COVID-19's Impact on Gendered Household Food Practices: Eating and Feeding as Expressions of Competencies, Moralities, and Mobilities

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COVID-19's Impact on Gendered Household Food Practices: Eating and Feeding as Expressions of Competencies, Moralities, and Mobilities

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on research conducted in Colorado in late-2019 and again post-COVID outbreak, from April through May of 2020. In addition to (virtual) face-to-face interviews, the study used a GPS tracking app to map respondents' macromobilities – trips from one GPS coordinate to another. The data presented are informed by practice theory. The paper's findings focus on the themes of competencies, moralities, and mobilities. Gender proved a particularly significant variable for disentangling the diversity and contingency involved in the social effects of the pandemic, while also stressing the continuities of practice for some, and disruptions for others.

Introduction

The world is going through an unprecedented pandemic matched only by our collective response to it. In March, 2020, one in five people around the world were under lockdown (Guardian 2020). By the end of that month, some three in four Americans were following stay-at-home orders, while the other 25% lived in states where governors' instructions had similar effects to a lockdown. Now that stay-at-home orders have been lifted, public health officials continue to press for "social distancing." Gallup attempted to track the extent to which Americans were avoiding each other. From mid-March through April (2020), at least 80% of those surveyed reported shunning "small gatherings of people, such as with friends and family" with between 75 and 80% also saying they "avoided going to public places, such as stores or restaurants" (Saad 2020). Public health professionals in my state of Colorado hope to see 65% social distancing through the end of 2020 in order to "flatten the curve" – social distancing exceeded 80% in the state between mid-March and early-May. In other words, the aim for the remainder of the year is to have Coloradoans cut their in-person interactions during this period by 65% relative to what they were pre-COVID (Swanson 2020).

Since the start of this pandemic, reports have been released on the psychological impacts of social distancing (e.g., Hamid, Scior, and de C Williams 2020.). Attention has also been paid to the economic consequences of this intervention, often framed in terms of its "costs" – e.g., jobs and tax dollars lost as people refrain from engaging in pre-pandemic habits and routines (e.g., Bodenstein, Corsetti, and Guerrieri 2020). There have been

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analyses looking at how societal responses to COVID-19 impact crime rates in a handful US cities (e.g., Mohler et al. 2020). Considerable literature documents, too, the (mostly positive) impacts of the lockdowns on phenomena like air emissions (e.g., Cicala et al. 2020), water quality (e.g., Yunus, Masago, and Hijioka 2020), and noise pollution (e.g., Aletta, Osborn, and Osborn 2020).

These studies, however, generally present such effects as time-limited, which is to say, like the state-mandated lockdowns and ordered social distancing, the consequences, too, will eventually pass. Perhaps that explains why so few ask about the sociological outcomes of these practices. While allegedly obvious – it is called *social* distancing, after all – my guess is that many assume the consequences to be short-lived; a belief further bolstered by, for instance, the countless images of people flocking to congested spaces (places of worship, restaurants, beaches, parks, and the like) even before Spring 2020 stay-at-home restrictions were lifted, much to the dismay of health professionals (e.g., Fortin and Diaz 2020).

It is also worth asking how these social effects are distributed within households. Home schooling is a good example of this – a chore parents across the country had to grapple with during lockdowns. According to a poll commissioned by *The New York Times*, nearly half of the fathers surveyed with children under 12 reported spending more time on home schooling than their spouse (only three percent of women agreed with that assessment). Meanwhile, 80% of surveyed mothers reported spending more time on school matters than their partners (Miller 2020). What little peer-reviewed literature has been published on the subject supports the thesis that the pandemic is exacerbating gender inequities, whether within the home (Collins et al. 2020) or the workforce (e.g., Landivar et al. 2020), perhaps because those two realms have been collapsed into the same spaces due to COVID-19 (Craig and Churchill 2020). Then there is the question of what these inequities look like across households; a query that should not be limited to demographics like household income and race but also zip codes (e.g., metro/non-metro households).

This article is based on a dataset with elements collected before as well as during the above-mentioned nation-wide shutdown and shortly thereafter when most of the country was still practicing high levels of social distancing – April through May, 2020. The project began months prior to the coronavirus outbreak, giving valuable pre- and post-outbreak data. The aim of the research initially was to better understand attitudes and practices associated with household food procurement. This was to be achieved through face-to-face interviews and by mapping macromobilities – trips from one GPS coordinate to another – with the help of a mobile phone tracking app (Carolan 2020a). The first round of data collection occurred in late-2019. Another round of data collection was planned for the summer of 2020, with the aim of validating elements of the earlier-collected data while also exploring how seasonality shapes food procurement patterns and behaviors. Then COVID happened. I moved the second phase of data collection ahead a few months to record and analyze the pandemic's impact on elements of everyday life within households.

The findings presented are, in some respects, tentative, realizing that the data come from a unique moment in world history. But I also argue that COVID-19 created a situation that, while horrible on so many levels, is good to think with from the standpoint of helping us further understand social dynamics and everyday life in particular. Using insights from practice theory (e.g., Bourdieu 1984; Giddens 1984; Schatzki 2010; Warde 2005), I interrogate changes detected between T^1 and T^2. The findings highlight a mix of outcomes. Evidence is provided indicating that respondents were cooking, baking, gardening, and

eating together more as a family post-outbreak relative to when first interviewed. At the same time, these disruptions were experienced differently depending on one's own social, material, and spatial locations – respondents, as later explained, also came from three very different communities within the state. Doings and sayings linked with gender proved especially significant for explaining the practices recorded.

I begin this discussion with a review of practice theory. The value of this theoretical orientation came out of the coding process, following the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Practice theory innovates in several ways upon more tradition social psychological and behaviorist approaches due to its move away from methodological reductionism – i.e., looking at people, behaviors, and/or attitudes in isolation. It has proven especially useful when interrogating household food practices, as it draws attention to the symbolic, social, and material affordances related to who does what with respect to feeding and eating. After setting the stage conceptually, attention turns to the study's methods followed with a discussion of findings.

The Findings section critically interrogates changes observed related to respondents' acquiring new food-related practices (e.g., learning to cook, garden, bake) during the pandemic. Evidence of these changes, while interesting data in itself, is of secondary importance to the main aims of the paper. More important still is being able to disentangle the diversity and contingency involved in the social effects of the pandemic, while also stressing the continuities of practice for some, and disruptions for others. To do this, I organize the Findings section around the emergent themes of competencies, moralities, and mobilities as they relate to the empirical material. The paper concludes reflecting on what the findings mean for society as well as for future scholarship on the subject of household food practices.

Practice Theory: A Brief Review

A considerable literature has been built around the thesis that behavior is the outcome of a linear process by largely rational individuals (e.g., Burgess, Harrison, and Filius 1998; Kil, Holland, and Stein 2014; Owens 2000). One of the more widely used of these models is the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991). This framework argues that intention, which proceeds behavior, comes about through interactions between one's attitudes toward a behavior, beliefs about what others think about the behavior, and the amount of control that is thought to be had over the behavior. At the same time, a growing body of research has documented how individuals are social creatures and therefore cannot be treated as existing in an individualized vacuum (e.g., Nye and Hargreaves 2010; Southerton, Warde, and Hand 2004). This context has been shown to be so influential that it has the potential to override all variables included in such cognitive models as the theory of planned behavior (Stern 2000). The theory of planned behavior has responded to this criticism by opening itself up to additional variables, such as previous behaviors, self-identity, affective beliefs, and belief strength (e.g., Han and Stoel 2017; Yuriev et al. 2020). Yet as is the case with any predictive device, the inclusion of additional variables comes at a cost to a model's predictive capacity and practical value (Hargreaves 2011). Moreover, the model has not wavered in terms of its fundament unit of analysis – the individual and their atomized attitudes and behaviors.

Arguably, the theory of planned behavior's popularity says more about those supporting the model than it does about its validity. There is a desire in some quarters to "see" – and therefore find support for the belief that – a linear and relatively non-complex link between attitudes and behaviors (Bamberg 2003). This linearity would make policy responses relatively straightforward. As Hargreaves (2011:81) writes, "if the necessary cognitive components can be identified and modified, behavioral changes will cascade across contexts throughout all areas of an individual's lifestyle."

In contrast to such individualistic and rationalist approaches to behavior, practice theory decenters the individual, with their discrete attitudes and values, as an analytic unit. Instead, the focus is on the social, symbolic, and material milieu of the performance. Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) conceptualize practices as being comprised of three elements: materials (technologies, infrastructures etc.), meanings (symbolic understandings, aspirations etc.), and competences (skills, know-how, etc.). Practices are therefore recognized as dynamic entities that change as practitioners develop new skills; as new materials, tools, and technologies enter the picture; as contested meanings circulate through social networks; and/or as related practices evolve and change (Nash et al. 2017). Take the example of purchasing and preparing a chicken. Some of the *materials* that shape the practice include the type and abilities of the cooking technology, meat thermometers, pots and pans, a refrigerator (or *not* having one), etc. *Meanings* might lead someone to purchase an ethically raised chicken or help explain why someone would prefer to grill their bird rather than cook it in a stove – grilling, for instance, has long been associated with masculinity and leisure (Inness 2001). *Competencies*, finally, highlight the type of knowledges needed in this practice, which include skills related to cooking but also, for instance, knowing what "fresh" meat looks, smells, and feels like, which could range from looking at the package's "best by" date to knowing how to select a fully-constituted, fully-feathered bird hanging in a butcher shop.

Practices are also guided by what Bourdieu (1990:66) has termed "practical sense," which refers to patterns rooted within an individual's lived experience, shaped by a host of variables, ranging from class, culture, in-group associations, embodied abilities, and so on (Scheer 2012). Behavioral change, then, when viewed through the lens of practice theory, involves more than a targeted individualized response, such as through education, persuasion, or incentivizing/nudging. As Warde (2005:140) explains, "the principal implication of a theory of practice is that the sources of changed behavior lie in the development of practices themselves." Individuals still mater following this approach. They have been described, for instance, as the "carriers' or "crossing points" (Nash et al. 2017; Reckwitz 2002) through which practices take shape. But unlike traditional behavioral approaches, the individual is no longer at the center of the social universe. In practice theory, the individual, and "their" attitudes and behaviors, are interpreted through a sociological lens, which requires situating their *doings* and *sayings* within a broader web of social, cultural, material, and spatial realities.

The remainder of the literature review is nested within in the following discussion of methods, given paper's inductive beginnings. In other words, before pivoting more clearly to the links between food procurement and practice theory, I want to walk the reader through the process that led me to this literature.

Grounded Theory Methodology

The research was animated at the beginning by an experimental spirit, in terms of the methods employed and the types of data collected (Carolan 2020a). I call it "experimental" because, for one, the project initially lacked a concise research question, other than knowing I wanted to "better understand issues around household food procurement within the state of Colorado" – to pull from a statement given to participants at the study's beginning. Secondly, I approached the design of the study lacking a clear conceptual path forward, which, thirdly, meant I also employed data gathering techniques (such as using the tracking app) that lacked clear theoretical grounding. What I sought, instead, was to ground my orientation within an interactive process between methods, analysis, and the theoretical literature. That process unfolded as follows.

The project started with 41 households – 70 respondents – from three Colorado localities. Participants came from the following locales: a community of roughly 100,000 residents located on the eastern edge of the metropolitan Front Range; a non-metropolitan county located in the far-eastern third of the state; and a non-metropolitan county in the state's mountainous interior. Individuals were first interviewed between September and October of 2019 During this first stage, data collection took place over three phases: baseline interviews, which lasted approximately 45 minutes; 30-day study period, which involved using a GPS tracking app on their mobile phones; and follow-up interviews that lasted roughly two hours.

A few reasons drew me to the community-types described above. I had numerous connections within these communities, which was important as participants were recruited by reaching out through personal networks. Having conducted numerous prior studies throughout the state (e.g., Carolan 2020b, 2020c), I reached out to previous respondents to create an impromptu snowball sample within each community. (None of the respondents for this study participated in that prior research.) I also wanted to include a metropolitan community with a mix of commuters and non-commuters. As one of the fastest growing regions in the US (McCann 2019), real-estate prices within this part of the state have pushed many people out of the communities in which they work, as they seek affordable housing elsewhere – not an uncommon trend nation-wide, as wages fall behind relative to inflation (Jacobson 2019). This, I suspected, impacted households' food procurement macromobilities. Lastly, I wanted to avoid any critique of perpetuating an urban bias as I thought about household food procurement, as many studies looking at issues of food access and food insecurity tend to focus exclusively on urban spaces (e.g., Bedore 2010; Block et al. 2012; Walker, Keane, and Burke 2010). I included two different non-metropolitan communities thinking their respective differences – one located in the mountains and the other on the plains – might be good to think with on subjects related to household food practices and food mobilities in particular.

Focus was on (adult) household mobilities, behaviors, and understandings, as opposed to atomized individuals. Had I focused only on the latter, I might have missed important divisions of labor within households. All adults from those 41 households were therefore interviewed, though some households only contained one adult.

Participants' mobilities were mapped using the smart phone app Prey. Prey only allows the phone owner to track their whereabouts – a safeguard that attracted me to this software to further protect respondents' mobility data. At the end of the four-week period, I sat down

with each participant in front of my laptop, which, I should also add, marks when the "grounded" process began in earnest. We logged in to their Prey account and together discussed the purpose and rationale of their trips. Participants were free to leave the study and take the mobility data with them at any time up to this point. What I heard and saw while discussing those tracking data shaped directly the questions asked from that point on. All interviews were recorded. Baseline interviews and those follow up interviews were eventually transcribed and coded for emergent themes.

Working iteratively between theory and methods helped me think through how I wanted to proceed with follow-up interviews that were to occur during the summer of 2020. The goal of this second round of interviews and tracking was to validate the data from the year prior and to explore how/if seasonality shapes food procurement patterns and behaviors, as the data strongly suggested that seasonality matters when understanding household food practices. Most attempts at mapping food procurement mobilities offer only a snapshot and therefore miss annual rhythms – e.g., seasons, summer break, summer-related mobilities (e.g., trips to the pool, summer vacations, outdoor parties), etc. – that shape what, how, and with whom we eat (see e.g., DeMaster and Daniels 2019; Sweeney et al. 2016).

Then COVID-19 happened. It did not take long to grasp the unique nature of the pandemic and the world's response to it. Days after my state's Governor issued a statewide "stay at home" order on March 25, 2020, participants were contacted and asked if plans could be accelerated. The second phase of data collection began in April.

The first phase (i.e., pre-pandemic) of data collection brought to the discursive surface themes ranging from, for instance, the roles of tacit and embodied knowledge in gendered expectations and moralities of practices. These themes, in turn, directed me to specific areas of scholarship. I therefore practiced an iterative literature review, especially during the second phase (i.e., post-outbreak) of data collection while conducting research during an unprecedented moment in recent history.

Speaking in broader terms, the data drew me to practice theory because of the approach's "ontology of interconnectedness" (Kendall et al. 2016:106). Literature that I was drawn to included scholarship dealing with the moralities of practice – the idea that our doings are shaped by societal (and often gendered) expectations. This involved, importantly, the "good mothering" literature (e.g., Atkinson 2014; Cairns and Johnston 2018; Cairns, Johnston, and MacKendrick 2013). Broadly speaking, this scholarship speaks to the "intersecting ideals of motherhood and ethical food discourse, whereby 'good' mothers are those who preserve their children's purity and protect the environment through conscientious food purchases" (Cairns, Johnston, and MacKendrick 2013:97). This outlook not only places an asymmetrical burden on women (often this research focuses on heterosexual households) by making it their responsibility to procure "good food" for the household. It also reinforces neoliberal worldviews by emphasizing mothers' individual responsibility for securing their child's wellbeing. Elsewhere, these morally animated practices have been referred to through the concept of circuits of intimacy, "which refers to the way ideas of intimacy and caring practices circulate through [...] food-related activities that take place in a range of spaces, in and beyond the kitchen" (Meah 2017:1146). While these circuits are said to be shaped by gendered expectations, they also highlight that doing gender of any form is premised on notions of "right" and "wrong" and "good" and "bad."

Relatedly, we know that gender is a key axis for understanding mothers' mobility experiences and greater responsibilities and burdens relative to those experienced by fathers

(e.g. Barker 2011; Schwanen 2011). This, in turn, raises questions around how these doings around mobility are distributed. The concept of "mobility justice" speaks specifically to these asymmetries – "about who is free to move or remain immobile, who encounters barriers or burdens in their movements and how daily mobility plays out for different social groups in relation to inequalities" (McLaren 2018:846).

The importance of phenomena such as capabilities, skills, and tacit and embodied knowledge also proved central to how respondents negotiated their sayings and doings concerning household food practices (Bruhn and Schutz 1999; Carolan 2011; Johnson et al. 1998). This highlights the heterogeneity of what it means "to know." I highlighted an example of this diversity earlier, when discussing what it means to know when a chicken is "fresh." Practice theory reminds us that *what* we know needs to be linked with *who* we know *with*. This speaks not only to the importance of something like trust in knowledge production and dissemination but also to the fact that some knowledge can only be disseminated through doings with others – a point highlighted through the concept *community* of practice (e.g., Farnsworth, Kleanthous, and Wenger-Trayner 2016; Lave and Wenger 1991).

Sixty-one of the original 70 participants – or 36 households – agreed to participate in this accelerated plan by having their movements tracked using the Prey app for two full weeks. Table 1 contains basic demographic information of this final sample. All tracking was completed before the statewide stay at home order expired on April 26th. I then conducted interviews with each household using either Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Facetime, or Skype. During these interviews, individuals were first asked about their travel, after which, the tracking data were reviewed and discussed. I did this, in part, to understand if what they chose to recalled with regard to their macromobilities matched with what they actually did.

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents across sample populations: n = 61/36 households (h).

	Metro (n = 20/ h = 11)	Rural, Plains (n = 19/ h = 12)	Rural, Mtns (n = 21/ h = 13)	Total (n = 61/ h = 36)
Race/ethnicity				
White	14	17	21	52
Black/African American	3	0	0	3
Latinx/Hispanic	2	2	1	5
Two or more	1	0	0	0
Household income				
less than $20,000	0	1	1	2
$20,000 to $39,999	3	2	4	9
$40,000 to $59,999	4	5	7	16
$60,000 to $79,999	2	3	1	6
$80,000 to $99,999	2	3	3	8
$100,000 to $119,999	2	5	2	9
$120,000 to $139,999	4	0	4	8
$140,000 or more	3	0	0	3
Age				
21 to 30	3	2	1	6
31 to 40	6	3	5	14
41 to 50	3	3	4	10
51 to 60	1	4	5	10
61 to 70	5	4	3	12
71 to 80	2	3	4	9
Gender				
Male	8	10	12	30
Female	12	9	10	31

A discussion was also had about what social distancing meant for them in the context of COVID and public health professional recommendations. Interviews occurred over the month of May, when statewide social distancing levels were averaging around 65% – less than the 80-plus percent levels experienced in April but still a significant departure from how we interacted with others pre-COVID (Swanson 2020).

Multiple codes emerged during data analysis. The coding process was iterative, in the sense that conceptually coherent codes were collapsed to create theoretically coherent themes. I performed all the coding, though the process was "verified" by initially having another person trained in qualitative techniques code a shared set of transcripts. We then reviewed any inconsistencies in coding until consensus was reached. Those initial codes helped orient the remainder of the data analysis.

The Findings section focuses on the themes of competencies, moralities, and mobilities. For this analysis, the geographic categorizations referenced in Table 1 – between metro, rural mountains, and rural plains – make a minimal appearance beyond this point other than to situate respondents who are quoted, save for one place in the analysis where the distinction is driven by important conceptual considerations.

Finally, while individuals are quoted I make several attempts to decenter the individual. This happens, first, through the themes themselves. All three speak to sayings and doings that nest individuals within broader socio-spatial materialities. Decentering is also accomplished by interviewing all adults within households, which allows me in instances to talk about households rather than individuals. Relatedly, quotations are (anonymously) attributed to households, which gives readers the opportunity to see what qualitative data are coming from which homes.

Findings: Household Food Practices During Quarantine

Applying practice theory, this section is organized around the themes of competencies, moralities, and mobilities. The findings highlight the diversity and contingency involved in the social effects of the pandemic, while also stressing the continuities of practice for some, and disruptions for others.

Table 2 illustrates changes in how participants responded to certain questions from Time 1 (pre-outbreak) and Time 2 (post-outbreak). The data align with other survey research, noting changes to how people procure, prepare and consume food since the outbreak. In

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (n = 61).

Variable	Coding	2019 (mean/std. dev)	2020 (mean/std. dev)
# of times i cook/bake last week	0 to 7+	3.60/2.71	5.00/1.81
# of times i eat away from home last week	0 to 7+	2.71/3.82	0.22/0.25
Exploring gardening/expanding existing	1 (yes) or 2 (no)	1.87/0.11	1.30/0.25
Used grocery delivery service in last yr.	1 (yes) or 2 (no)	1.91/0.22	1.53/0.26
Used grocery curbside pickup in last yr.	1 (yes) or 2 (no)	1.78/0.32	1.35/0.23
Bought groceries amazon in last month	1 (yes) or 2 (no)	1.95/0.12	1.22/0.28
Watched cooking show/video in last month	1 (yes) or 2 (no)	1.71/0.14	1.25/0.29
# of days worth of food stored at home	1 to ∞	5.60/4.42	18.33/5.45
More likely to use virtual platforms post-covid than pre-covid	1 (yes) or 2 (no)	n/a	1.15/0.21
Seriousness of covid to public health	4 (very serious) to 1(no concern)	n/a	3.50/0.65

one survey of more than 1,000 American adults conducted in early-April 2020, over half reported cooking more (54%), and almost as many said they were baking more (46%), than before the pandemic. Three-quarters of those claiming to cook more reported being more confident in the kitchen (50%) because of those experiences, with 73% saying they are either enjoying cooking more (35%) or as much (38%) as before (Hunter 2020). The International Food Information Council (2020) conducted a survey of 1,000 US adults during the same time period. Fifty percent of that sample reported doing less in-person shopping and 47% were eating more home-cooked meals. This is supported by data from Instacart, the largest independent grocery-delivery service in the US (Bogost 2020). The company witnessed their order volume increase 150% from early-March to early-April of 2020, with downloads of their app multiplying sevenfold during that period (Bogost 2020). There is also evidence more people are buying in bulk now than prior to COVID-19 (C+C Research 2020).

Capabilities: New Practices, Old Networks

Looking at the subject of cook and baking, respondents' qualitative comments align with the shifts in practice noted in the table, with all admitting to spending more time in the kitchen when interviewed in 2020 compared to when interviewed in 2019. While this change in behavior can be readily attributed to certain basic brute facts, such as a state-wide stay-at-home mandate, it helps to nest these practices within the complex webs in which respondents lived.

The following quote is representative of sentiments reflected by others, especially among parents. It came from Lori, a thirty-something mother of two from the metro sample who worked fulltime as an accountant.

> It's not like I didn't know about cooking, that people take enjoyment out of it, and that it's a great way to have family time while teaching kids important life skills. […] I didn't wake up one morning and say, 'I should cook.' I always felt I should [cook]. (Metro H#2)

Lori was among those who admitted to cooking and baking more because of the lockdown. She was also one of those who stated during Time 2 that they would start a garden in 2020, even though when interviewed months prior she reported that the thought of a garden was "just too much work for what it's worth." This change was attributed in part to her family being unable to eat out regularly like they did prior to the pandemic. But she also emphasized the role played by having more time at home – she was working remotely during the second phase of data collection.

> I'm busy [at home] with kids and work but since we never leave the house I still have time for things that I wouldn't have had time for before the pandemic, like learning to cook, watching videos on how to make the perfect pizza dough, reading about how to make raise [garden] beds.

It was then that she revealed what had really been keeping her from changing her behaviors in the kitchen and garden. It had nothing to do with attitudes and everything to do with acquiring certain competencies.

> You don't have to convince me that home cooked food is better for you than the processed crap. But you have to know how to cook before you can do it, which you just can't get from reading a book. You have to do it.

And these skills, once acquired, had an effect on her family's practical sense, too. Lori, again:

> The lockdown gave me the opportunity to brush up on my [cooking] skills, to the point where now I think everyone [in the family] experiences, *even expects*, time in the kitchen together as something we just do. It has become a typical family practice, just like the game night we have every Monday night. (emphasis in original)

Those who admitted to spending more time preparing food or preparing to garden during quarantine did not undergo an attitudinal change. Such an individualizing variable misses the larger context that helped animate changes in practice. Mentioned instead were issues dealing with knowledge – having the competencies to *do* these activities. I am also thinking about knowledge sociologically; not knowledge as something someone (passively) acquires but as something someone does, often with others, in order to know it.

Conceptualizing knowledge as much as a *doing* as a saying temporalizes it, which brings to the fore the fact that knowing also takes time. And as we know, free or leisure time is asymmetrically distributed, especially when thinking in terms of gender, which means those doings and sayings are not equally accessible to all. The following is a good example of this asymmetry within the same household.

> When you're stuck at home for weeks, what better way to put that extra time to work than by learning to bake. [...] I have had a lot of time to practice [baking] over the last few weeks (Jack, Rural Plains H#5)

> I'm grateful for [Jack's] sudden interest in domesticity because I just can't do it anymore; not while working from home while having to also keep tabs on the kids and making sure they're doing what they're supposed to be doing with school. (Susanne, Rural Plains H#5)

COVID-19 also introduced new materialities into these nested webs-of-practice, where "to know" how to cook now included for some respondents having to also know how to operate in a virtual environment: e.g., "Before [COVID] I never used things like Facebook Live and Zoom. Now that's all we use, for work, for school work, to see family. [...] I would have never imaged using Zoom to 'attend' a virtual gardening workshop but I am" (Marcy, Metro H#10). Of course, such competencies are contingent on still other materialities, like having access to reliable high-speed internet: e.g., "I tried dialing in" – this household did not have dial-in internet but they used the term nevertheless – "to some programming offered by [Colorado State University] Extension but kept getting kicked off the call because of our poor internet" (Faye, Rural Mountains H#3).

Any inquiry into social practices equally involves an investigation into who are participating in these practices. Who constitute those *communities* of practice (Farnsworth, Kleanthous, and Wenger-Trayner 2016; Lave and Wenger 1991) and what do such associations mean from the perspective of understanding the longer-term sociological consequences of pandemic-induced social distancing?

Given the situation, it should come as no surprise to learn that the proximate (i.e., physically-close) "communities" formed during quarantine were limited largely to one's household. Whenever anyone talked about growing their competency toolkit it was done alongside a fellow household member and no one else. But there were also *virtual* communities of practice, which describe instances where know-how is shared, co-created, and innovated upon with others in a cyber-environment (Fang and Chiu 2010; Peñarroja et al. 2019). Examples of this included respondents who talked about participating in Facebook

Live events to learn about cooking or breadmaking (Metro H#1) or the individual who joined a Zoom-enabled workshop on raised bed gardening (Rural Plains H#8). Research to date, however, suggests that these virtual networks are qualitatively different from face-to-face based communities – as exemplified by the research highlighting the differences between "social media social capital" and "offline social capital" (de Zúñiga, Barnidge, and Scherman 2017).

A related concern is how these virtual communities might crowd out conventional (offline) communities in the future as individuals develop their online acumen during quarantine and social distancing mandates. This concern is born from participants' responses to the question of whether they are now more likely to use virtual platforms post-outbreak compared to before. See, for example, Table 2, showing that the majority answered that question in the affirmative. Furthermore, the qualitative data amplify the point that social distancing mandates may have altered interaction patterns in ways that last longer than the pandemic. A representative response of this ilk looks like the following.

> I have no doubt corona [virus] will change how this family interacts in the future. Even my 80-year parents are now comfortable using video conferencing. I think they might even prefer seeing us on their iPad rather than in person. It's so much easier for them. They have mobility problems. […] My wife said the other day: 'Why did we ever leave the house for some things knowing now that we can do them virtually from the comfort of our home without the hassle of traffic and the cost of gas.' (Marvin, Rural Plains H#9)

At the same time, I saw evidence of *dis*-comfortabilities emerging toward face-to-face, physically proximate doings and sayings. These arguably started off as legitimate reactions to respondents' concerns over the "seriousness of COVID to public health" – see the last line in Table 2. The question remains, however, whether this public health-based concern will outlive – will "stick" beyond – the virus. While these data cannot answer the question, they do suggest it is a question worth investigating further.

> The biggest thing [that has changed] since we last talked is that I'm now uncomfortable being physically around people I don't know. […] I have really gotten used to just hanging with my family and very close friends. I don't even really miss being around people I don't know. (Jake, Metro H#9)

> I'm not sure I'll ever be 100 percent comfortable anymore being around large groups. I'm just saying, I don't know right now. (Sally, Rural Plains H#1)

Moralities of Practice

Table 2 highlights a growing reliance upon food delivery for many of the households. As mentioned, quarantine has been a boon for grocery delivery services, which has driven investments into this space – in drivers, software and apps, coordination/agreements between delivery firms and grocery chains, etc. (Porter 2020). These financial flows, in turn, have enhanced the "convenience" of the service by reducing wait times and delivery prices, enhancing food delivery options, and the like (Statt 2020).

When asked to explain her repeated use of a grocery store delivery service during the pandemic, Julie was quick to supply an answer:

> It is easy, super convenient, and really not all that expensive. […] I've gotten spoiled, which is why I think we'll continue with it. It has also changed my definition of convenience, which used to be about how well stores were laid out and how quickly they checked you out. Now it [convenience] means not having to walk into a store ever again! (Metro H#11)

It just so happens that "convenience" was the focus of early, seminal practice theory research (e.g., Shove 2003) and continues to interest scholars working on the topic (e.g., Jackson and Viehoff 2016). This literature shows the concept to be mutable, multiple and complex. An example of this relates to how it is often moralized. Convenience food (e.g., ready-made meals, precut and repackages fruits, heat-and-eat foods), for instance, are linked to broader discourses around nutrition, waste, sustainability, and health. The moral connotations associated with such food are therefore often negative. Alternatively, when discussed among respondents in this study, "convenience" in the context of at-home food deliveries often had a positive connotation. In Julie's case, the convenience provided by these services played into her beliefs of what it meant to be a good mother:

> As a single mother, I'm not going to risk exposing my kids [to COVID] if I can help it. So what if it costs a little extra. […] It offers both convivence and some piece-of-mind. What type of parent would I be if I didn't do everything I can to keep them safe?

The "good mothering" concept (e.g., Atkinson 2014; Cairns and Johnston 2018; Cairns, Johnston, and MacKendrick 2013) is relevant here because it highlights yet another non-individualizing variable animating the actions of certain respondents. More than that, it points to how behaviors are driven as much by normativities, as oppose to reducing behavior to cold, rational behavior. Moralizations animating practice are especially important to acknowledge when hoping to arrive at viable policy responses. After all, an education campaign to encourage Practice X will never succeed if individuals believe adopting Practice X will make them a "bad" person in some way. Moralizations are also incredibly sticky, which is to say, once formed in association with a practice they are not likely going to go away quickly.

Earlier, I introduced Susanne and Jack (Rural Plains H#5) to highlight an example of how free time during COVID was asymmetrically distributed within the home. To recall: Jack put his "extra time to work" by learning to bake because Susanne "just can't do it anymore" due to all of her other household responsibilities. As other have highlighted, men tend to "help" rather than assume a leading role in feeding the family (DeVault 1994; Oakley 1974).

I did see a disruption in feeding roles in the majority of households with two adults from T^1 to T^2, where what participant's did pre-outbreak changed in a post-break, COVID environment. In no case did the man of the household report doing less feeding (i.e., food procurement/preparation) post-outbreak relative to what they reported pre-outbreak. When a change was reported it was in the direction of helping more. It is worth noting, however, that a man reporting doing more feeding did not necessarily translate into the women of the household doing less. In most cases, females did more feeding, even with this added help from the male partner, as children were no longer eating at school and eating out was not possible as restaurants were still closed. In short, there was a lot more "feeding" to do in those households T^2 relative to T^1.

Lori (Metro H#2) was introduced earlier as an example of someone who admitted to cooking and baking more post-outbreak. She was the one who explained that the lockdown

gave her time to learn new things about cooking and gardening. Later in the interview, she talked more about why she felt compelled to further develop those competencies.

> I worry about my [two] kids. This has to be an unsettling time for them. I want them to feel safe; to show them that they are cared for. [...] Cooking is a great family activity that creates an environment that *feels* safe, you know. And I'll admit, it's good for me; it helps me feeling like I'm doing something for them; showing them that they're loved.

Geographies of care are often gendered (Conradson 2003). For example, what it means to do and show care looks and feels different depending on whether those doings and saying are coming from mom or dad. (The good mothering literature, again, tends to focus on heterosexual households.) Dads, for example, might show care by being the "fun parent," which is seen in the critical gender studies literature as an expression of asymmetrical power relations within the home (Lazar 2000:384). For example, while material acts of "mothering" tend to include performances focusing on conformity and stability – note Lisa's reference to the post-outbreak world being an "unsettling time" for his kids – fathers' performance of gender allows for expressions of rule-breaking and nonconformity. This has been demonstrated in the literature, for instance, by dads allowing their kids to each certain food (i.e., junk) that society – if not their mother's specifically – deems as "bad" (Fielding-Singh 2017).

Ben (Metro H#2) was the husband and father in Lori's household. He reported doing "considerably more" feeding post-outbreak. Yet that labor largely took the form of outdoor cooking. Specifically, he grilled and smoked meat – forms of food preparation that have long been associated with masculinity (Sobal 2005). He also attributed his labor to the weather, "Now that it's warming up I'm able to help [Lori] out more with the cooking." This suggests this labor is optional and contingent and therefore less dependent upon household needs and societal expectations – as in the case of being a "good mother." In short, it was his choice to do it, which is another display of the aforementioned asymmetrical power relations.

Feeding Mobilities: Gendered Heterogeneities

The above-mentioned moralities of practice also included moral mobilities of practice. Among the things "good mothers" *do*, for instance, is to go to certain places while making it a point to avoid others. This speaks to the prior literature noting the role of gender for understanding mothers' mobility experiences relative to fathers (e.g. Barker 2011; Schwanen 2011). This brings me to the tracking data.

Before disaggregating the tracking data, such as by gender or by food procurement mobilities, let us look first at recorded macromobilities in the aggregate. As expected, *all* respondents reduced their travel during the stay-at-home period. Figure 1 presents a histogram of respondents' (n = 61) percent decrease in macromobilities from T^1 to T^2 by frequency. As illustrated, 27 respondents traveled between 81 and 100% less in T^2 compared to T^1, 14 individuals journeyed 61 to 80% less, and so on until we get to the final group located on the far left of the figure, where 11 participants reduced their travel 20% or less. Rural respondents generally traveled more overall during both periods than their urban counterparts. Yet when looked at in terms of percent change from T^1 to T^2 this distinction between metro and non-metro households disappears, which is why the data are presented as percent change rather than in terms of actual miles traveled.
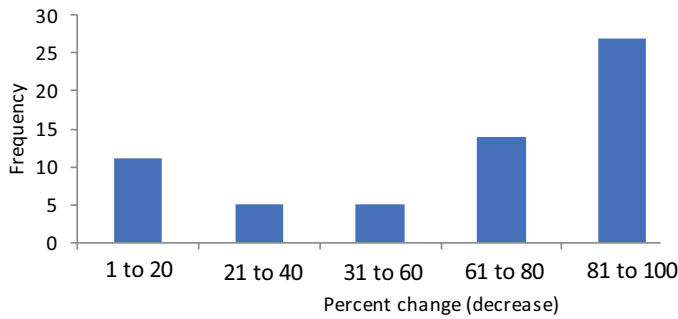
Figure 1. Histogram of respondents' (n = 61) percent decrease in macromobilities from t^1 to t^2, by frequency.

Data presented in Figure 1 refer to all trips beyond the home. Let us now look at food procurement-related trips, which refers to any trip were food was secured for the household. This would have excluded trips through drive-throughs, for instance, when the food procured was only for the driver. Food had to be purchased for later consumption for the trip to have been included in this figure. These data paint a very different picture, as evidenced by the fact that, in a few instances, macromobilities *increased*. Changes were not randomly distributed across the sample population, however. Gender proved an especially significant variable for explaining variation, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Men made up every instance when there was an increase in food procurement-related travel recorded between T^1 and T^2. Not only that, when travel reductions where recorded, men on average recorded lower percent changes than women. In other words, they were less likely to reduce their travel during the pandemic, at least when food was involved.
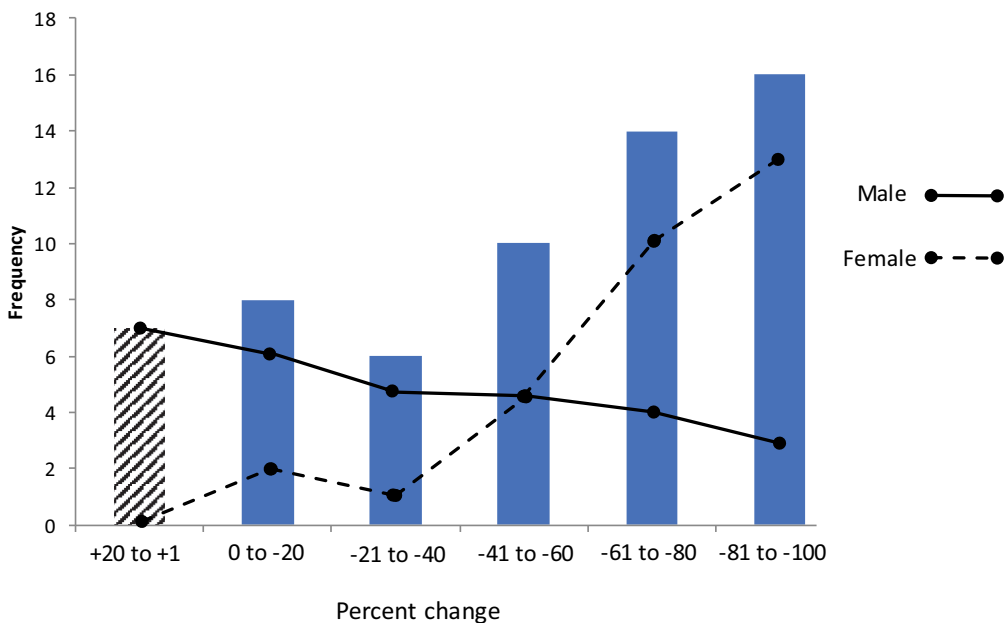

Figure 2. Histogram of percent change in food procurement macromobilities broken down by gender.

For context, it is important to first highlight some established links between gender and responses to the pandemic, specifically, the finding that men are more likely to downplay the seriousness of the virus (Abad-Santos 2020; Hennekam and Shymko 2020). A number of polls, for instance, find that men in the US are less likely to wear masks compared to women. To take a Gallup survey: 34% of men compared to 54% of women responded they "always" wore a mask when outside their home and that 20% of men said they "never" wore a mask outside their home, compared to 8% of women (Brenan 2020). This idea that "real" men respond a particular way to the pandemic came out during the interviews. To quote Jeff, speaking about the Governor's stay-at-home order that we were still under when interviewed at T^2:

> This isn't sitting well with people out here. I've got a family to support. Obligations. Guys like me know what the risks are and should be able to make our own decisions about what we should be doing. [...] But apparently we've got a bunch of snowflakes [–a term used pejoratively by the Right to describe the de-masculinization caused by Progressives–] calling the shots. (Rural Plains H#6)

While minimizing risks associated with COVID-19, some men simultaneously played on those heightened risks to justify engaging in practices that were previously the responsibility of their wives. In other words, the virus helped to de-feminize – or perhaps even masculinize – particular tasks, like going to the store and participating more directly in feeding the family because of the dangers involved.

> My wife's worried about leaving the house, so I'm happy to do that. It's a risk I'm happy to take as a father. [...] Got to keep my family fed, right? (Stanley, Rural Mountains H#2)

These sentiments were most strongly expressed by men coming from the two non-metro communities. This could be seen as tentative evidence of what Campbell and Bell (2000) call "masculine in the rural," which speaks to how masculinity and rurality are interrelated identities that men tend to perform in certain rural contexts. "Masculine in the rural", then, refers to the different ways in which masculinity is produced, maintained and contested in those spaces also performed as "rural." This thinking is useful because it helps us talk about how "rural" itself, or at least particular performances of it, has become coded with particular masculine signifiers.

What this also helps us understand, then, is why it was acceptable in some situations for women to demonstrate masculinity when performing certain forms of rurality, at least within the confines of particular gender practices. Examples of this can be seen in how some of the female non-metro respondents spoke about their food procurement-related macromobilities during the pandemic. Only one rural female fell into the histogram "bin" signifying the greatest mobility reductions in Figure 2 – the "-81 to −100" percent category. Curiously, the wife of Stanley, who I quote above as describing his partner as being "worried about leaving the house," told me she had "no problem" (Rural Mountains H#2) leaving their property. Perhaps *both* were attempting to perform a type of rurality during their interviews, as both wanted me to know that the risks associated with COVID had not kept them from doing what they felt needed to be done as good mothers and fathers.

Faye, for instance, minimally reduced her food procurement-related macromobilities, falling into the "0 to −20" percent bin. Living in the rural mountain community, she explained her behavior as follows:

> Living out here you got to be a risk taker. Blizzards. Forest fires. COVID is just another thing you learn to deal with. [. . .] I've got a family. You've got to be fearless, for them—to take care of them but also to show my kids that you've got to be tough. Life throws you a curve, you have to suck it up. (Rural Mountains H#3)

As opposing to doing masculinity, we might instead understand these quotes as demonstrating women who were challenging hegemonic femininity. Faye, then, might be said to be practicing an alternative femininity, similar to that articulated by Annes, Wright, and Larkins (2020) in their study of French women farmers. Christy, for instance, had a specific take on what it means to be a good mother in the countryside. The topic came up when discussing her tracking data. Noting how kids are being "too coddled" today, she added,

> You care for yours kids by making sure they grow up resilient and independent. Country life is beautiful but it's also brutal. They need to know that (Rural Mountains H#7).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article is based on data collected in late-2019 and again post-COVID outbreak from three Colorado communities. I hoped to not only document changes in household practices dealing with eating and feeding, pre- to post-outbreak. With the help of grounded theory and mixed methods, which involved coupling qualitative interviews with GPS tracking data, I also wanted to advance practice theory as it applies to gendered household food practices. What I have attempted to capture through this research, therefore, is a snapshot of how 61 individuals (36 households) in Colorado negotiated COVID-19. I did this in the aim of learning something not only about the sociological significance of the pandemic but also about the sayings and doings of food procurement at the household level.

The data also highlight areas in need of further research. The above data indicate shifts in practice, enabled by a variety of different elements. Yet the question remains: how habitual – "sticky" – are these changes? This is a question for future research. Certain groups – political partisans, age cohorts, etc. – eagerly anticipate a "return to normal" (Ao 2020). Alternatively, as indicated above, because these changes have precipitated, and been precipitated by, changes in things like competencies and materialties, it would not be surprising if certain household practices never returned to their pre-outbreak state. As we continue to observe and track these changes, we should be able to refine our understanding of the uneven disruptions associated with the pandemic and the co-evolution of materiality and practice. In short, as we read reports about how food procurement and family feeding have changed since the start of the pandemic, let us be sure to ask how these changes are distributed *within* those homes.

The findings also highlight certain non-COVID elements in need of further research. When thinking about gendered household food practices, to what degree does (or should) place matter? I am thinking about "place" here in not only in a geospatial sense but also as a performance, as indicated above when discussing *doing* conceptions of rurality. How might this, for instance, shape those moralities of practice? Do "good mothers," for instance, who also do rurality *do* and *say* differently than "good mothers" doing, say,

cosmopolitanism? And more generally, what does it means to think of these geospatial categories (e.g. rural, urban, suburban) as, at least in part, performative identities, which are themselves not doubt every bit as diffractive and multiple (Barad 2014) as gendered identities?

In sum: I hope others find this article, and the data it draws upon, good to think with as we seek to understand household food procurement, mobility justice, and gendered performances in a future likely to be deeply impacted by COVID-19.

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