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The Role of Food and Food Behaviors in Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract

There is a paucity of research that systematically examines how food behaviors play a role in intimate partner violence (IPV). Therefore, this qualitative study aims to answer the broad question, what role do food behaviors play in intimate relationships? Food behavior narratives emerging from participants of court-mandated domestic violence (DV) offender treatment programs were analyzed using grounded theory methods. Five themes emerged. Two described inflammatory/harmful roles: (1) food as a trigger for anger and violence and (2) food as a mechanism of "othering." One theme described the role of food behaviors in promoting unequal and equal relationships: (3) food as an embodiment of gender roles. Two themes described

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reconciliatory/beneficial roles: (4) food as a mechanism of recognition and (5) and food as a representation of group rapport. Food behaviors can escalate into conflicts but can also be used as a tool to resolve conflicts. Limitations and the need for future research are further discussed.

Keywords
communication, domestic abuse/violence, gender & family, intimate relationships, power dynamics, qualitative, food and food behaviors

Introduction

Recent advancements in intimate partner violence (IPV) and food insecurity research consistently show high co-occurrence rates of IPV and food insecurity and decreased instances of IPV in interventions that address food insecurity (Chilton, Rabinowich, & Woolf, 2013; Hidrobo, Peterman, & Heise, 2016; Melchior et al., 2009; Moraes, Marques, Reichenheim, Ferreira, & Salles-Costa, 2016; Ricks, Cochran, Arah, Williams, & Seeman, 2015; Schwab-Reese, Peek-Asa, & Parker, 2016). However, few studies have examined if and how IPV is related to other relevant food behaviors. This study aims to explore this important and understudied question.

Food behaviors is a general term that widely captures food-related activities, such as diet, preferences, planning, purchasing, preparation, eating practices/rituals, and related cleaning tasks. According to structuralist food theories, food serves biological and social functions and is often governed by ideals created by complex social dynamics (Bourdieau, 1984). As a result, food behaviors embody ideologies, values, and beliefs (Bourdieau, 1984; Douglas, 1972; Drewnowski & Kawachi, 2015). In social relationships, food behaviors can represent group membership, shared values, respect, and intimacy (Fitchen, 1987; Julier, 2013). Therefore, food behaviors are often "enmeshed in feelings about self [and] interpersonal relationships" (Fitchen, 1987, p. 394).

Food insecurity is defined in the United States as the inability to afford or acquire adequate amounts of nutritious foods in socially acceptable ways (United States Department of Agriculture, 2020). Food insecurity is a food-related construct that influences various food behaviors, but food insecurity by itself is not a food behavior. Instead, food insecurity describes individual or household-level access to consumable nutritious foods, based on financial ability and assistance from formal and informal safety nets (Shimizu, 2020).

Food and Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence includes physical, sexual, financial, and psychological violence, as well as stalking by a current or former romantic partner

(Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Intimate partner violence research that considers food-related factors predominantly focuses on food insecurity since financial abuse is one of many manipulative tactics in IPV (Stylianou, 2018), and because poverty is a known risk for violence, financial stress, and food insecurity (Breiding, Basile, Klevens, & Smith, 2017; Chilton & Booth, 2007; Chilton et al., 2013; Melchior et al., 2009; Ricks et al., 2015). Furthermore, financial hardship, which often exacerbates food insecurity, is a common barrier that prevents individuals from leaving an abusive relationship or can be experienced as a product of leaving a relationship (Ricks et al., 2015; Stylianou, 2018). In the United States, men and women with experiences of IPV report being food insecure at a significantly higher rate than those without IPV experience (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014), and the odds of experiencing IPV are higher among women who are severely food insecure (Ricks et al., 2015). Additionally, interventions have reduced violence in relationships by alleviating food insecurity through cash and in-kind transfers and enhancing food-related knowledge through nutrition education (Buller, Hidrobo, Peterman, & Heise, 2016, Buller et al., 2018; Hidrobo et al., 2016). The association between food insecurity and IPV is evident. As a result, food-related narratives in IPV research have been collected predominately from low-income, food insecure women, often in lower-income countries, who are at risk of food insecurity or are food insecure because of IPV.

However, it is important to note that IPV narratives often describe changes in IPV prevalence and severity in relation to various food behaviors, above and beyond food insecurity (Buller et al., 2016; Ellis, 1983; Fitchen, 1987; Franklin, Menaker, & Kercher, 2011; Snell-Rood, 2015). For example, women experiencing IPV who attended nutrition education workshops reported increased authority over food purchasing and preparation, which were associated with increased self-confidence, increased food-related decision-making, and decreased instances of controlling behaviors by their husbands (Buller et al., 2016). In another study, disagreements about "cooking, cleaning, and other household duties" increased the likelihood of IPV victimization (Franklin et al., 2011, p. 7). Considering these findings, further research is needed to understand how food behaviors or changes therein positively and/or negatively affect intimate relationships and family dynamics.

IPV and Batterer Intervention Programs

Domestic violence (DV), including IPV, in the United States is a criminal offense. In many states, individuals arrested for a DV crime are mandated to treatment, commonly known as batterer intervention programs (BIPs). These programs initially designed for male offenders and female victims, emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s with aims to reduce recidivism and increase safety (Barner & Carney, 2011). Since the inception of BIPs, higher rates of

female offenders are being mandated to treatment due to pro-arrest and mandatory arrest laws for DV enacted in the United States (Barocas, Emery, & Mills, 2016). Hence, DV offender narratives are evolving and complex and are relevant to understanding violence and victimology.

In states with mandatory arrest policies, the police officers are required to determine who was responsible for the harm based on the reported incident, rather than examining overall relationship dynamics leading to the incident. Police officers, therefore, may arrest an individual or make dual arrests if both parties are deemed culpable. Consequently, victims can be charged with a DV offense based on the officers' preconceived attitudes and beliefs, the context of the incident, and the interaction between officers and those involved (Phillips & Sobol, 2008; Saunders, 1995). In other words, individuals who are not the primary aggressors in the relationship, who use violence as self-defense (mostly women), can be arrested and charged for a DV crime (Kernsmith & Kernsmith, 2009). Furthermore, IPV is known to have intergenerational effects on families (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012) and it is often bi-directional, where individuals in a relationship can be both the person-harmed and the person-harming, blurring the clear-cut definition of perpetrator and victim (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012).

The most widely implemented BIP is a psychoeducational model known as the Duluth Model implemented for men and women (Seawright, Whitaker, Droubay, & Butters, 2017). The Duluth Model discusses power and control dynamics informed by gender-based social constructs (such as male privilege and patriarchy) and addresses tactics and patterns in authoritarian relationships (such as intimidation, isolation, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse) (Bohall, Bautista, & Musson, 2016; Seawright et al., 2017). It provides a detailed curriculum with supporting materials (videos, handouts, examples, and discussion topics) that guide the program facilitators (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, 2011). True to the program's basis in feminist ideology, a significant portion of the materials portray gender dynamics within the context of intimate relationships and families.

Food, IPV, and BIPs

Gender is also a crucial topic in food studies. Some discussions are particularly relevant to interpersonal relationships. For example, Devault (1991) coined the term feeding work, which captures the logistical and emotional work required to create a meal and feed a family. According to Devault (1991), women in heterosexual relationships are disproportionately responsible for both the physical (meal planning, prep, cooking, feeding, and cleaning) and emotional aspects (managing food preferences while also considering nutrition) of feeding work (Devault, 1991; Julier, 2013). These unequal dynamics also

exist in same-sex relationships, as one partner usually engages in feeding work (Carrington, 2012).

Dynamics such as feeding work are particularly relevant to discussions in BIPs since unequal power dynamics and a lack of shared responsibilities are pertinent topics in IPV. However, details regarding food-related narratives among batterer intervention participants remain unclear. Understanding food-related conversations in these programs is critical as it may provide the following: (1) innovative avenues to prevent future violence within families and relationships, (2) strategies to address past instances of violence or conflict in families and relationships, and (3) provide nuanced explanations of if and how IPV, food insecurity, and food behaviors intersect.

Gaps in the Literature and the Present Study

Critical "voices" are missing from the current literature on the relationship between food behaviors and IPV. First, as IPV research predominantly focuses on food insecurity, it is unclear whether food behaviors independently impact IPV and whether the impact of a given food behavior on relationships is reconciliatory or inflammatory. Second, women's food-related IPV narratives are valuable in describing the effects of food-related gendered roles traditionally assigned to women. However, men's narratives are also important. Since the narratives of men are often missing, how men understand and relate to food behaviors in relationships and the family context is unclear. Male interpretations of food-related relationship dynamics may also explain how food-related gender roles are perpetuated and how men can dismantle these gender biases. Lastly, while food neglect and deprivation are familiar concepts in studies of child abuse and neglect (Helton, 2016; Wiggins & Hepburn, 2007), dynamics of food behaviors within adult conflicts or abusive relationships are unclear.

The present study, therefore, sought to gain insight into whether, how, and to what extent food behaviors lead to or exacerbate conflicts, and whether food behaviors reduce, protect, or mitigate violence. Qualitative methods were chosen as the study aimed to build knowledge on the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between IPV and food behaviors, while also highlighting novel ways of understanding and addressing relational dynamics involving food, an understudied topic. The present study explores food behavior narratives among participants of court-mandated treatment for DV crimes to determine what role food behaviors play in IPV. The specific study questions are: (1) what food-related experiences are discussed in relation to the curriculum in BIPs? and (2) in what ways do food-related narratives emerge from these participants who have experienced IPV?

Methods

Sampling and Data Collection

The study questions emerged during the analytic process of two larger studies, neither of which set out to study food behaviors. The two larger studies were (1) a randomized controlled trial (RCT), comparing a standard BIP to an alternative treatment approach, utilizing secondary data collection (Mills et al., 2019) and (2) a qualitative study, involving primary data collection efforts, to complement the RCT. Inclusion criteria for these studies were (1) IPV-only cases; (2) over 18 years of age; and, (3) court-mandated to treatment for a misdemeanor DV crime. It became clear to analysts in these studies that rich empirical data elements were present describing the relationship between food behaviors and IPV.

Domestic violence and IPV are not interchangeable terms. Domestic violence can refer to any abuse within a household (e.g., adult child and parent) or abuse between intimate partners who do not necessarily live together. In contrast, IPV refers specifically to violence between individuals who are or have been in physically or emotionally intimate/romantic relationships (CDC, 2018). While these definitions are broad, the specificities differ by state. In Utah, where the study was conducted, DV broadly includes violence or abuse among cohabitants, which can include any family members (adults only) as well as roommates, and IPV cases (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). This study focuses on IPV cases only.

Description of the larger study. For the RCT, the sample was comprised of all eligible IPV offenders who were sentenced to treatment for a misdemeanor DV crime from two justice courts within the same county in Utah. All judges seeing DV cases from both courts agreed to refer eligible IPV cases to the treatment provider with whom we were partnered for the RCT. Cases qualified for the RCT if the offender violated the DV-relevant criminal code(s), were over 18 years old, and lived locally. Cases were excluded from being randomly assigned to treatment if the offender was not sufficiently proficient in English to participate in an English-speaking treatment; was actively psychotic or in need of acute detoxification or hospitalization; was currently engaged in DV treatment or had attended a DV treatment session within the last 30 days with another treatment provider; or was subject to the jurisdiction of another court and was receiving DV, drug, or mental health treatment services through that other court.

At sentencing, the judges provided eligible offenders with an information sheet for the referral to the relevant treatment provider. Offenders then contacted the treatment provider to schedule an assessment. If an offender was deemed fit for either treatment option, following the assessment, the case was

randomly assigned to one of two treatment options: (1) treatment-as-usual, which was the standard BIP based on the Duluth Model, or (2) a hybrid approach that applies restorative justice (e.g., Circles of Peace, CP) to the Duluth Model BIP (BIP + CP).

A total of 222 male and female offenders were randomly assigned to treatment over a 2-year period. To avoid any contamination biases, the assignment of cases was conducted remotely. All cases randomly assigned to treatment involved secondary data collection efforts to capture criminal activity outcome measures using the Intention to Treatment (ITT) method of analysis by following cases for 2 years post random assignment. Thus, for the RCT, there was no contact between the researchers and the participants. More specifically, the data collection for the RCT was limited to pre-existing/secondary data that is routinely collected by treatment providers and criminal justice agencies. The qualitative study involved several primary data collection efforts including interviews with offenders and victims and observations of treatment sessions. The current study draws on data collected during the observations of these treatment sessions.

Description of the treatment sessions and observation methods. The RCT included both male and female offenders, and all groups were separated by gender. All were "open" groups and addressed content defined in the Duluth curriculum. The required curriculum topics for BIP and BIP + CP are provided in Appendix A. In order to capture what was occurring in each group and the timeframes of offender participation, 58 group sessions, across all treatment groups, were observed over consecutive weeks with observers taking notes as part of the primary data collection efforts for the qualitative study. Observations were made only in treatment sessions where participants agreed to allow for the observers to be present and to take notes ($N = 61$). Observers were trained research assistants from the University of Utah. Guidelines were given to observers to describe the group type, the physical environment, participant details, group activities, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication. The food behavior narratives analyzed for this study were captured in these observation notes. Quotations marks were used to signify direct quotes from the participants. Observer guidelines and a sample of de-identified observation notes are provided in Appendix B. All processes were approved by two university institutional review boards (New York University and University of Utah) and a Privacy Certificate was obtained from the National Institute of Justice.

Analytic Process

Data analyses followed a series of steps based on grounded theory coding techniques (Glaser, 1965). This method attempts to build a theory based on

processes, interactions, and overall experiences described by the participants (Creswell, 2013). First, for the purposes of the larger qualitative study, the observation notes were coded using a deductive approach for required group topics such as "Non-threatening Behavior," which are defined in the BIP and BIP + CP curricula. Analysts also identified sub-topics pertinent to the intervention in addressing violence that organically emerged in group discussions such as family values. As part of this process, analysts noticed significant content related to food and food behaviors, which led to the present study, which asks: (1) what food-related experiences are discussed in relation to the required curriculum topics defined by BIPs? and (2) in what new ways do food-related narratives emerge from these participants who have experienced IPV?

Data reduction strategies were applied to extract relevant data. Initially, eight coders familiarized themselves with the data, increased sensitivity to food-related content, and flagged any data related to food or food behaviors as "food." On a second read, the coders conducted a line-by-line analysis of quotes flagged as "food" and individually engaged in open coding based on the content. Independently, analysts engaged in constant comparison, comparing and contrasting codes applied to the data within and between group sessions. Analysts also developed axial, or higher level, codes to connect codes and ultimately identified overarching themes emerging in the data. Then, analysts came together numerous times throughout this coding process to compare and contrast codes and coding schemes between analysts, to discuss discrepancies, and to develop a set of themes on how food data was emerging deductively, related to the a priori curriculum topics, and in new ways, organically, among the participants. Disagreements between analysts throughout the process were resolved in reconciliation meetings, which would prompt the coders to revisit their coding schemes and memos. Further, the analytic team regularly discussed data analyses related to personal subjectivity on the study topics to challenge personal biases that may have been influencing the coding process to increase reflexivity and credibility in the overall study. Interpretive observation notes were omitted from the analysis. All data were managed using Atlas.ti.

Results

The sample ($N = 61$) was 62% male (38% female) and over 18 years of age, sentenced to treatment for a misdemeanor DV charge. Sample characteristics were comparable to Utah's demographic make-up. Five themes emerged, describing ways food behaviors play a role in IPV, intimate relationships, and DV treatment. In the first two themes, (1) food as a trigger for anger and violence and (2) food as a mechanism of othering, food behaviors were inflammatory or harmful in intimate relationships and DV treatment. In the

third theme, (3) food as an embodiment of gender roles, food behaviors were harmful in unequal relationships but positive in equal partnerships. In the last two themes, (4) food as a mechanism of recognition and (5) food as a representation of group rapport, food behaviors were reconciliatory and beneficial to intimate relationships and DV treatment. Single quotation marks within quoted notes indicated direct quotes from participants within observation notes, and ellipses were utilized to eliminate fillers such as "um" or irrelevant and subjective notes.

Inflammatory/Harmful Impact of Food Behaviors in Relationships

Food as a trigger for anger and violence. Food narratives revealed that food and food behaviors could be a trigger for anger, conflict, or violence, especially when beliefs inherent in food behaviors were violated. Many examples that emerged from the participants included emotional incidents surrounding food that escalated into fights.

Food and food behaviors were particularly associated with anger. For example, Woman 2 in discussions about taking responsibility in relationships, described her abusive ex-partner's lack of responsibility and accountability. She described how her ex-partner used to blame his anger on food preferences and specific foods: "Her ex-husband indicated that he wouldn't eat beef because it made him angry. And she would say that the black eyes he gave her were not from the beef [as] he would only eat ground turkey." Woman 3 also shared an episode when she made home-baked cookies for her coworkers on Valentine's Day but forgot them at home, which triggered an "argument about going back home to grab the cookies." Woman 3's partner refused to return to the house, which eventually escalated into her partner, yelling at her and calling her names. The participants' narratives, similar to those of Woman 2 and 3, often depicted male partners fixating on particular types of food or instances where the women's cooking and related efforts were unacknowledged or disrespected.

The participants' narratives were further reflected in the video vignettes, utilized in the offender groups as a tool to identify and discuss violence in relationships. The video vignettes were produced and provided by the Duluth model curriculum and were created based on real-life accounts of IPV (DAIP, 2011). Two vignettes portrayed food-related conflicts. One video vignette called "Eat at Kimo's" depicted an instance of violence where an intoxicated, angry man comes home late at night and argues with his female partner. The argument escalates as the man angrily demands that his partner make him dinner, ignoring the food his wife set aside for him.

Another video vignette called "Just Stay Home" depicted an interracial couple where the man becomes angry at his Korean partner for cooking "that noodle shit again," referring to the Korean food she cooked and berates her

because "he doesn't like 'that kind of food'" and "doesn't want his 'kids eating it either'" (DAIP, 2011). In the end, the man refuses to eat Korean food and demands that his wife cook him something else.

The male partners' anger in both vignettes escalated over frustrations related to how, when, and what their female partners prepared for their dinner. The man in "Eating at Kimo's" was angered because he did not get dinner when he wanted it, and the man in "Just Stay Home" was angered by the specific type of food prepared for him and his children.

Male and female participants were able to identify the violent behaviors in these vignettes. However, notably, male and female participants, as well as facilitators were empathetic to the idea of being "hangry" or angry when hungry. Participants and facilitators empathized with being "hangry" often in reaction to the video "Eating at Kimo's," where the man angrily demands dinner from his female partner. Man 17, in response to the video stated, "I disagree with 99% of what the guy did, but he was hangry," seemingly offering a justification for the violent behavior. Woman 6 also described the angry man in the video vignette as "sad, stressed, and hungry," to which Facilitator 1 responded with validation "that sad, stressed, and hungry is a terrible combination and that nothing ever goes well from there." While Man 17 and Woman 6 do not explicitly justify the actions of the man in "Eating at Kimo's," their responses indicate that a violent or negative interaction, resulting from being "hangry" is a logical or reasonable order of events.

Food as a mechanism of othering. Food also emerged as a mechanism of othering based on racial/ethnic and cultural differences. The participants themselves did not report interracial or intercultural differences in their relationships and hence did not express personal experience with this particular food-related conflict. However, the participants were quick to condemn the act of using food to "other," often in response to the video vignette, "Just Stay Home," where the man berates and demeans his Korean partner for cooking non-American food. Male and female offenders identified the cultural discrimination inherent in the man's denial of the Korean food and his disapproval of their children eating her food. They further identified that the denial of the food from her country of origin was also a denial of her identity. Woman 4 recognized that "He could have been accepting of what she is. She's Korean." Similarly, Man 8 identified,

> "the woman would feel insignificant about having her culture and cooking disrespected...the man should have accepted and embraced her culture. His [in reference to the man in the video] kids are half-Korean...and indicated that sometimes when you don't like things or don't like the food, you might need to keep your mouth shut."

Racially and ethnically discriminatory food narratives also emerged from a participant when watching "Eat at Kimo's," a video vignette where the man demands that his wife cook him dinner. The couple in the video are both Black. The video did not explicitly depict the kind of food the wife had prepared or the specific food the husband demanded. However, when the facilitator encouraged participants to identify possible beliefs that are inherent in the husband's abusive actions, Man 5 claimed "that Black people have very different ways of life and...they are very particular and live very differently than everyone else and [continued to elaborate] about black-eyed peas and collard greens." Facilitator 2 and the participants were offended by his comments, and the facilitator quickly addressed how inappropriate and racist these comments were. Facilitator 2 correctly pointed out that beliefs like "All black people like collard greens and black-eyed peas" need to be changed as they are generalizations that perpetuate inequalities. No responses from Man 5 were noted.

Food as an Embodiment of Gender Roles: Unequal and Equal Partnerships

Male and female offenders also discussed food behaviors as a representation of gender roles in relationships. These narratives mostly emerged within the context of male privilege, a subtopic within, "Shared Responsibility" and "Economic Partnership," which are two main curriculum topics. Examples of how food behaviors intertwine with gender roles emerged in the context of unequal and equal partnerships.

Unequal partnerships. Many female and male participants used food behaviors to provide examples of gender roles that contribute to unequal responsibilities within intimate relationships. Women gave multiple examples of frustrating and complex power dynamics related to food. Many women were angered as they had to conform to traditional food-related gender roles in their attempts to take control of unfair situations. For example, the concept of a "provider" and how it creates unequal power dynamics was a common discussion topic in conversations about "Economic Partnerships." The facilitator asked Woman 1 whether being a provider meant that the man was "above her." She responded, "'No, and that's the frustrating part. He's not the provider. I let him be.' She then described how they would go out to dinner, and she will let him pay because it makes him feel better, but then he constantly brings it up, 'holds it over me.'" Women 1 is one example of how women understand the power dynamics, and in an attempt to avoid conflict, consciously surrenders their power by allowing their partners to be the "provider." However, as Woman 1's situation illustrates, her willingness leads to a frustrating situation as her partner unfairly uses the power against her.

Some women internalized the traditional gender role assignment, namely, that women should cook. In a discussion about "Shared Responsibility," Woman 5 stated "that her week is good and always good because she makes it good. She indicated that shared responsibility in her relationship is that she cooks and her man eats."

Being unable to perform internalized gender roles like cooking also negatively affected self-worth. Woman 1 stated that she hit her partner over the past week since she got so upset. The facilitator probed, encouraging Woman 1 to reflect on how her anger led to physical violence. Woman 1 shared in despair that "[her partner said] really hurtful things…and she was flooded with emotions...that she can't do anything right for her boyfriend, 'I can't cook, clean, or work right and now I can't even do sex."

Women, particularly mothers, were expected to cook or provide food, and not doing so implied failing to fulfill needs. For example, Woman 4, while reflecting on her childhood, stated, "I didn't feel like my mom was meeting my dad's needs. Dad cooked, and she would go out to her sisters." The male participants also described similar food-related gendered expectations. For example, Man 11 stated that "men [in his culture] were treated like kings [and]…that usually 'the woman prepares everything for the man' …in his culture woman can be treated like slaves." Facilitator 2, in this discussion with Man 11 and other male participants, disclosed:

> "as a young boy, his mother would always have food on the table when he got home...that his mom did this all the time, and it was his expectation when he grew up. He knew that mom would always provide dinner. He then shared how his ex-wife did not have this core belief, [and] that it was a compromise he had to learn to make."

Similar to Facilitator 2, the male participants also described how they learned gender roles in their families growing up and how it informed their core beliefs or expectations in intimate relationships. These male accounts of gender roles also aligned with the women's narratives that depicted women purposefully diminishing their independence to fulfill gender roles and expectations, to avoid conflict:

> "Man 2 said his mom was old fashioned, so his dad was the breadwinner, and to this day, she listens to his dad. For example, she won't change the oil without him with a mechanic because the dad isn't here. He said she's very independent, but she follows his rules… Man 2 said in a way it's been passed on because he thinks she (his partner) has to do what he says. He says he has to catch himself and think about it… there's times when he gets upset with his father. He will tell his father that his mother "doesn't have to cook at the same time every day," etc.

> He said his real dad was the same way, and that's the way it is in Mexico. He said the women have no say, or they get beat up."

Equal partnerships. Not all gender-related food behaviors were inflammatory, harmful, or frustrating because participants also discussed examples of equal partnerships that do not conform to traditional gender roles. In these examples, harmony was maintained in relationships through fair divisions of domestic responsibilities. In a discussion about division of labor in equal partnerships, Man 1 "identified things like washing dishes, vacuuming, and dusting as 'feminine things' [and discussed] how he felt it was important to teach his daughters how to do some work on cars just like how his mother taught him how to cook." Similarly, in the women's group, when the facilitator asked the participants to identify gender roles in their families growing up, Woman 10 gave a counterexample and "stated that her mom was the worker and dad cooked." Additionally, male and female participants were in favor of equal divisions of labor often in response to video vignette, "Eating at Kimo's." Many participants shared the same sentiments as Man 8, who "suggested that the man in the video should have made his dinner because he's not working, but his wife is" or Man 2, who shared that "'instead of demanding that she has stuff ready like cooking and clothes, he could have just helped her.'"

Reconciliatory/Beneficial Impact of Food Behaviors in Relationships

Food as a mechanism of recognition. Food and food behaviors symbolized commitment and intimacy, which fostered a sense of being recognized, making an individual feel valued and appreciated within romantic and familial relationships. Three sub-themes emerged that described instances where food symbolized recognition in the form of (1) cohesion in a relationship, (2) celebrating individuals, and (3) showing appreciation. In these sub-themes, food behaviors were described as tools to improve or reconcile intimate relationships.

Cohesion in a relationship. Cohesion in relationships is a common topic in the Duluth model, defined as having commitment built on shared positive emotional experiences, understanding, and goals (DAIP, 2011). Food behaviors as a tool to achieve cohesion in relationships emerged in discussions between facilitators and offenders within the curriculum topic, "Trust and Support." Specifically, going out to eat or getting to know food preferences were introduced by the facilitators as a medium to create shared meaning and foster intimacy. For example, in conversations about the "need to get to know [their] spouses well to foster understanding and commitment, [Facilitator 1 listed]...what to order them at a fast-food restaurant" as an example of information participants ought to know about their partners. Facilitators also

encouraged participants to read psychoeducational handouts with examples of how to create shared meanings which included "rituals couples and families might have like Sunday dinners" (Facilitator 1).[1]

Meals or going out to eat commonly emerged as a communal activity to build shared experiences, especially within curriculum topics that emphasized partnerships. For example, in a group about financial partnerships, Facilitator 1 asked, "'If you could wave a magic wand and create the perfect financial partnership, what would that look like?', [to which Man 7 responded that he] wants to be able to pay all the bills, but still be able to go out to dinner and enjoy life together" with his partner.

Shared meals with families were particularly indicative of support in relationships. This concept emerged organically from the participants. Meals were simply an opportunity to spend time with family, as "Woman 1 said she appreciated the support from her mom and sister and ended up going to dinner with them the next day. She reported that she got to hang out with the family." Other times meals were an opportunity to be supportive through participation in food customs such as "Woman 7 [who] explained to the group that in her culture after a death the family can't touch meat, shower, cut nails, or cook for 4 days. [She] wanted to be with her family to help support them. [She] said that she decided not to go to the funeral but sent money to help buy food to show support."

Celebrating individuals. Celebrating each other was another essential aspect of feeling recognized in intimate relationships. The celebration of individuals or recognizing achievements usually involves gathering over food. For example, traditionally, people gather for special occasions like birthdays over a shared food item such as a birthday cake. Narratives about meals to celebrate individuals in relationships emerged organically from participants, independent from curriculum topics, through personal anecdotes that were shared during check-ins where they were encouraged to describe how their week has been. A few of the groups occurred after Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, and Easter weekends, where both male and female participants shared positive experiences of going out to eat with their partners and families. Woman 5 reported, "'Mother's Day was good. It was my first one. I ate all day and had a good week.'" Man 18 also "indicated he had an enjoyable Easter weekend camping with family that he never gets to see. He was really happy to see them. They drank beer, hung out in a hot tub, and ate good food."

The importance of going out to eat or having communal meals to celebrate an individual was also emphasized by the tension that would arise in intimate relationships from the lack of these celebratory events or refusals to attend. Woman 13 stated "that her Mother's Day 'sucked'…She stated that she wasn't invited to her family's Mother's Day BBQ." Woman 8 also expressed her disappointment in her partner and her Mother's Day: "Our marriage is on the

rocks...He never does anything for Mother's Day. I want him to show his appreciation." In addition to not having her partner celebrate her, Woman 8 was doubly disappointed as she "stated she wanted to do things with her mom...wanted to take her mom to dinner [but] 'She never showed up."

Showing appreciation. In addition to food customs for special occasions the offenders and facilitators also discussed the importance of acknowledging loved ones in everyday life. Food behaviors such as meal preparation did not merely represent the food, but it also symbolized the effort and care required to make a home-cooked meal. The lack of showing appreciation in the video vignettes spurred lively discussions in male and female participants where they emphasized how vital appreciation is in intimate relationships. For example, in response to both the video vignettes "Just Stay Home" and "Eating at Kimo's," the participants discussed the need to accept and appreciate the woman's efforts in preparing dinner. Participants and facilitators were particularly sensitive to the effort it takes to prepare food for partners and families. Man 8 stated that "Even if he didn't like the food, he should appreciate that she made it," and Man 3 "discussed how the man in the video should have appreciated the woman… instead of being accusatory…[and] persecuting her." Man 2 further "indicated that the woman would have felt love if the husband would have embraced her culture and cooking."

For some male offenders, the video vignettes that depicted a lack of appreciation in food-related instances of IPV, provided a learning opportunity. For example, at the end of the group, male offenders were prompted by the facilitator to discuss what they learned from watching "Just Stay Home," the video vignette depicting an interracial couple's conflict over Korean food. Man 8 said he learned that "you can always find something to appreciate," while Man 17 stated, "Just eat the food they make." Other participants also shared similar comments about various coping strategies or positive alternative behaviors that shows appreciation for the food and efforts required to cook a meal. The facilitator then concluded the group with closing remarks "about how when she was first married and learning how to cook, her husband would eat food that was gross anyway and tell her how great it was."

Many female participants also empathized with the female victims portrayed in the vignettes. The women's accounts reiterated the importance of appreciation for food-related efforts in intimate relationships. For example, Woman 4 expressed, "[the woman in the video] is trying to support the family, so he needs to give her respect...Obnoxious, she is working, and he should be cleaning the house and making dinner." Woman 10 in observing the video stated the man "shouldn't use hurtful words" and empathized further recalling that in her experience, "especially with food, they [in reference to men] say, that's gross."

Food as a symbol/representation of group-rapport. A crucial aspect of group work with individuals court-mandated to treatment for DV crimes is the therapeutic alliance between the participants and the facilitators as well as rapport between the participants. Supportive relationships between participants are known to create a non-judgmental safe space, which reduces defensiveness and encourages participants to take responsibility and make behavioral changes (Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). In the current study, food symbolized friendliness in groups. Many male and female participants regularly brought snacks to share with other participants and facilitators. Sometimes the shared food in groups was intended to celebrate the last session or completion of the mandated treatment. Man 1 "announced that if next week is his last week in the group, he will bring nachos for his fellow group members." Woman 3 also brought in cookies and offered them to the group while Woman 2 in another group brought candy and passed them around.

Discussion

Various food behaviors emerged inductively and deductively from observations of female and male offenders in DV treatment. Five overall themes emerged in participant narratives that illuminated how food and food behaviors play a role in IPV, intimate relationships, and DV treatment. Two themes indicated that food behaviors were inflammatory or harmful in intimate relationships: (1) food as a trigger for anger and violence, and (2) food as a mechanism of othering. The theme, (3) food as an embodiment of gender roles, suggested food behaviors can be harmful in unequal partnerships and beneficial in equal partnerships. Two themes indicated that food behaviors played positive or reconciliatory roles in intimate relationships and DV treatment: (4) food as a mechanism of recognition and (5) food as a symbol of group rapport. These diverse themes suggest a complex picture of the role of food behaviors in the lives of intimate partners and their families.

The narratives that emerged deductively were in association with curriculum topics "Trust and Support," "Shared Responsibility," "Financial Partnerships," and subtopics such as male privilege and respect. Other times it was instigated by the facilitators' use of personal anecdotes or resourceful handouts shared for psychoeducational purposes. Food narratives were also salient in the video vignettes, which were part of the Duluth curriculum, created based on extensive interviews with DV victims.

Inductive narratives about food and food behaviors emerged organically from male and female participants through personal anecdotes that explained how their relationship has been during check-ins or through reflections on past experiences. They shared food-related examples from their upbringing as well as past or current relationships to vent about relationship conflicts or to discuss power dynamics, beliefs, and values.

Implications

Examining the narratives specifically from individuals court-mandated to treatment for DV crimes provide novel insight into how the food narratives exist within violence and non-violence, particularly in intimate relationships and families. Food narratives in the context of violence are commonly examined in the field of child abuse where food is utilized as a form of abuse and neglect (e.g., food deprivation, forced regurgitation, or forced feeding). (Helton, 2016; Wiggins & Hepburn, 2007; Wild, 2013). Based on clinical experience with IPV, extreme instances of IPV can include these food-related acts. However, findings from the current study have illustrated that in adult relationships, mundane food-related behaviors can also escalate into anger, violence, or be manipulated to create unequal power dynamics.

The narratives indicate that food can be a trigger for conflict but also a medium for positive communication because food is laden with expectations informed by beliefs and values. In other words, when expectations based on these deeply ingrained beliefs and values were not harmonious between couples, the issues became personal. Therefore, certain food behaviors made individuals feel violated, denied, or unappreciated, resulting in anger, which often escalated into fights or violence. However, when these expectations were agreed upon and upheld, food behaviors became a powerful vehicle for showing gratitude, increasing intimacy, commitment, and overall, communicated recognition of the other as a respectful and contributing member of the romantic or familial relationship.

Food, therefore, is an easily accessible method of communication and cooperation in partnerships. Food-related behaviors are necessary as most people eat at least once a day, and in relationships and families, intimate moments often include food. Moreover, feeling valued and appreciated in relationships are not fostered by 1-day celebrations but are influenced by frequent thoughtful acts that signal commitment and intimacy (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010). Food behaviors, therefore, provide multiple opportunities in everyday life for individuals in relationships to improve, sustain, or develop a sense of closeness and intimacy.

Furthermore, communication skills, particularly those surrounding food, have become especially pertinent in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic where couples and families are spending more time together in confined spaces, due to stay-at-home orders and other social distancing measures (including school closures and the closing of non-essential businesses). An additional 15 million IPV cases worldwide are estimated for an average of 3 months in lockdown (e.g., stay-at-home orders and social distancing mandates) (United Nations Population Fund, 2020), and food-related relational conflicts in households are a unique problem that couples and families are starting to acknowledge (Dizik, 2020; Ellin, 2020). Positive communication

that fosters understanding is, therefore, a valuable skill. Beliefs and values vary by upbringing, culture, and various psychosocial factors and as a result, no relationship consists of individuals who are exactly alike. Nevertheless, it is possible for partners to be in a harmonious relationship. So, while food behaviors can escalate into conflicts as it can communicate contradictory beliefs and values, it can also be an opportunity to overcome these differences and resolve conflicts if it is used as an instance to practice positive communication that fosters empathy and an appreciation for diversity.

The ability of food behaviors to operate as an independent curriculum topic or a medium of intervention delivery to address relationship conflicts, violence, or diversity needs further investigation. Findings, however, are promising as relatability to the curriculum topics and rapport amongst group members are particularly important for court-mandated participants. Court-mandated participants do not get to choose whom they participate in a group with or whether to participate at all without legal consequences. They, therefore, face an additional challenge of finding commonalities or developing rapport in a forced setting with a diverse group of individuals. Food behaviors, given their relatability and mundane nature, may mitigate this additional challenge for those mandated to treatment. Moreover, targeted strategies for behavioral change and interpersonal communication skills are also factors that are known to benefit DV offenders participating in BIPs (Gray, Lewis, Mokany, & O'Neill, 2013; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). Targeting food-related communication skills, therefore, may be particularly useful as it provides tangible examples that can be easily integrated and practiced in their daily lives.

Furthermore, considering how relational and value-laden food and food behaviors are, results indicate the need for future studies to investigate whether these food-related relational dynamics inform food preferences and eating behaviors. If such food behaviors are incongruent with healthy dietary habits, it may negatively influence dietary quality and, subsequently, health outcomes. Considering the role of food and food behaviors in intimate relationships, therefore, may be an innovative avenue to instigate change in dietary behaviors.

Finally, it is essential to note that the offender narratives, especially women's narratives describing the relationship between food, anger, and gender roles, illustrate how they have also been victims of violence or aggression. Such narratives capture the bidirectionality of IPV and how misleading the term "perpetrator" or "offender" can be. As previously explained, legally being labeled an offender and being a victim are not mutually exclusive conditions. This is particularly relevant as mandatory arrest policies are active in several states, including Utah, where the present study was conducted (Cohabitant Abuse Procedures Act, 2013). Therefore, while the group interventions were for those court-mandated to treatment for DV crimes

in cases of IPV, it is also necessary to recognize that many of the participants may have also been harmed. Furthermore, while the aim of this specific study was not a comparative analysis of IPV perpetration by gender and its related food narratives, more research is needed to understand these differences.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. The current study examined observation notes. While observers received note-taking guidelines and data analysts attempted to eliminate subjective observation notes, the observers' bias inherently influences them. Additionally, pertinent data could also be missing as observation notes do not capture conversations in ways that verbatim transcriptions of audio or video recordings do. Nonetheless, the food narratives were extracted and analyzed due to the rare opportunity to have any data on male and female IPV offenders participating in court-mandated treatment for DV crimes. However, for future research, the use of verbatim transcriptions is recommended to minimize biases and missing data.

Another limitation is that the observation notes were utilized as secondary data. In other words, the data was not collected to understand the role of food and food behaviors in relationships. Additionally, the interventions (BIP and BIP + CP) were not designed to ask questions that would elicit further insight into food in relationships. However, findings in the current study suggest the need for more data that specifically examines food-related beliefs and values in IPV to gain further insight. The themes identified in the current study can be utilized to inform questions for these future studies.

Interestingly, food insecurity or food-related conflicts in the context of socioeconomic status did not emerge, despite previous studies that have found correlations between IPV and food insecurity. While the participants came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may not have felt comfortable openly discussing financial dynamics. It may also be the case that observers, due to human error, missed documenting it in the notes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, food behaviors in IPV and intimate relationships can be a powerful vehicle for expressing emotion, values, and beliefs which inform expectations and power dynamics in relationships. As a result, some food-related interactions can feel like a personal insult when they are incongruent with expectations informed by core beliefs and values. In other words, food behaviors can give rise to instances of miscommunication or positive communication leading to either harmony in relationships when expectations are fulfilled, or conflict in relationships when expectations are rejected, denied, or

violated. Furthermore, while the intersection between food security and IPV is significant, this exploratory study indicates that food behaviors can also negatively and positively influence relationships, independent of socioeconomic context. Further research is, therefore, needed to identify whether and how food-related narratives in relationships and IPV vary by socioeconomic contexts using primary data collection methods. However, this study provides some of the first data of its kind that clearly demonstrates a complex, multifaceted, context-driven relationship between IPV and food behaviors. A further examination of these relationships can help inform other interventions that address relationships and families.

Appendix A

(Required Curriculum Topics)

1. Nonviolence
2. Non-threatening Behavior
3. Respect
4. Trust and Support
5. Honesty and Accountability
6. Shared Responsibility
7. Sexual Respect
8. Negotiation and Fairness

Appendix B

(Note Taking Guidelines & Sample De-identified Observation Notes)

DV GROUP OBSERVATIONS

Notes should be typed up immediately following the observations. The notes should include such things as the following:

1. Note the group type, time, and date
2. Background information about the cases in the group
3. Describe the physical environment in detail
4. Describe the participants in detail
5. Describe the activities and interactions (including frequency and duration and non-verbal communication)
6. Note what is said, who speaks to whom, who listens, and any silences

7. Describe your own behavior during the group session and how your role as a researcher affected those you observed
8. Note what you have learned from observing the group and any additional questions you may want to ask in an interview
9. Your thoughts, impressions, and reactions, and anything that stands out for you.

SAMPLE DE-IDENTIFIED OBSERVATION NOTES

From a Male BIP+CP Group…

Facilitator is reading the good things from the wheel. Being trustworthy, listening to concerns, valuing her capacity to make decisions, recognizing and appreciating her humanity, etc.

Man 17: "He was talking shit on her food."

Facilitator is pointing out that it was about disrespecting her Korean culture.

From a Women's BIP Group…

Facilitator tells Woman 1 that she thinks that she hit that flooding point (referring to emotional flooding), and ask the group what causes this? Woman 1 states that she can't do anything right for her boyfriend, "I can't cook, clean, or work right and now I can't even do sex." Woman 1 became emotional and state, "he is so ungrateful." The facilitator asks if she believes that his abuse will stop. Woman 1 said that she keeps hoping but that she does not know. Facilitator talks about importance of setting boundaries because the cycle continues.

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Notes

1. There were no direct participant responses to these facilitator suggestions but it was included as no adverse participant responses were noted. The participants were generally agreeable/receptive and disagreements or negative participant responses were usually noted. However, we acknowledge that this missing data is a limitation of observation-based data as the conversations/group sessions were not recorded and transcribed verbatim.

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