sharing. They made a full Thanksgiving spread and dropped off homemade meals for local friends and family who were especially isolated. Dave also shared that the act of cooking and then sharing those meals with others helped to make the day feel less isolating and was a bright spot for him. Again, the connections made through the sharing of food that he put time and effort into was the part that was important and notable.

And for Debra, sweet breads such as banana, pecan, and cranberry loaves were handmade gifts she was able to share with an extended network of friends and family over the Christmas holiday. Using mini loaf tins, Debra found she could bake many loaves in a day and create a homemade treat that was affordable for her and touching for her friends and family to receive. Debra felt that the homemade and from-scratch aspects of those loaves were the significant aspects that made them a more impactful gift than something expensive or store bought.

For all three of these interviewees, the contents and taste of the gifted food was significant, but more than that the act of making something for people they cared about was more important. All three described personal gratification and positive feelings from the making and sharing aspects of the food gifts. This way of staying connected to people who they had been isolated from during the pandemic offered a solution for both keeping in touch and sharing part of themselves with their friends and family. The intentionality of the choices made and the creative solutions participants found during the pandemic serve as examples of active identity creation and reinforcement through new and familiar foodways.

Changes to Individual and Communal Foodways

The changes brought on by the pandemic impacted interviewees' individual and communal foodways. This mirrored many of the results from survey data. In our conversations, I asked interviewees to expand upon the ways in which the pandemic had collided with their foodways, and some of these ways showed up as either challenges or solutions. Other instances described fall more into the category of material changes or simply a restructuring and reprioritization of energy that impacted interviewees' foodways. Themes around community connection and personal agency arose out of interviews.

Community Connection – Día, Amy, and Linda

As with the survey data which highlight food as a community connector, several further examples of this theme came to light from participant interviews. The experiences of Día, Amy, and Linda all offer examples of how individuals made food-based connections with their immediate community during the pandemic. Their stories help to highlight the personal and emotional impacts of these connections and the importance of those during the uncertainty and uncontrollability of the pandemic.

Día. The pandemic has changed Día's individual and communal foodways. Food provided a sort of central hub around which Día was able to arrange her life while much else remained unknown. Día gave up her lease and quit her job (a food service job in Portland, Oregon) to go on the study abroad trip to Portugal. Returning home meant instant quarantine and isolated living at her parent's home in Olympia, Washington while the pandemic unfolded. Over the course of the year that followed, Día moved back and forth between Portland and Olympia, re-forming quarantine social pods and figuring out how to access food safely and affordably while also facing regular uncertainty. As someone who self-describe as a social-introvert, Día found cooking and sharing food to be a way of communicating her appreciation for a place to stay, for the companionship she found in different households she formed during the pandemic, and for the resources they shared.

Día said the most constant aspect of her life during the pandemic was her personal morning ritual around tea. This offered an individual foodway that was grounding, no matter where she was living. Things like fancy weekend breakfast and exploring how to cook meats and different Mediterranean dishes were memorable moments of connection with her pandemic households as well. She said,

> Sharing food is just a way that I know to make connections with people and share some of the things that I enjoy with them…I love being treated to someone's exciting new dish. And then I also feel the same sort of secondary excitement of sharing new dishes with people. And so those are kind of two of the rewarding parts [of sharing food] for me.

Not having work and moving around often meant that sharing meals and cooking was a way for Día to (re)connect with both her family and different friend households.

Amy. In Amy's family of four, dinner was often a time where she tried to draw her teenage children out of their rooms and the isolated bubbles created by online school. Making dinner special by using the nice china and lighting candles or pairing the meal with an activity like poker night or home karaoke helped to shake up their routines and support their family in connecting with each other. Amy felt that these themed meals generated more participation and connection and supported their family in an overall difficult year.

These intentional meals with family also gave Amy an opportunity to share a part of herself with her family. Amy found food a tangible way she could express her love, concern, and care for her family during the pandemic. This looked like catering to food requests, shopping with her children's desires in mind, and being willing to try making new treats and snacks. This form of support was something Amy had agency over during the pandemic and helped her to connect with her kids and their individual needs.

Linda. For Linda and her husband, their intentional focus on international cuisine during the pandemic offered a strong form of interpersonal connection. The intimate connection through their shared cooking and eating experiences was a way of feeling connected to both each other and the distant outside world. In our interview, Linda shared:

> I think food is a great connection to bring people together, so that's another reason why I like doing this with my husband. It draws us closer to people from all over the world, and we're eating the ethnic foods that they would be eating and enjoying their music and stuff. So it just makes the world seem less expanded and remote. It brings it closer to us in our heart[s].

For Linda and the other participants, these connections through food were notable because they added structure to their quarantined lives, supported their friendships and partnerships, offered mental and physical support, and helped them to feel linked to the world beyond their home, town, and country. These ways of connecting are distinguished from the solutions to social distance found in Día, Dave, and Debra's food gifting stories because they illustrate the ways in which the pandemic changed these participants' daily lives and the unique ways in which they navigated those changes on a personal level. Their food connections did not solve the isolation or disconnection caused by the pandemic, they made them more bearable.

Personal Agency – Debra and Dave

A significant way that the pandemic changed people's lives was through the enactment and enforcement of pandemic lockdowns, quarantines, and rules regarding how to behave in public. This intersected with people's foodways through the temporary or altered closure of eateries, mandated and perceived ways of behaving safely in grocery stores, and the availability of certain foodstuffs. These external changes to individual's behavior coincided with individual risk assessments, as can be seen in the previous story about how Beth navigated the challenge of the doughnut and food safety. Examples shared by Debra and Dave also illustrated material, logistical, and emotional impacts on their foodways caused by the pandemic. Their examples

illustrate the ways in which they exercised personal agency around impacted foodstuffs and foodways.

Debra. The relief of being able to resume sharing food in public was strongly felt by Debra. When asked, Debra's food-related memory from the pandemic was the reopening of her favorite bar and grill so that she and her boyfriend could again go to Taco Tuesday. The tradition had begun several years ago as a group of widows and widowers who gathered there weekly. Through this group, she met her boyfriend; the weekly meal tradition remained important to them both. Being able to go again when the restaurant re-opened was not as much about the food that was served as the connections that she formed through that supportive group of people. The group of friends, her boyfriend, and the regular waitstaff were all specific connections that she named, and which helped to make that experience significant and important to her. The external restrictions which changed the ability for the restaurant to be open caused a significant loss for Debra, even temporarily.

But despite this temporary loss of an important foodway, Debra also described the pandemic as a time when she was able to prioritize and focus her foodways around health. Debra chose to shop at "known places" and timed her shopping for when she expected there to be less people in the store. She emphasized that shopping somewhere where she knew the clerk helped to give her a sense of security in those otherwise fraught outings. The personal limits Debra set around her allowable outings contributed to an increase in unstructured time in her daily life. This perceived increase in time assisted Debra in making more conscious decisions about her food. The changes Debra made in her foodways had evident positive impacts on her health. She shared:

> My whole relationship with food has changed because I can deliberately plan. There's nights when I'll have a bowl of steamed Brussel sprouts with butter and parmesan cheese, and that's the whole meal. And I'm not deliberately vegetarian. But I can think about what sounds good and plan to do it because I have time to. I don't have to quick make a meal and run out the door, or I'm getting home at five o'clock and needing to eat by seven. I can have dinner at five o'clock, and not need anything else.

In discussing this idea of time and its relationship to intentionality around food, Debra said it felt like she was finally in control because the pressure and time constraints of work and other activities were no longer putting restraints on how, when, and what she ate. The immediate changes in how Debra shopped for, prepared, and consumed food were linked to the pandemic.

Dave. Dave's family signed up for the Instacart grocery delivery application immediately when lockdown began in March 2020. They coupled this no-contact way of getting groceries with bulk purchases of staple items such as flour, rice, and beans, and shopping at their smaller neighborhood store, Ralph's Thriftway. They felt that Ralph's was safer because they knew the checkers and felt they were "fully invested" in COVID safety procedures in the store. "It's a mixture of safety and also wanting to keep the money more local," said Dave.

The impacts of this change to Dave's foodways can be seen in the previous stories regarding how he was challenged and found meaningful solutions during the pandemic. In particular, his habit of bulk purchasing flour was a key component of developing his regular sourdough baking practice. The caution and concern evident in Dave's choices around grocery shopping also helps to show some of the regular mental impacts and concerns that influenced Dave and his family to seek comfort food as a coping mechanism during the pandemic. These

connections between Dave's foodways are examples of overlap in how the pandemic has influenced his life.

Application of Interpretive Frameworks

The exact meaning of food landscapes, and individuals' interactions with them, has fluctuated for participants during the pandemic. Food has long been seen as a symbol of nurturing, but relationships with food became fraught with fear and danger of contamination during the pandemic. Food also increased in significance for individuals who experienced pandemic-related food insecurity or for whom food was a primary tool for expressing creativity and managing mental health. Symbolic interactionism suggests people have established symbols and know how to interact with those symbols: the pandemic changed the symbolic value of food by complicating it with additional concerns or imbuing it with new importance. Thus, participants had to change how they interacted with food. This is evident in people's changed behavior around socializing over food, safety concerns when grocery shopping and getting takeout, and changes in foodways that placed food at the center of a participant's daily life in a new way during the pandemic.

Central to symbolic interactionism is the notion that people create meaning out of objects through culturally situated social interactions with them (Greider & Garkovich, 1994). Symbolic interactionism and Greider and Garkovich's concept of landscape (1994) leaves room for meaning to be imbued in both the mundane and fantastical. During the pandemic, food was shown to be both a mundane daily necessity and an accessible and important form of fantastical enjoyment, pleasure, or community support. Food became a symbolic resource employed by individuals during their individual experiences of the COVD-19 pandemic. The breadth of symbolic importance, and a person's regular interaction with food (especially in the restrictive

and limited setting of the pandemic) made foodways and foodstuffs a critical component of individuals' pandemic experiences to examine.

Examining the symbolic importance of food through a constructivist paradigm offers greater flexibility in interpreting the differences and similarities found in participants' responses. Constructivism supports the idea that the culturally/socially formed meanings associated with these symbols are then interpreted, categorized, and applied individually (Blumer, 1986). By also using the interpretive framework of constructivism I have left room for interpreting the data using the idea that participants actively constructed personal knowledge and made meaning of their pandemic experiences through a constant process of interaction, interpretation, and modification of their social environments (Howell, 2013). Constructivism supports the existence of different interpretations of a subjective reality that is neither in contrast nor alignment with an objective reality (Howell, 2021). The multiple and complex experiences of the pandemic make this form of flexible interpretation necessary.

Repetitive interaction with the symbolic resource of foodstuffs during the pandemic increased the significance and role of food in participants' subjective interpretations of the pandemic. For example, the pandemic-informed practices of meal planning, an increase in family dinners made possible because of unstructured time and restricted travel, or new foodways discovered such as baking sourdough bread or incorporating new cuisines into home cooking practices. These examples from the data are instances of participants regularly practicing meaning-making using personally relevant symbolic interpretations of food and food experiences. The importance of these experiences and their centrality to making meaning of the broader pandemic experience is individual and unique to each participant, while collectively illustrating larger themed categories of experiences. These themes gain relevance and become

impetus for future action because of both the place-based nature of this research and the intentional use of symbolic interactionism and constructivism as frameworks for interpreting the data.

Discussion

One of the distinct and challenging aspects of this research is that it is focused on an event that has continued to unfold during the data collection, interpretation, and writing. As guidelines for behavior, restrictions, and economic impacts change (often in individual and inequitable ways), the long-term impacts of the pandemic on people's foodways are still unclear. This remains true at the time of writing. Indeed, even in April 2020, questions about the long-term changes to individuals' foodways were being questioned:

> The end of self-isolation could mean a return to all the conveniences of a pre-pandemic food era, to an unstable, fragile food system. But for those who live through the pandemic, it could also shape a collective response, and all of these small habits could add up to a meaningful shift that changes our food culture. (Rao, 2020)

Rao had put a call out on Twitter for foodways and customs handed down by generations of immigrant and Depression-era relatives that have survived the years. For every example of a preserved practice, such as freezing butter wrappers to grease baking pans, there are numerous examples of lost innovative foodways (Rao, 2020). Perhaps this is the fate of some of the COVID-19 pandemic foodways described by participants and popular media.

Some participants expressed a clear wish for some long-term changes in their foodways, such as a hope that their shopping habits had changed permanently, that they would continue some of the creative and innovative cooking practices such as baking bread and cooking international dishes, and a change in eating habits to reflect a new focus on health and family

meals. Many survey takers mentioned that the changes in their foodways during the pandemic was a direct result of an increase in time spent at home and a feeling that focusing on food was a reasonable and appropriate response to the pandemic. It is hard to know if this change in focus or busy-ness that many spoke of will last in the long-term.

The instances of food creativity and food related ingenuity shared by participants are examples of ways that participants used food to manage stress during the pandemic. The correlation between time and the ability to try new foodways or intentionally focus on eating indicates that the pandemic and experiences of quarantine are part of what made these foodway changes possible for people. It is also clear in these examples that there is a connection for participants between feelings of creativity and inspiration when cooking and connecting with others. In this way, these examples help to provide answers to the research questions of this thesis.

Participants' anecdotes about the ways in which food functioned in their life speaks to some of the ways in which food took on greater cultural meaning and significance for participants. For example, gifting food and exploring personal cultural heritage through foodways. In these instances, food served symbolically to help connect participants to important parts of their identity, their immediate community, and the outside world. Other food experiences, such as the complicated emotions and calculations related to food safety and food access, are examples of the change in food significance because of the pandemic. These examples also indicate potential long-term impacts of the pandemic on foodways. Because the pandemic is linked to participants' changed behaviors in relation to food, the resulting data described in this chapter are a glimpse into the ways in which people have been making meaning of their pandemic experience through food. In this way, the data address the research questions.

The wealth of experiences shared through participants' survey responses and the six interviews offers many examples of how food served as a symbol, identity marker, and communication tool. As discussed previously, there does exist a kind of productive overlap in the four research questions and thus in participants' responses. Because food is universally recognized as a symbolic resource and is interconnected with identity and communication, it becomes difficult to talk about things like creativity in cooking without discussing the connections and communication around that food practice or to name a foodway as a challenge without discussing how it has impacted a participant's life during the pandemic. These themes intersect and overlap to paint a full picture of how individuals' food experiences helped them to make meaning of the pandemic. People's priorities, especially around food, were restructured and aligned because of the pandemic and the associated health and safety concerns. How these changed priorities will continue to impact them moving forward is area for speculation. Instances of overlap and repetitive categorization should be viewed as a form of productive redundance that further illustrates the important role of food in meaning-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. This productive overlap creates space for future research opportunities and areas of exploration which will be addressed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

Future Research Pathways

The participant stories shared in Chapters 4 and 5 provide examples of food operating as a symbol in cultural and social practices, fostering identities formed around foods and food practices, and serving as a communication tool. More specifically, they illustrate food operating in these ways within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and in Thurston County, Washington. This research examines the ways in which food is an integral part of culture, and, as stated in the introduction, culture is how people make sense of the world and experiences. Recording the ways in which these individuals used food and food practices to make sense of the COVID-19 pandemic offers insight into methods of managing upheaval caused by a complex crisis. Individuals' foodways during the pandemic illustrate meaning making in action.

Documenting these experiences is a way of communicating or preserving the collective challenges, solutions, and changes the pandemic has had on individual and communal foodways. Through this documentation and analysis, the importance of things like shared meals, comfort foods, and food creativity is remembered. Using surveys, individual interviews, and specific informant interviews, this research sheds light on the role that food played in the construction of cultural and individual meaning-making during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Food Justice and Equitable Food-Oriented Development

Howell (2013) linked the constructivist paradigm to action research, that is, research that adopts an active role in affecting the outcome of the phenomena being studied through a process of democratic inquiry. Howell's discussion of participatory and action-based research builds off constructivism and the idea that reality is a personal, local, and shared experience that has the power to change social structures and experiences, of which food justice is an example. Food

justice research is an action-based form of interdisciplinary research that addresses how food serves as a conduit or medium for the instigation and perpetuation of greater community-wide or system-wide social and environmental equity. Food justice addresses the connections between economics, politics, environmentalism, and cultural studies in relation to foods and food practices (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). In this way, the research undertaken in the field of food justice is actively seeking to change the phenomena being studied through a participatory, active, and democratic manner that values the relationship between the researcher and the researched. This thesis is action research adjacent because while did not result in direct action, it has the potential to offer solutions for ways in which food can be a tool for community resiliency. Food Justice action research offers an interpretive framework pathway forward for future research.

Similar to food justice is the newly emerging framework of Equitable Food Oriented Development, or EFOD. EFOD is designed to "reap the powerful benefits of food projects and enterprises as vehicles for community development and health, while investing deeply in the self-determination and leadership of community residents." (Aguilar, Andrade, Cedeño, Espinoza, Ferdinand, Roque, Sharma, Yakini, Zandi, Rebanal, Saldaña, & Schempf, 2019). The current expansion of this framework and the field of food justice presents an opportunity for new research because the potential for addressing forms of inequity in the food system and the need to do so has often been recognized by on-the-ground activists before being explored in academia (Kepkiewicz, Chrobok, Whetung, Cahuas, Gill, Walker, & Wakefield, 2016). Because it is a rapidly growing and evolving field of study, controversy has surfaced and new norms are frequently being discovered and developed. Studies of food justice ground activism within an academic setting and solidify food studies and food justice as fields and frameworks within which research needs to be conducted. These frameworks and the idea of whole systems thinking

create space for the kind of radical food justice work called for by scholars e.g., (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Kepkiewicz et. al, 2016). Through the lens of food justice framework and EFOD, this research could be applied to future research and action-oriented community work that addresses how individuals interact with and are impacted by their foodways and foodstuffs.

These action-focused frameworks, though not applicable to this research as it stands, offer insight into how future research on how the global pandemic of COVID-19 intersects with a variety of other crises around the world. This might include the intersection of the pandemic with the active acknowledgement of systemic racism in the United States and the fight for the abolition of racism, a fraught and high stakes presidential election in 2020 and the disintegration of previously "solid" democratic norms, migration and refugee resettlement conflicts across the globe, natural disasters and climate crisis impacts felt around the world, and more. Consideration of these frameworks leaves the door open for further research and on-the-ground action-oriented application of the data in the future.

Potential Application of Data

As the COVD-19 pandemic continues to evolve and be understood both locally and beyond, continued scholarship around the challenges, solutions, and changes - related to food and otherwise - is critical. The nature of food as a widely applicable symbolic resource used to support identities, aid in communication, and represent larger beliefs and experiences makes continued study of food in the context of the pandemic important. While this research documented many of the immediate impacts of the pandemic on foodways, long-term impacts will increasingly become visible in economic recovery patterns and continued coverage of the pandemic. Additionally, following up on the hopes and changes speculated on by participants

creates an opportunity for further research that may offer more insight into the pandemic's influence on people in this specific community.

There is ample room for action-oriented research built upon this research. I maintain that this thesis is action research–adjacent because the findings *could* be applied to affect community change, though doing so was not in the scope of this thesis. Additionally, participants in this research did discuss issues of food security, food sovereignty, sustainability practices, and systemic change in their personal and communal foodways. As a researcher who works in the food system, future application of the data to food justice research is a direction that I support and intend to pursue. This is also a logical direction for this research to grow because both food justice research and EFOD are inherently interdisciplinary frameworks and could productively build upon the interpretive frameworks used in this thesis.

The limited nature of this research means that there are many areas where it could be expanded. I would like it to be taken and expanded or applied to further research about the inequitable and intersectional aspects of food and the pandemic. While it is true that the pandemic is a worldwide event that is impacting many people, there is great disparity and inequity in how those impacts are felt—including in people's foodways. This leaves room for further study which could look like specific research around local instances of food insecurity or the effectiveness of food access programs. Additionally, further research examining the intersections of race, gender, or economic disparity and food would offer interesting and more specialized insight into how food supported meaning-making for different groups of people during the pandemic.

The data and findings of this research could also be applied to action-oriented community projects. I support the use of the data as justification for future work that supports food access,

food as a tool for community building, and food as a tool for exploring individual and cultural identities. The value of the shared individual experiences and the larger themes they contributed to could be taken as representative examples when an organization is applying for funding or seeking partners for future work. This is an area I intend to explore in my future research and work as a community educator and farmer.

While many of the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals' foodways and foodstuffs are still unknown, the findings of this research make clear some of the ramifications to foodways because of the pandemic. Economic recovery is beginning in some areas, while desperate attempts to stem the virus still rage in others. The long-term impacts on individuals' ability to access food, procure food, and gather over food again will be place-specific and highly dependent upon personal senses of safety and local government responses. Direct impacts on diet and food consumption patterns after world events have certainly been apparent in the past. For example, changes in culturally accepted foodways originating after World War II have been passed down for generations (Rao, 2020), and diet related impacts on health are still affecting people today in the form of increased rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease among elders who lived through the war (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitaet Muenchen [LMU], 2014). Further, as Snyder (2020) catalogued, foodways have been a focus of periods of plagues and pandemic in world history—why should the COVID-19 pandemic be any different? The long-term consumption patterns, changed foodways, and food-related trends will become more apparent in the months and years to come.

It is my hope that this research will complement other scholarship about the pandemic. Other case studies, community-focused research, and justice-oriented research is ongoing at the time of this study and the potential combination of our collective research is exciting. This thesis

can be used as a justification for food being operationalized as a symbolic resource and the individual interpretations and uses of food as valid practices of meaning-making and resourcefulness.

This research captures some of the specific examples of how people from Thurston County, Washington have employed food as a tool for making meaning of their pandemic experiences. It offers insight into ways in which the pandemic challenged their foodways, how food offered solutions to the hardships and upheavals of the pandemic, and the material and social changes that the pandemic had on their foodways. The data offer instances of food serving as a symbol, identity marker, and tool in communication as participants navigated the emerging and on-going pandemic. As a symbolic resource whose importance is regularly renewed through daily consumption, food has operated as an individual and cultural landscape on which to ascribe methods for living with and through the COVD-19 pandemic. The findings of this research serve as a tool for understanding the role of foodstuffs and foodways in personal and communal meaning-making during a large-scale crisis.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

1) Have you regularly thought of the food you will prepare and/or eat during the COVID-19 pandemic? *Y/N*
    a. Please elaborate: *Short answer*
2) Have you always been able to access the food you need since the pandemic started? *Y/N*
3) Has there been a change in where you obtain your food from during pandemic? Please elaborate if you would like to. *Short answer*
4) Have you experimented with food or taken joy from food experiences of any kind during pandemic? *Y/N*
    a. If yes, please elaborate: *Short answer*
5) What do your mealtimes look like during pandemic? Please describe. *Short answer*
6) Is this different in any way from pre-pandemic mealtimes? If yes, please elaborate: *Short answer*
7) Has your relationship with your community or the people around you changed in relation to accessing, preparing, eating, or any other food related experience? Please elaborate. *Short answer*
8) Would you be willing to participate in a more extensive interview about your food experiences during pandemic? *Y/N*
    a. If yes, please provide a preferred contact method.

Appendix B

Survey Results

Timestamp	Have you regularly thought of the food you will prepare and/or eat during the COVID-19 pandemic? Y/N? Please elaborate either way.	Have you always been able to access the food you need since the pandemic started?	Has there been a change in where you obtain your food from during pandemic? Please elaborate if you would like to.	Have you experimented with food during pandemic? Could be out of interest or necessity. If yes, please elaborate.	Have you found joy from food experiences of any kind during pandemic? If yes, please elaborate.	What do your mealtimes look like during pandemic? Please describe.	Is this different in any way from pre-pandemic mealtimes? If yes, please elaborate.	Has your relationship with your community or the people around you changed in relation to accessing.
2/11/2021 12	Yes- out of boredom I start planning meals early in the day and trying new recipes.	Yes	More a change in the frequency of shopping. Using Instacart for Costco shopping every 3 months. Going to Haagen's once every 10 days.	Yes- baking and learning new cuisines and techniques. We have always cooked from scratch a lot. I've learned to make Vietnamese fresh rolls, homemade pizza dough, plus others. Also have experimented with using vacuum sealing as I freeze more after our Costco delivery and use the technique to extend the shelf life of my lettuce.	Ha! Cooking is the highlight of my boring life!	We eat 3x day. Salad lunch. Home made dinner. The vegetable are the kind that can keep for a couple of weeks - my husband jokingly complains about the frequency of Brussels sprouts!	We used to eat out once a week but no longer do that.	We moved here to be closer to grandkids we rarely see... Thanksgiving was just our household.
2/11/2021 16		Yes	This past year bought a CSA share because I thought it was likely that there would be shortages of fresh veggies at the local markets. Also, I figured the farmer's market might be closed, and I often shop there during spring/summer/fall.	For the first five months, my spouse was stuck out of state at a job site and could not travel home. So my cooking habits changed and I mostly moved to making one big pot of something (stew, chili, large meatloaf, etc...) and eating that for 4-5 days and then on other nights having eggs or sandwich or buying take out. So there was a big change from "what's for dinner tonight" to this longer-term cooking for myself. Also I did do more take out than normal, because I wanted to support local restaurants (I tend towards smaller Indian and Thai places, so local family restaurants).	I found it very joyful to get takeout, because I was feeding myself food that is a "treat" for me, and also feeling good about participating in supporting local businesses.	Pretty much normal. I have an eat-in kitchen area, and eat at the table there. Read while I'm eating when I'm alone. When my spouse was here, we make conversation over meals.	Just cutting and pasting here, because I think I've already answered. For the first five months, my spouse was stuck out of state at a job site and could not travel home. So my cooking habits changed and I mostly moved to making one big pot of something (stew, chili, large meatloaf, etc...) and	Mostly the two changes I've mentioned: - Using a CSA rather than local farms and farmers' market, because those were not available this year. - Doing more take-out in order to support local businesses - I expect that I will continue that for quite a while, as in-
2/11/2021 17	Y But often out of boredom and because eating out in a restaurant isn't an option.	No	No	I have tried more vegetarian options.	No. I enjoyed eating at potlucks, parties, and restaurants more with friends and family.	There's a lot to comfort food and chilling in front of the tv.	Sometimes. I do think that getting out made life more interesting.	I often saw acquaintances while out at parties and restaurants and never had cell phone contact. I only prepare food with family now.
2/11/2021 17	Food preparation and earing have been highlights of our experience.	No	All home-prepared meals now.	Using recipes from dozens of other countries and regions. Play music from applicable areas when eating.	Yes! Even new cooking techniques have been delightful learning experiences.	Exotic recipes with traditional music every night. Sometimes, Zoom with others.	Totally different. Fun now to research and find recipes. So creative!	My husband and I are both seniors with a grown son and daughter. This is a fun, safe adventure for us as we shelter at home.
2/11/2021 18	Yes	Yes	No	Yes. Trying new recipes to keep my spirits up during the pandemic.	Yes.	Eat breakfast mid-morning around 10:30, dinner around 6. I'm working from home, so have access to food whenever I'm hungry.	Yes. I worked in an office prior. Breakfast around 7, lunch around 12, and dinner around 6	No
2/11/2021 19	Yes- I've started making weekly menus so I can purchase all the food for the week at once and have everything available for prep throughout the week.	Yes	No	Yes- I got on the sourdough train and learned that I could create nearly gluten free delicious bread for my gluten-sensitive husband by using a 24-hr rise with the dough. I make bread every week now.	See previous answer.	Busy since we usually work long hours, but with a planned meal, it's less stressful. Try to play music while preparing food.	Yes- now that I have a menu planned for the week, deciding what to make each night is less stressful. Also, we're not going out to eat at all (haven't since last April). We get takeout about once per week.	Yes- mainly that we aren't sharing meals with friends and hosting/attending potlucks as we normally would pre-pandemic. We've had just a handful of outdoor dinner gatherings (where we all brought our own food) with two neighbors in the past year.
2/11/2021 21	Yes. Food has provided peace and moments of calm during this time. Food has been a way to show love and hopefully provide health.	Yes	We always obtain much of our food from our garden, supplemented by friends who grow lamb and beef. Otherwise we continue get our food from the farmers market, Trader Joe's and Costco.	I have learned how to use the instant pot during this time, as between balancing working at home and helping the kids with school at home, preparing dinner has been tricky. The instant pot has been a way to make a yummy dinner with frozen meat, quickly.	Yes! Food is always joy but especially now when there is so much less to share and celebrate together. We try to break out candles to make simple meals fee even more special.	If we are lucky, all four of us sit down together. Otherwise my husband and I eat together and the kids filter in as their homework schedules allow. We cook almost every night and love homemade bread/rolls/focaccia most night and lots of homegrown produce that we've preserved.	We are eating earlier, as there is no commuting or any evening sports. That makes it easier but stress is an even bigger issue as the pandemic has all of us stressed out in new ways. Being without peers, the kids are depressed and cranky.	I love sharing food with others. We often have folks over to share meals, and using the pizza oven with friends is our entertainment. That was suspended during the pandemic and it was so hard. We've tried to be joyful with just the four of us but it's been a challenge. Also, I usually share food with folks at work and in meetings - it's how I show love. It's been such a sad thing to have lost this during this time.
2/11/2021 21	Do you mean in the sense of planning meals? Yes - we look ahead , see what we have and we will need to buy to decrease how often we go shopping. We are lucky to have a garden and do - in the summer- were able to use our own produce.	Yes	No	Yes somewhat. We have always been interested in trying new things and with the changes in our habits due to the pandemic, we have done more of that.	It's been fun trying new things	Breakfast, lunch, dinner pretty much at usual times	No	Not really
2/11/2021 21	Yes. I have made and purchased an insane amount of not so good for me comfort food. Very carb and sugar heavy. And I have fantasized about all the food in places I would otherwise have traveled to but can't.	Yes	Way more home cooking.	Not really. A few times. I think about it, but then I am never motivated or with enough energy to do it.	Not really, not even when I bought great takeout (rare)	I often work thru lunch on weekdays, then have either takeout, fast food or some carb heavy thing I cook at night.	Yes. I often went out for lunch with friends, then out for dinner with friends. I ate far fewer carbs pre-pandemic.	Yes, I'm missing all the social interaction with friends at mealtimes as I live alone. Living alone also impacts my desire to cook as I will be stuck eating the same thing for days on end.
2/11/2021 23	not much	Yes	no, but I do shop less often and I figure out what to cook based on what is in the house. I used to run to the store to get ingredients if I wanted to cook something I did not have in the house, but in the pandemic I ship once a week or once in ten days and I eat what I have at home.	not much	The few times I have ordered out, it is a joy to not eat my own cooking.	simple	yes, I used to eat out much more often, and make more elaborate food to share with others	yes, I loved going out to eat with friends and did it often. No more of that. I loved having friends over for dinner, no more of that. And while I still see friends on zoom the conversations are different - no layering of talk, people have to take turns, it's hard to have a few conversations going at the same time. Waiting to take turns to talk changes the conversation. It is better than nothing but it is isn't the same as being with people.
2/12/2021 10	Yes, trying to think of meals to improve my family's mood and also keep them healthy during a time of inactivity.	Yes	Yes, since the pandemic I have obtained a Costco membership and buy in bulk on a monthly basis.	Yes, trying to sneak in more veggies, grain alternatives, and vegan options into our family's routine food schedule.	Yes, I have increase my use of different food processors- cuisinart mixer, instapot, and cast iron .	Either around a table in the kitchen (75%) or at the kiddie table in front of the tv (25%)	No	Yes, I haven't been able to cook as much for friends or family.
2/12/2021 15	Yes - this has come in waves but I have been more invested in cooking and trying new things.	Yes	Yes- I find I am less inclined to travel far from home so I go to the flower store even though it's more expensive.	Yes - a lot of this has been out of boredom. I have also focused more on my health so healthier options are great. I've also tried to learn making international cuisine from scratch, such as butter chicken. I have been more open to hours long processes.	Yes - has filled the time and was a good way to fill the time. I feel like my cooking has improved.	I eat around 9, 12:30, and 7:30. Meal times are more rigid when my gym is open as I go to a 6pm class when it is open.	Yes, I didn't go to the gym pre pandemic so I would just eat dinner when I got home at 5:30.	Yes - my boyfriend and I love going out to eat so we have missed out on a lot of dates.
2/12/2021 17		Yes	No	No	No	Same	No	No eating out
2/12/2021 19	Yes. I now weekly meal plan to limit my time out in public/in the grocery store.	Yes	Yes. I now do the bulk of my grocery shopping at Trader Jo's because they are very conscientious about sanitizing and limiting the amount of customers.	Yes. I LOVE trying new recipes and I expeitment with the portions (try to have a lot of leftovers) to cook less—I'm a graduate student with little time for elaborate meals.	When I have time? Absolutely. Cooking is my love language and I find it quite relaxing as time allows.	Not too different than non-pandemic times. I always eat breakfast (usually oats w/fruit), leftovers from night before for lunch at my practicum and usually something Instant Potted in the evening.	Not so much.	Yes. The undocumented population I worked with last year is really struggling with food insecurity. Many fellow students I know that have been unemployed are now taking advantage of local food banks.
2/12/2021 23	Yes, and I have tried to eat more greens and other vegetables to compensate for being less active.	Yes	No	Not really, but I have been able to cook more while working from home.	I'm just grateful to be able to obtain good food and have the money to buy it. Many people aren't as fortunate.	I generally only eat two meals a day, with one or two snacks. Oatmeal or fruit and yogurt or granola for a late breakfast. Spinach salads for lunch/dinner meal. For awhile I was making peanut butter sandwiches again which I haven't eaten in years.	Just the frequency of being able to cook more, and a greater commitment to eating fresh uncooked veggies.	Far fewer family meals after none at first, since that would mean combining households. I've eaten takeout meals fewer than a dozen times in the last year and only one meal in a restaurant in a private room after my father's funeral service.

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2/13/2021 9:4	Yes. At first we stockpiled staples. Then we realized that we don't eat a lot of beans, why did we buy 20 lbs? Crazy stockpiling became more measured. Now it's normal for us to have 25lbs of flour on hand, but we're baking from scratch several times a week. We rely less on "what should I get from the store on my home" and more on "what's in the cabinet"	Yes	Shop more locally, less at big grocers	We now bake bread regularly. Make more things from basics: flour, beans, rice	I keep talking about bread. It's deeply satisfyingly for me to engage in the life cycle of sourdough and to make the beautiful and delicious loaves for my family and friends. Food sharing is also new: making and sharing with family and friends absent any special occasion.	More comfort food. More "gee its good to be eating" less "we need to be eating in a certain way"	The household eats together marginally more often	See above: sharing with friends and neighbors is much more common
2/13/2021 12	No, on whole food plant based lifestyle so know that what I am going to eat	Yes	Yes did sound sound food hub csa	Roasted vegetables moore, more different types of salads	Appreciate our restaurants more and try to support them	Same as before breakfast 7am lunch 11:30am dinner 6pm	No	Yes csa first time, went to farmer markets moore
2/13/2021 12	Yes. I have well stocked cupboards under most circumstances.	Yes	No. I have been able to access my usual grocery stores.	I have tried a few new dishes when I have had someone to cook for.	Yes. I baked quick breads for Christmas gifts.	Carefully thought out, especially portions. I have managed to loose nearly 30 pounds in the past year.	Not really. I retired in June of 2019, so when the pandemic started I was already a home body.	Restored my vegetable garden spring of 2020 and was able to share fresh produce with neighbors and friends.
2/13/2021 12	Yes. Since I was uncomfortable going to the larger out of town grocery stores, I get limited to what was available locally.	Yes	Yes, i shop more local and try to stock up, so fewer trips. Obtained much of my produce at the local farmers market and planted a garden.	Yes. I bought interesting produce at the local farmers market. Also for a while I couldn't find the types of dried beans I usually buy so tried some unfamiliar ones. I had more time so tried some new recipes.	Yes. I did not work throughout the spring and summer and found joy in tending my vegetable garden boxes. Also found joy seeing friend while visiting the local farmers market.	Early morning oatmeal breakfast. Noon salad for lunch with my adult son who spent much of the spring and summer with us. 6:00 dinner with husband and son.	Usually it's just my husband and me.	My potluck book club has not been able to meet since last March with the exception of a few summer outdoor meetings at the park. We were not comfortable sharing food so didn't do a potluck just brought our own.
2/13/2021 13	Yes, have to meal plan.	Yes	No, we shop at the same stores we always have.	Have tried a few new recipes out of boredom of the same old foods.	No.	We always eat our dinner together at the table. Breakfast and lunches are fend for yourself. I don't eat breakfast and get hungry at different times then my husband.	We used to sometimes eat out at restaurants pre-pandemic.	My Tribe has provided food boxes. We have not eaten out. We have had take out a couple of times.
2/13/2021 13	Yes, but not necessarily any more than usual due to the pandemic. (Not any less either.) It has been more fun and creative at times.	Yes	Yes, much less eating out at restaurants and much more home cooked meals. More food from grocery stores that offer curbside pick up (large retailers - Fred Meyer), more bulk produce from local farms, more products from smaller local retailers who could source things large retailers were out of (often direct from local producers and manufacturers).	Yes to some degree, more time to prepare home cooked meals not having to commute from work and pick up kids from childcare. Saved a total of 3 hrs daily of driving. More home cooked breakfasts in the morning too. My creativity was reinvigorated now that time is available, rather being pressed for time and opting for routine or convenience.	Yes! Again, my love of cooking and interest in preparing more elaborate or creative meals was restored (especially in the beginning). More satisfaction from the kind of food that I'm putting in my own body and the quality of food I'm feeding my family. Happier to be spending less money on eating out for convenience.	More time for regular meals each day. Larger home cooked breakfast (8am), late afternoon light lunch (1-2pm) and an earlier homemade dinner (5-6pm).	Yes, lighter breakfasts usually around 9am or 10am on the go or in the office (kids quick breakfast before school/childcare). Skipped lunch for me typically and packed cold lunch for the kids. Dinner later usually 6:30 or 7. Not much has changed for husband.	More frequent and better quality home cooked meals together for my immediate family. Much less hosting BBQs and meals for family and friends.
2/13/2021 13	Yes I plan the menu 2 weeks in advance	Yes	No	No	Found more time to make more extravagant meals instead of just tacos	Dinner on table by 5pm	Hour sooner than pre pandemic	No
2/13/2021 13	Yes. Still have to eat!	No	Yes. Shopping at the smaller local grocery store a lot more now.	No	It was nice when restaurants allowed indoor seating again so we didn't have to eat our take-out in the car. I wouldn't call it joy, but rather pleasure.	Same as before. However eating more fruits and veggies because we have increased our shopping at the outdoor fruit/veggie stand.	Other than more fruits and veggies, the only difference was having to eat restaurant food in our car.	We stopped getting together with most friends for meals. However one family that we knew had been very vigilant about staying away from any high risk people, so our two families have gotten together more for dinners.
2/13/2021 13	Yes. Stocking my pantry and planning meals accordingly.	Yes	Yes. Local farms	Yes. Cooking more from scratch and healthier. No processed food	Yes. Experimenting with different combinations and spices	3 meals per day with family, mostly homemadr	Yes. Less takeout and eating out. More thoughtful choices	Yes. Met local farmers!
2/13/2021 14	We plan ahead a little more, and maybe think a little more about it	Yes	We shop less frequently, order online, mostly by at the coop which was true before but is even more true now.	We tried making sourdough croissants at the beginning of the pandemic because we had time. We made more bread than usual. I have been experimenting with making chocolate bars and peanut butter cups.	A good meal or baking project is something to look forward to. Also one day we got Togo lunch as a rare meal out and it was fun.	Breakfast is quick. Lunch sometimes on front porch when weather was nice, more options than when not home. Dinner together.	Daytime meals are more rushed and evening meals are more relaxed, with candles. We didn't used to have lunch together and now sometimes we do. We have a pizza night to our somewhat regular repetoire. We can't be as spontaneous about dinner since we order food once a week.	Less occasions to enjoy with friends or at a restaurant. Less time at the grocery store means not running into people there.
2/13/2021 14	no	Yes	no	no	no	just like any other day	no	yes, just cant go out and eat like we want to
2/13/2021 18	Yes. Tried new recipes and worked with our garden food.	Yes	I've used more organic.	Make whole wheat sour dough with a bit of khorasan or kamut.	Some. We are also eating more desserts.	Meat, starch and veggies. Some soups and biscuits.	No.	Less eating out.
2/13/2021 20	Yes, cooking for 1 mi	Yes	Yes I have shopped more where they were taking the pandemic seriously. I have been doing most of my shopping at the Olympia Food co-op since the pandemic started. Previous I was shopping there once a month, now it is weekly.	No	I have been rotating take out at local restaurants.	Simple meat, veges and some carbs. One pot meals mostly	I used to eat more with family especially my daughter. Now I eat more alone.	Less eating with family. More take out meals. No dining in. A few open air dining dates
2/13/2021 20	Yes, I have done more meal planning so that I can reduce the number of trips to the grocery store.	Yes	No	No	Yes, since we are stuck at home, the kids are home for dinner and it's nice to all be at the table together	We have dinner as a family.	Yes, kids weren't always home for dinner (teenagers)	Yes, we used to host alot of gatherings and always had a ton of food, can't do that now.
2/13/2021 22	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	2 meals daily with a protein and veggie	More restaurant indoor dining and bbq gatherings	Shop more locally or pick up food to support business. Create different recipes with family make it more interesting.
2/14/2021 6:4	Yes, but as a mom prior to and during the pandemic, thinking of meals to make is constant	Yes	Yes, I have a garden now and grow my own but the grocery store routine is the same.	Yes. More time at home allowed more time for new recipes. We all fell in love with mashed cauliflower during quarantine.	Growing food is amazing. Plants are magical.	More family members involved because we didn't all have to split off when we got home to do individual tasks i.e. work emails, homework. Everyone got a dinner/lunch prep task instead.	Meals were the task; not a by-product of getting through the day. We were all home from March-June. The gardening and food gathering was the center of the day.	Yes! Because of growing and harvesting my own food, there are so many more people to connect with. Veggie growers, organic CSA farmers, flower farms, my neighbor, Bob, who gave me winter garlic that's currently growing. We met (after living close for 4 yrs, I know, shameful) during a walk when he caught me scoping out his raised beds. We all exchange veggies and growing tips now.
2/14/2021 7:1	Yes trying to eat healthier	Yes	Sometimes go to a smaller store with less options because it's closer and less people to deal with	We are always looking for good recipes	Yes when the meal turns out perfectly	Small breakfast and larger dinner	Not really	Just don't go out to eat anymore. I don't miss it so much because we cook such good food at home

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2/14/2021 11	Yes, we meal plan more than we used to.	Yes	Yes, I found I shop at smaller groceries more frequently than bigger box stores. They tend to have things in stock when others don't.	Yes, I bake more, and make things from scratch more often. I also did a lot more home canning this year, and started a sourdough starter when yeast was unavailable in stores.	Yes. It feels good to eat a meal made from scratch, especially if there is a loaf of homemade bread with it, or if I have had success with a new recipe. I also was raised in a low income family, so to be a parent now during the pandemic and being able to amply provide for our kids above and beyond their needs is a good feeling.	Typically we do cold cereal/grab and go breakfast. Fruit, yogurt or toast...Kids need something quick so they can get on their zoom meetings for school. Husband has packed lunch for work (drives truck). He used to stop and grab food but with less places open, and general covid stuff he packs lunch and coffee now. I make kids and I a quick hot lunch, something simple. Soup, or grilled sandwiches or sometimes leftovers from dinner. Dinner has always been a sit down family style meal. Generally centers around a protein and veggies.	Husband packs meals now for the work day instead of getting something from the quick mart or a restaurant. I also cook more than before, because the kids are home doing school every day. So its easier to make a hot meal at lunchtime for all of us, where they used to eat at school. Once in a while we load up and get the kids free school lunches, just for something different. We also used to eat out for dinner once a week, and occasionally go to a diner for breakfast on the weekend. Not anymore. Even with restaurants opening back up, its hard to find room for our family of 6 with limited capacity.	I miss getting together with friends for dinner on weekends, of bbqs and bonfires this summer and fall. We used to be pretty social amongst our friend group. I would do a moms night out once a month at a restaurant with friends. And we always had family friends over for dinners, or even lunch and play dates with the kids. It was social, but we always had good food. We grilled on our smoker year round, made homemade pastas and lasagna. I would always make dinner for someone going through a life change and drop off at their house. Now, everyone has such varying comfort levels with covid. We just don't do things like that anymore. Its really sad.
2/14/2021 15	Yes, but this is a normal action for me.	Yes	No, I deliver for Instacart.	Yes, but I do that anyway. I have a culinary degree.	Yes, food is what I dream about. It is after all the one thing necessary to survival and also can supply memories and comfort.	With just my husband and I we tend to find a comfy spot and sit down and eat. This is our wind down time to just enjoy each other.	No, not really	Yes, I quite my job at a retail restaurant supply store, to deliver full time.
2/14/2021 15	Not really. Neither my partner nor I are into cooking and we eat a lot of takeout. Our options have become more limited.	Yes	Not much. Shop at same stores. A few of our favorite restaurants closed.	No.	Eating dinners on zoom with friends.	Same as they did before. Mostly in front of TV.	No	No
2/15/2021 8:3	Yes, meal prepping before grocery shopping is the way to go.	Yes	Yes. Some stores run out of things so then I go to the next.	Yes, got bored so tried new seasonings and such.	Not sure.	We eat separately for the most part.	No.	No.
2/15/2021 17	Yes. We often plan a couple of dinners per week	Yes	No	Yes. We have tried many new recipes from the Sunday New York Times	Yes. Exploring new flavors and ingredients has been fun	We sit down to eat together dinner between 6:30 and 7:00 every evening.	No	Yes. We do miss eating out with friends or cooking meals with them at home. We also miss visiting the cafe to sit around others in our community.
2/15/2021 18	Y. I am responsible for cooking in my household	Yes	Not really	Yes, but I did before, too. I'm an avid cook.	Yes, I have more opportunities to make things that require me to be home because I'm home more.	Same as before; eating home cooked meals.	No	No
2/15/2021 20	Yes! Taking time to try my hand at new recipes and cooking for myself and my pod has kept me going!!	No	I have been unemployed and without a vehicle. I have gotten on food stamps and use those all the time, but I used to utilize my school's food pantry and a community free food market and now I can't take public transit so those aren't accessible anymore.	Yes! I've tried new ingredients and new cooking techniques.	Yes! Cooking new recipes with my dad and pod mates and for my pod to enjoy! Sharing food always brings me joy.	Breakfast upon waking up, lunch noon-3 dinner 6-7:30 usually	Yes, because I was eating around a schedule of commuting to full time school and part to full time work	I've learned to share food across distances with porch drops and packages
2/16/2021 20	Yes, but I don't think that's very different than pre-pandemic. Except i have to plan meals better, or make better use of what's on hand because i shop much less.	Yes	Just a little bit. I'm a westside co-op shopper and with the pandemic i am now exclusively a co-op shopper because they are small and i trust them to make sure everyone wears masks and is distanced	I have become a bit more creative to figure out meals with food already in the house, since i don't go shopping as often as before.	Because my daughter and i could not be together for Mother's Day, we made galettes together over facetime. We've shared food photos and ideas.	usually pretty healthy, not much different than prior. often veggies and chicken or veggie burger, a lot of salads, much less takeout food. I am very conscious to eat well especially now because it helps keep my mood up.	Not really	Yes. My supper club no longer meets or when we did in summer we all brought our own food. No more potlucks with friends. I feel more disconnected when not sharing food with friends. I'm also experimenting with food less because i often make new things for potlucks or supper club. I eat alone so don't experiment with myself much.
2/27/2021 13	Yes. Weekly meal planning, and pantry set-up and inventory.	Yes	Yes. Rather than in person shopping, we are obtaining many pantry items mail order. Part of the mail order process has been driven by local shortages. We have chosen to shop more frequently at small local markets. We have obtained more food items from local growers and farmers. We have had a small garden that has provided food for our family.	Yes. We experimented with various food plants in the garden. We have preserved new types of food including canning chutneys, jams and jellies, and drying some foods. We have also tried many new recipes.	Yes. There has been joy in finding new recipes that are enjoyed by my family members. Growing a small portion of our food was extremely joyful, even the inevitable various new gardener mistakes.	At our house with four adults, breakfasts and lunches are typically everyone eating individually and making their own meals, but dinners are typically communal and shared.	Its not really different in so far as when we share meals, except that everyone is home nearly all the time, so all meals are basically at home.	I think that I am aware of more local food resources, and ways to access food. We are more mindful about obtaining take-out food as it is less frequent and more intentional. We try to use less processed food. We try to reduce food waste by making sure food is eaten timely or preserved so that it does not spoil.
3/19/2021 21	Yes, it's felt more important to know the source of the food. To be able to name the farm(er) has been a sense of security and	Yes	Yes, I have grocery shopped much less. I've been eating out of my freezer and cooking from scratch / bulk	Yes, I received a sourdough culture very early on, and have been feeding and using it weekly.	Yes, I've made waffles or pancakes weekly since starting the sourdough and	Other than the weekly waffles, I just cook for myself, so "mealtimes" are just	Only insofar as I used to eat out at bars and restaurants quite a lot.	Yes, because of the pandemic, I changed homes and became a

Appendix C

Participant Interviews Summary

Interviews were semi-structured, and questions were tailored to subjects' survey responses. Interviews were an opportunity to ask about participants' responses and gaps, anecdotes, or examples they provided in the survey. Interviews were an opportunity to learn more in-depth about the differences in how subjects experienced food during the COVID-19 pandemic versus before. Interviews were also an opportunity to ask subjects about any long-term anticipated changes to their foodways because of pandemic.

Examples of interview topics included:

- How participants' obtained food.
- What participants' meals and eating practices looked like during pandemic, including their social and communal interactions.
- Questions regarding cultural traditions related to food and participants use of them.
- If participants felt any tension or had any conflict related to food.
- Participants' experiences of COVID-19 pandemic and being quarantined.

Interviews with subjects occurred in the following order and manor:

- Debra, Zoom interview – March 18, 2021
- Beth, Zoom interview – March 18, 2021
- Dave, Zoom interview – March 25, 2021
- Día, Zoom interview – March 25, 2021
- Amy, Zoom interview – March 28, 2021

- Linda, phone interview – April 5, 2021