

Dinner for Two: How Collective Practices and Identities Emerge Over Time

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Ratna Khanijou, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented is entirely of my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to understand how collective practices and collective identities emerge over time in the context of newly cohabited couples. Existing literature suggests consumption plays a key role in consumer identity transitions, however research mainly focuses on individual perspectives of identity and consumption. Inspired by recent trends of practice theory and how engagement with materiality allows identities to emerge (Miller, 1987), this study analyses the meal consumption practices of newly cohabited couples. In particular, the research seeks to understand how collective routines and collective identities emerge through time. The method consisted of a 1-year longitudinal ethnographic study consisting of participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews with 13 newly cohabited couples. The ethnography entailed shopping and attending evening meals with couples at their homes. Data consisted of speech-in-action, fieldnotes and interview transcripts, analysed through thematic analysis to find common themes.

Theoretically, the contributions to practice theory and identity are twofold. First, the study shows how a collective consumption routine is born over time. Findings reveal how elements such as meanings, competences and materials within a consumption practice are key in shaping the practice from individual to collective performers. In particular, synergies in practice co-performances are formed via three processes: blending, combining and domineering elements. Second, the study illustrates how, over time, collective identities emerge as a dialectical process of interaction between actors and their co-engagements in practices. Findings reveal that collective identity-work emerge through symbolization of the meal, materialization of collective aspirations and embodiment of collective routines. The study therefore links existing practice theories to identity theories using Miller's dialectical materiality theory. The research opens up a new theoretical lens of analysing collective identity from a collective perspective through practice.

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There are three types of wisdom in this world: 1. Suttamaya-punya: Wisdom through learning from other people's works and experiences. 2. Chintamaya-punya: Wisdom through one's analysis and thinking. 3. Bhavanamaya-punya: Wisdom that emerges through observing one's own bodily experience [and body routines]. This is your living wisdom.

Siddhartha Gautama, The Buddha

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Chapter I

Introduction

“Almost one in five (18%) couples in the UK argue regularly or consider separating, a study finds”
(Marjoribanks in BBC News, 2016).

According to the Office of National Statistics [ONS], the fastest growing and second largest family type in the UK is the cohabiting couple, where it was at 3.3 million in 2017 – more than double what it was 20 years ago (ONS, 2017). As younger couples are choosing to cohabit before marriage or as an alternative to marriage, this trend is likely to increase, says Pamela Cobb, Population Statistics Division (ONS, 2016). However, a survey carried out by the charity *Relate* in 2013-2015 found that almost one in five people (2.87 million people) in couple relationships in the UK are living in what can be considered as “distressed relationships” (Sserwanja and Marjoribanks, 2016, p.3; BBC News, 2016). According to the report, continuous bickering and lack of the art of communication were common problems in today’s society, as people have lost the art of talking about how they feel to each other, which can have detrimental effects not only on couples but also on children who grow up with parents who have constant conflicts in their relationship (BBC News, 2016).

Such conflicts in a relationship becomes especially prominent when the cohabitating couple is at its genesis. For example, when couples newly settle to live together. According to Marshall and Anderson (2002), the newly cohabitating couple household provides a unique lens to understand the onset of family life, as it grants an opportunity to observe the transitional phase of the family life course. Kemmer *et al.* (1998) notes how this period of transition is an important life stage in the couple relationship as it is where the expectations of roles and habits are “being consciously negotiated and therefore brought into focus” as couples become aware of theirs and their partner’s differences (p.49). Hence, if we are to understand how and why distress in a couple relationship persevere, we should perhaps turn our attention to study this transitional phase of the family life course – and it’s relation to theory.

There has been increasing interest within marketing and consumer research to study transitional periods of consumers’ lives and how the marketplace plays a role in such transitions (Hogg *et*

al., 2003; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Voice Group, 2010; O'Donohoe *et al.*, 2013; Ogle *et al.*, 2013). Especially in relation to identity construction and transformation, studies have shown how consumption plays a role in women's transition into a new mother (Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Banister and Hogg, 2006; Voice Group, 2010; Ogle *et al.*, 2013; McNeill and Graham, 2014), an "empty nest" mother (Hogg *et al.*, 2003; Hogg *et al.*, 2004) or men's transition into a new father (Bettany *et al.*, 2014). Studies have also shown how market-related activities aid in identity negotiations during transitions of divorce (Bates and Gentry, 1994), retirement (Schau *et al.*, 2009) and even bereavement (Gentry *et al.*, 1995; Bonsu and Belk, 2003).

Within the context of newly married or newly cohabiting couples, there are also few studies that show how consumption, especially of the shared meal, aid the couples' transition from singlehood to coupledom (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Lupton, 2000; Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Sobal *et al.*, 2002; Bove *et al.*, 2003). Studies have highlighted how eating together, eating the same meals and eating "proper meals" help form part of the couples' transition into a "commensal unit" (Marshall and Anderson, 2002, p.194; Sobal *et al.*, 2002, p.379). Although these studies are very relevant, as they show that there are various stages over a family life course and consumption can be used as a tool to negotiate new roles during such life stage changes, previous studies mainly analysed accounts of consumption from uni-lateral perspectives (e.g. interviewing couples separately). There is less consideration of the collective perspective in doing collective consumption. Inspired by recent trends of analysing consumer doings (Epp and Price, 2008), I will be approaching the understanding of such identity transitions from a collective and practice perspective over time.

Within current scholarship, there are two main schools of thought underpinning theoretical analysis of identity within consumer research. First, developed in the 1990's, sociologists have argued how modern societies have resulted in individualised societies, where consumers are seen as agentic beings who can construct their identity as a self-reflexive project (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2001a; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Consumption here is seen as a symbolic tool through which consumers can create a personal identity and meaningful sense of self through time (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2001b; Fischler, 1988; Bugge, 2003; Cutright *et al.*, 2013). Second, there is a growing trend within consumer research to study identity not as a being but as a doing - How identity is shaped through doing everyday practices of

consumption (Epp and Price, 2008; Cappellini and Parsons, 2012a; Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014; Holttinen, 2014).

Especially in relation to family life, there are studies on doing mothering (O'Donohoe *et al.*, 2013; Cappellini and Parsons, 2014; Molander and Hartmann, 2018; Harman and Cappellini, 2018; Hogg *et al.*, 2004; Cairns *et al.*, 2013; Halkier, 2013; Gram *et al.*, 2017a), doing fathering (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006; Bettany *et al.*, 2014), doing parenting (Del-Bucchia and Peñaloza, 2016; Thomas and Epp, 2019), and grandparenting (Gram *et al.*, 2017b; Timonen and Arber, 2012). These studies highlight how through doing contemporary and mundane consumption practices, identity is constantly shaped and reproduced in everyday life – although as O'Donohoe *et al.* (2013) suggests the ideals and understandings of the identity may still be provided by the marketplace, brands and society. But in this approach, there is an implication that identity is not simply an internal construct that resides in the minds of individuals but is “co-constructed in action” primarily through practices of consumption (Epp and Price, 2008, p.52). Analysis of identity from a practice approach therefore allows researchers to analyse not only what people say about themselves, but also what and how people do in everyday life to understand their identity (Epp and Price, 2008; Molander, 2011).

However, previous research mainly focused on the doings of a single individual, and there has been less consideration of the doings of a collective entity. For example, the couple household. Especially couples that are in transition and are newly co-performing a consumption practice together, how does their collective practice and in turn collective identities emerge. Previous studies analysing identity transitions have also mostly concentrated on individual perspectives and experiences of change. For example, the mothers' transition (Hogg *et al.*, 2003; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Ogle *et al.*, 2013), the fathers' transition (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006; Bettany *et al.*, 2014) or uni-laterally interviewing couples separately to analyse their transition experiences (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Marshall and Anderson, 2002). Little is known about collective identity emergence from a collective perspective over time. Previous studies analysing consumer practices during their transitional period have also mainly employed interview methods to analyse changing accounts of consumption (Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006), and there is less consideration of the ethnographer's accounts of seeing consumption in transition over time. This study explores how collective identities emerge and it does so through observing the meal consumption practices of newly cohabited couples through time. In particular, the co-performance of the dinner is analysed to

first understand how the collective meal practice emerge, then how identities emerge through the process. The meal is chosen as the analytical tool as we know from existing literature how this practice is central to family relationships (Moisio *et al.*, 2004; Marshall, 2005; Cappellini and Parsons, 2012a; Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014; Edirisingha *et al.*, 2015) and especially dinner has been shown to play a key role in couples transitional periods (Marshall, 2005; Marshall and Anderson, 2002).

1.1 Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

In order to understand how collective identity emerge from a collective perspective, this research analyses the doings of the meal in new couple households over time. The specific research questions at the core of this research project are therefore:

- How do collective meal practices emerge over time in newly cohabiting couples?
- How does collective identities emerge through co-performing meal practices over time in newly cohabiting couples?

These research questions thus involve shifting the focus away from asking couples about their thoughts on being a couple to analyzing their doings in everyday life. In other words, it shifts the focus from asking how do newly cohabited couples negotiate their identity, to analyzing their meal consumption practices and identity emergence from the practice. In doing so, I will be able to analyze not only what people say about themselves, but also how they do in everyday life to understand their identities (Epp and Price, 2008; Molander, 2011). I will also be able to provide the understanding of identity emergence from a more collective and dynamic perspective, taking into account both actors perspectives and their performance in the practice.

Thus, there are two main theoretical aims. First, the research aims to understand how a collective practice is born. And second, the research aims to understand how identities emerge from co-performing practices over time. In order to achieve these aims, there are three research objectives. First, I will analyze the co-performance of dinner consumption practices of newly cohabited couples over time. Inspired by a practice theoretical approach, I approach co-performances in practices as interactions between various *elements* in a practice (Shove *et al.*, 2012). In particular, I look at practices as comprising of three main elements: “Meanings, Competences, and Materials” (*ibid*, p.12) which are interacting with one another at the collective level during a practice co-performance. I will explain more about my theoretical

approach in the next section, but in analyzing co-performances, I will analyze how these elements are interacting at the collective level over time during the couples' doing of the meal. The second research objective is to analyze how these elements of symbolic meanings, materials and competences along with their interactions can play a role in the collective practice emergence. And third, I will analyze how individual and collective identity-work of the couple is being done during co-performing meal practices over time. In taking practice performance as the focus of analysis (Warde, 2005), I will thus be able to analyze identity construction from a more dynamic and collective perspective, taking into account the perspectives and interactions of all actors and materials involved in the co-performance. The research objectives, research aims and questions therefore imply an ethnographic longitudinal approach. Since the study aims to analyze the emergence of collective practice and in turn collective identities through time, it will adopt a longitudinal approach. The time aspect will allow to capture change that is ongoing as the negotiation of the practice, and individual and collective identities, takes place. The analysis of the co-performance also implies an ethnographic approach, which will allow me to capture the doings of the collective meal in action (Epp and Price, 2008).

Thus, a set of ethnographic methods combining participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews (Willis and Trondman, 2002; Arnould, 1998) was adopted to analyze the meal consumption co-performances of newly cohabited couples over time. In particular, a 1-year participant observation combined with in-depth semi-structured individual and collective interviews was conducted with 13 newly cohabited couples residing in London. Each couple was visited once a month for around 6 months during the 1-year period. The ethnography entailed observing shopping and attending normal workday evening meals with couples at their homes. The participant observation allowed a perspective in how the practice is being co-performed and can reveal interactions and disputes in action (Khanijou and Pirani, 2020). Whereas the individual and collective interviews allowed to understand the underlying meanings and attitudes about the practice (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). Data consisted of speech-in-action recordings, interview transcripts, fieldnotes and photographs, which were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify common themes (Spiggle, 1994). In employing both observations and interviews to analyse consumer doings, I was able to provide a more complex account of analysing consumption changes during this transitional period: consumer accounts of doing from their own perspectives as well as my account of their doings over time. Below I will discuss my theoretical background and provide an overview of the findings.

1.2 Theoretical Background

The research combines various theoretical approaches in order to understand how a collective practice is born, and how collective identities emerge through co-performing the practice over time. First, being inspired from theories of practice, I analysed how meal consumption practices are co-performed by two actors in order to understand how a collective practice is born. In the past 10-15 years, there has been a growing interest amongst consumer researchers to apply practice theory to study consumption (Warde, 2005; Magaudda, 2011; Truninger, 2011; Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Halkier *et al.*, 2017; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017; Molander and Hartmann, 2018).

The underlying appeal of practice theory is that firstly, it provides a tool to analyze both the “doings” and “sayings” but also the materialities of everyday life (Schatzki, 2001, p.53). Practices have been defined as co-constituents of various elements interacting with one another (Reckwitz, 2002a; Shove *et al.*, 2012). As mentioned, I am influenced by Shove and colleagues’ (2012) definition of practices as comprising of three main elements: “meanings, competences and materials” (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.14), as their tri-elemental approach seemed more applicable to study collective practices. Studies have highlighted how focusing on the performances of these elements can allow for seeing the ways of doing in everyday life (Halkier and Jensen, 2011; Warde, 2017). And in analyzing the elements in a practice, Shove *et al.* (2012) contends how one can analyze how practices are created, abandoned, develop or change over time. Therefore, in my approach to understand how a collective meal practice is born, I looked at the interactions between elements of practice at the collective level over time. Another appeal of practice theory is also that it regards all the elements in a practice as important for the practice to be performed (Schatzki, 2001; Halkier and Jensen, 2011). It thus allows one to take into account both the actors’ perspectives as well as materials in the practice to analyze the meal co-performance. However, as will be discussed in my literature review, most practice theorists are not concerned with identity. Therefore, I use another theoretical lens to analyze how identities emerge through co-performing practices over time. I will give a brief outline of my approach here.

Inspired by Daniel Miller's (1987; 1998; 2010) dialectical materiality theory comprising of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, I analyze how collective identity emerges as a dialectical process of interaction between subjects and their co-engagements in practices. Through his ethnographic works of mothers' shopping in North London, Miller (1998) analyses how subjects and objects have a dialectic relationship to each other as one co-creates the other. He discusses how it is only through engagement and submersion in the material world that subjects can come to understand themselves and form their identities, but in this process objects also gain its meanings and inalienable position (Miller, 1987). Miller has focused mainly on one subjects' identity emergence as his ethnographic works concentrated on mother's shopping and their identity emergence. He has also mainly focused on reflexive accounts of the mothers' consumption and did not analyze consumption in action. Being inspired from his theory, I approached co-engagements in meal consumption practices as a dialectical process through which collective identities of actors, and meanings in practices, emerge through time. In doing so, I will be able to provide a more in-depth and collective understanding of the process of identity emergence from practice over time.

Hence, this study contributes to literature on practice theory and identity in two main ways. First, I show the process through which a collective practice is born over time as practices are co-performed by two actors. Although most practice theorists acknowledge that practices are collective and shared in nature (Southerton, 2013), most empirical research have focused mainly on the experience of single practitioners who perform an inherently shared social practice (Magaudda, 2011; Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017). In analyzing the co-performance of the meal practice in newly cohabiting couples, findings reveal how elements within a practice are key in shaping the practice from individual doers to collective doers. As when actors first attempt to co-perform a practice together, pre-existing elements of the practice carried within the actors interact with one another as the practice is co-performed. I show how elements within the practice conflict and compete with each other at the collective level through time. However, elements can also synergize with each other over time, creating a collectively coordinated practice co-performance (Barnes, 2001). Findings reveal three ways through which synergies between elements of the practice are formed, what I called: blending, combining and domineering. Synergies were aided by new elements, such as new symbolic meanings, competences and material resources provided by the market. In creating a synergy between elements of practice at the collective level, the study reveals how

a new collective practice is born. Elements were therefore key in understanding how practices move from individual to collective performers.

The second novel theoretical contribution is that the study shows the process through which collective identity emerges as a dialectical process of interaction between subjects and their co-engagements in practices over time. Findings reveal three processes through which collective identity-work is being performed during doing the meal together, what I describe as: symbolization of the meal, materialization of collective aspirations and embodiment of collective routines. As actors carry their pre-existing identities to the practice co-performance, their existing identity in the form of materialities will first interact with each other. However as they co-engage in practices together over time, new materialities start to emerge, which plays a role in their collective identity work. The study uses the lens of Miller's dialectical materiality theory and related it to practice theory and pre-existing identity theories to discuss how collective identity and meanings in routines emerge through a dialectical process of interaction over time. The study therefore theoretically combines existing identity literature with practice theory literature, using Miller's materiality theory as a bridge. But it also advances existing theories on identity and Miller's dialectical materiality theory to show the process of how collective identity emerges from a collective and dynamic perspective over time, taking into account the various elements involved in a practice.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of nine chapters. This first chapter provided an introduction to the study. The theoretical framework, research questions, aims and objectives were outlined, along with an overview of the theoretical findings. The literature review will now be discussed in Chapters II and III.

Chapter II provides a theoretical review of the literature on identity and consumption. Starting from the theoretical underpinnings of identity literature from sociology, I discuss how identity has mostly been analyzed from an individual point of view. Here I unpack literature on identity as a project (Giddens, 1991), where individuals are seen as agents who can construct their own identity through consumption of market related goods and services. I discuss how sociologists such as Beck, Giddens and Bauman have argued that modern societies have changed the way people approach relationships as they become more individualized. I then discuss various

empirical consumer research that show how consumers use various market objects and activities to construct, maintain and transform their identities, especially during transitional periods of their lives. The chapter ends with addressing the critiques and gaps in this school of thought.

Chapter III sets the scene for understanding how we can approach identity from a more collective and dynamic perspective through adopting a practice approach. The chapter starts with literature on practice theory and its application in consumption studies. I discuss the various theories of practice and my approach to analyzing practices. I then discuss how we can understand identity emerging from practices through the lens of Miller's dialectical materiality theory. The chapter moves on to discuss collective practices and collective identity, taking inspiration from previous literature on family consumption. I discuss literature on family routines, family identity and meal consumption in order to show my approach to study collective identity in the context of newly cohabited couples. This chapter ends with identifying gaps in previous studies, and my approach to study dinner practices in newly cohabiting couples.

Chapter IV outlines my methodology. The chapter starts with discussing my research philosophy - my ontological and epistemological positions. I then discuss my research design and methodology. A 1-year participant observation combined with individual and collective in-depth interviews was conducted with thirteen newly cohabiting couples residing in London. I discuss my fieldwork, the recruitment and ethics. I then discuss my data collection and data analysis methods as I use speech-in-action-recordings, fieldnotes, interview transcripts and photographs as sources of data. I discuss how I coded and interpreted my data. The chapter ends with discussing my reflexivity and ethics in the research process.

Chapter V, VI, VII discusses the findings of the study. In Chapter V, the themes of conflicts that emerged from the findings are discussed. I show how conflicts emerged as actors attempt to co-perform the meal consumption practice together. I illustrate various aspects of conflicts. I discuss conflicts as mis-alignments between various elements in a practice, and show how elements can interact and compete with each other at the collective level over time during co-performance of practice. Chapter VI reveals the themes of synergies that are achieved when the conflicts gets resolved over time. In this chapter, I show how elements within the practice can merge, cooperate and synergize together at the collective level over time so that the meal

can be co-performed. I show various processes through which synergies were achieved and discuss how collective practices were being formed through time.

Chapter VII shows how identities emerge from co-performing practices together over time. The chapter starts with showing how collective identity-work is being done during co-performing the meal. In particular, I discuss three aspects of collective identity-work: symbolization of the meal, materialization of collective aspirations, and embodiment of collective routines. The chapter then shows how individual identity-work is being done during doing the meal. In particular, I discuss how gendered identity-work is being performed and emerges as a consequence of meal practice co-performance in newly cohabited couples.

Chapter VIII combines the three findings chapter together and provides a theoretical discussion of the findings. In relation to the research aims and objectives, this chapter discusses how collective practices are born and in turn how collective identities emerge through co-performing practices over time. The chapter is approached through the lens of Miller's dialectical materiality theory to discuss how collective identities and collective routines emerge as a dialectical process of interaction when actors co-engage in a consumption practice together. Chapter IX provides the conclusion to the thesis. In this chapter I summarize the key findings, the theoretical contributions, methodological contributions, research limitations and future work.

Chapter II

Identity as a project

2.1 Introduction

The terms identity and consumption has been interlinked and dominated much of consumer behaviour literature over the past decades. Especially influential through theoretical insights of identity developed from other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and psychology, consumer researchers have tried to incorporate and develop understandings of how consumers use market related resources to build and express their sense of self.

As this chapter will show, one such approach is through the individualisation theme developed from sociology. Sociologists have argued how modern societies have resulted in individualised societies (Bauman, 2001a), where consumers are seen as agentic beings who can reflexively work on their own self-identity as a personal task to be worked upon (Giddens, 1991; Beck *et al.*, 1994). Consumption of market-related goods and services are seen as tools through which one can continuously construct a self-identity project through time (Bauman, 2001b; Giddens, 1991). Within the field of consumer behaviour, consumer culture studies have (although not directly) applied the theory and dedicated a stream of research into understanding how consumers use various symbolic and socio-cultural meanings in consumption and consumer objects to construct, enact and communicate their identity (Belk, 1988; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Especially in the area of food consumption, research has shown how food is integral to our sense of self as we eat not only for nutritional purposes but we incorporate “food laden with meanings” which inform our values, emotions and aspirations (Fischler, 1988, p.276).

This chapter will review past literature on identity and consumption. Starting from the theoretical underpinnings of how identity is seen as a project for individuals to work upon for themselves, I analyse how consumption is seen to play a role in such identity projects. The second half of the chapter will focus on the empirical works on identity and consumption in marketing and consumer behaviour literature, with an emphasis on how food consumption has been especially relevant for studying identity. The chapter ends with discussing gaps in this approach.

2.2 Reflexive Identity Project

Influential since the 1990's, the individualization theme concerning personal identity and lifestyle articulated by sociologists Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman, gained particular interest in many contemporary debates (Warde, 1994a; Brannen and Nilsen, 2005; Warde, 2017). Although there is a variation in their writings, their main argument is that modern societies have led to individualised and democratic societies, where people are seen as agents who can construct their own self-identity as a "project" (Giddens, 1991, p.5; Bauman, 2000; Bauman, 2001b). According to them, since traditional social constraints of gender, social class, race, religion and family now play a small role in one's life - as people are no longer bound by such constraints (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) - individuals are more and more seen as beings who can make choices regarding who they want to be and be seen as, constructing their identities as a task or a "project" to be worked upon (Giddens, 1991, p.75).

As Giddens (1991, p.53) put it: "*Self-identity is not something that is just given, [...], but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual.*" It is "*the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography*" (Giddens, 1991, p.244). Giddens (1991) highlight how individuals are now faced with the task to develop themselves for personal self-growth. We are faced with the need to find an inner "authenticity" (*ibid*, p.78), which is a sense of understanding oneself as who one really is. He suggests that this form of identity development requires individuals to be "internally referential", which is a form of recognizing that one's loyalty is to himself/herself (*ibid*, p.80). For him, these moral phenomenon of identity construction are not only possible but are seen as an ultimate goal in life. For in order to live a meaningful life, one has to construct an identity project, a meaningful sense of who one is through time.

These sociologists argue that reflexivity plays a strong role in helping individuals to choose the right identity for their desired identity goals (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991). Reflexivity involves "self-monitoring" of all personal decisions and actions governing people's lives (Lash, 1993, p.4). For Beck, individuals, in relying on themselves for their own choices, need to be self-reflexive to continuously calculate potential personal risks of choosing the wrong identity (Beck *et al.*, 1994; see also Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). His notion

of reflexivity can thus be related to feelings of “heightened awareness” (Beck, 2001, p.267) of one’s actions at all time. Giddens (1991), on the other hand, applies a more optimistic approach and views reflexivity as a process of ongoing individual reasoning which allows individuals to undergo “self-interrogation” and “self-observation” at all times (p.76). Since identity construction requires individuals to find their inner “authenticity” in a world full of options (Giddens, 1991, p.96), he argues that reflexivity is important to help individuals be more conscious of their choices and actions. According to these sociologists, individuals have to consciously and continuously construct their identity as a reflexive project, always analysing who they want to be and be seen as, but also how to act and what to do to fulfil such projects.

This notion of reflexive identity project implies that individuals are self-conscious beings who can act according to intention and purpose. Hence, every choice one makes, such as those of who to be and how to act, is based on reason. And when asked to do so, individuals can give a reasonable account of their actions (Giddens, 1984; 1991). However, at the end of this chapter I will discuss how this notion of reflexivity has been criticized as many have argued that most of what we do is in fact habitual, and we cannot give reasonable accounts for all our actions (Gronow and Warde, 2001; Warde, 2005; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017). But for now I stick to this stream of thought. If reflexivity is important in choosing an identity, then the very ability to choose is another important criterion to consider. In other words, reflexivity presumes agency.

2.3 Agency

2.3.1 Agency in Creating a Personal Biography

The concept of choice itself infers agency. According to Giddens (1984, p.9), “*agency refers to the capability of doing [...] It implies exercise of power*”. Power can equate control, control of one’s life such that “*we are in charge [of ourselves]*”! (Giddens, 1991, p.77). Though Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, Giddens and Bauman all indicate that without any pre-given identity, we can have control over choices of who we want to be and be seen as, they argue that in a way we are forced to choose. As Giddens (1991) put it, “*we have no choice but to choose*” (p.81) and to bear the personal responsibility of our choices. All four sociologists suggest that modern institutions, in the form of consumer markets can provide tools for individuals to pick and choose from to be any of their desired selves (Bauman, 2001a; Giddens, 1991), an aspect I will

return to in the next section. But in choosing an identity, individuals have to create a personal biography, which is a sense of continuity for themselves through time (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2009). As Giddens discusses how one must continuously monitor their identity choices throughout their lives in order to create a coherent narrative of the self-identity for there is always the “threat of personal meaninglessness” (Giddens, 1991, p.201).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, p.23) similarly argue that individuals are now faced with the task to develop a “life of one’s own”, where we have to construct our own biography, our own life story through time. They argue that individuals who do not work on their own goals, aspirations and in turn identity wisely will have no one else to blame but themselves for their own failures and unhappiness (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2002). Hence, they see agency as a “double-edged sword”, on one hand there is freedom and choice, on the other there is a burden of responsibility and continuous anxieties (Mythen, 2004, p.119; Giddens, 1991). Anxieties as Giddens (1991, p.13) explains, are continuous worries that come with having to live with the continuous monitoring of one’s identity.

Independence, autonomy, control, freedom - such is the condition of fulfilling a self-identity project in the individualized modern society. These sociologists argue that individuals are not passive but active subjects, who rely on themselves to be responsible for their own identity constructions. One has control over who one wants to be and be seen as. But such freedom comes with obligation. As Giddens (1991) discusses how one *has to* construct an identity project. In order to live a more meaningful life, one needs to be able to develop a biography through time (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). According to these theorists, this notion of agency also extends to other areas of one’s life. For them, even in social settings, individuals need to have the capability to do their own personal projects.

2.3.2 Personal Projects in Family Relationships

Giddens, Bauman, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, all argue that with individualization comes a new kind of social change that affects not only the individual but is creeping into other parts of social life as well. In a social setting, such as in a spousal setting, individuals increasingly have the agency to fulfil their personal life projects within the collective as well (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991). They argue that this is because personal relationships and marriages are no longer bound by traditional constraints of race, religion, gender, and

patriarchal division of power and labour within the household (Giddens, 1993; Beck *et al.*, 1994). We increasingly see more same sex, mixed race and live-in relationships, that are not confined to legal and societal obligations. Thus, individuals are not only free to choose their romantic life partners, whom they want to spend their lives with, but as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue, every relationship entered into is kept going only for the rewards it can deliver for the individual.

According to Giddens (1993), in modern societies, relationships are increasingly turning into “pure relationships” (p.58). For him, “pure relationships” are “entered into only for its own sake” and quest for individual happiness, and it will last only as long as it brings the rewards and pleasure it can deliver (or has promised) for the individual (*ibid*, p.58). He discusses how couples increasingly need to be seen as equals in the relationship. Each partner needs to be able to have their own democratic say and agency within the relationship (Giddens, 1991; 1993). Such agency implies mutual respect, equality, autonomy and freedom of speech and action for each partner. It also implies the ability to do one’s own individual project within the collective. As according to Giddens (1991), in order to have a fulfilling relationship with others, one first and foremost need to have a fulfilling relationship with ourselves, such as through fulfilling our own self-projects. As he puts it: “*A well-functioning relationship, is one in which each person is autonomous and sure of his or her self-worth*” (Giddens, 1991, p.93). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, p.3) similarly echoes Giddens in suggesting that only when both partners in a relationship obtain freedom and autonomy to “do their own thing”, then they can discover the basis for which love can grow. Love in this form is more “chaotic” but more “democratic” as it comes from one’s own free will and choice (*ibid*, p.2). Thus, for Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), “*what counts as a good [relationship] means that its central focus is now the individual person with her own desires, needs, ideas and plans, in short, personal happiness*” (p.72).

Bauman (2001a; 2001b; 2003; 2007) similarly argues that since everything including identity is short-lived in the modern society, relationships too are short-lived and will last only for the emotional rewards it can deliver. According to him, no one gets into a relationship with the idea of “until death do us apart” anymore, since we realize that everything is perishable, and there is no point for long term commitments (Bauman, 2003; p.90). As he puts it: “*the old-style ‘till death do us part’ marriage already elbowed out by the self-admittedly temporary ‘we will see how it works’ cohabitation, is replaced by a part-time, flexible-times comings together*”

(Bauman, 2003, p.36). Thus, relationships especially those without a legal marriage contract are always under construction and will be kept only for the emotional satisfaction it can bring for the individual (Bauman, 2000). This is a condition he calls “liquid love”, where people enter the relationships flexibly, without any contracts, with no guarantee that it will last (Bauman, 2003). However, according to him, this is a source of continuous anxiety as one does not know when the relationship may end. One needs to constantly work on the relationship in order for it to last.

Thus, according to these sociologists, relationships, like identity, need to be kept constantly in check if they are still worthy, if they are still providing individual satisfaction, happiness, allowing us to be who we are and to do what we want? “*The family thus becomes a [...] permanent ‘do-it-yourself’ project*” (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998, p.59) that needs continuous construction and monitoring through time.

2.4 Role of Consumption

2.4.1 Project and Agency Through Consumption

For these sociologists, the concept of agency and freedom of choice concerns the supremacy of consumption. Consumption plays a key role in allowing individuals to construct their identity project and perform their agency (Giddens, 1991). Choice and independence can only be acted out through consumption activities. As Bauman (1988) puts it: “*for most members of contemporary society individual freedom, if available at all, comes in the form of consumer freedom*” (Bauman, 1988 in Elliott, 1997, p.290). This is because these theorists argue that the consumer market is responsible for creating such identity choices. The market offers their consumers an array of identity choices to choose from on who to be, how to act, what to do to fulfil their identity aspirations (Beck *et al.*, 1994; Bauman, 2007). As will be seen in the next section, this is because market related goods and services are seen as having symbolic meanings, which can be incorporated into the symbolic project of the self through consumption.

According to Giddens (1991, p.78), in order to achieve a sense of meaning within one’s life biography, individuals need to have a continuous sense of identity narration through time. One’s identity trajectory needs to link one’s past, present and future selves in a coherent

fashion. And he argues that routinised patterns of consumption in the form of *lifestyles* will allow individuals to “*give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity*” (*ibid*, p.81). He defines lifestyles in terms of “*routine [consumption] practices*” (*ibid*, p.81). Lifestyles are routines organised in the form of consumption habits of eating, behaving and interacting with others, which provides a sense of unity and security in people’s lives (Giddens, 1984; 1991), and contributes to their self-identity project development. This concept of identity creation through consumption, (though not explicitly in relation to Beck, Giddens and Bauman), has been widely applied across the field of consumer research. Especially within the field of consumer culture, researchers seek to understand how consumers interact with market related goods and services to further their identity projects.

2.4.2 Symbolization of Consumption

In the past two decades, this concept of the autonomous and self-making consumer has been very influential in consumer research and consumer behaviour studies. Empirical studies have been conducted to offer scope for clarification regarding the agentic role of consumers. In this theoretical perspective, consumers are seen as “identity seekers and makers” (Connell and Schau, 2013, p.21) where consumption is - for the most part - a tool through which people define and display themselves (Ruvio and Belk, 2013; Keller *et al.*, 2017). The marketplace is seen as providing a symbolic resource of identities for consumers to choose and occupy to further their identity goals (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Slater, 1997; Holt, 2002). Studies have shown how consumers construct and transform their identity through consumption (Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Banister and Hogg, 2006; Schau *et al.*, 2009; Voice Group, 2010; Ruvio and Belk, 2013; Ogle *et al.*, 2013; Cutright *et al.*, 2013; McNeill and Graham, 2014; Bettany *et al.*, 2014).

If consumption plays a role in identity projects, this is because consumer goods and services are seen as carrying symbolic connotations. The marketplace is seen as carrying an array of symbolic objects (Levy, 1959) that have meaningful valuable traits, which consumers can incorporate and transfer into their symbolic project of the self (McCracken, 1986; Belk, 1988). Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998a) provides a sound illustration to show how consumers, being meaning centred beings, consume not only for utility and function but most importantly for the symbolic characteristics objects provide. Studies have shown how meanings in products and services are shaped through one’s culture, society, role models, brands or through personal allocation of meanings to an object through time (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998b; Belk,

1988; Broderick *et al.*, 2003; Dunn *et al.*, 2013; Cutright *et al.*, 2013). Importance is given to the role of advertising and mass media to communicate these meanings and provide images of identity ideals that consumers can choose from (O'Donohoe, 2006; Hirschman and Thompson, 1997; Holt, 2002; Cutright *et al.*, 2013). However, studies have also shown how such identity ideals can induce feelings of stress and anxiety when it is not achieved or is unattainable (Voice Group, 2010; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Theodorou and Spyrou, 2013; Ogle *et al.*, 2013). In order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how consumption plays a role in consumer identity projects, I will now turn to show the various empirical works in the field.

2.4.3 Identity Reflection, Creation and Transformation

Especially in the area of brand consumption, studies show how people actively construct and display their identity through consuming popular brands that reflect who they want to be and be seen as (Cutright *et al.*, 2013; Broderick *et al.*, 2003; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998b; Fournier, 1998). Construction and display of masculine or feminine identity through consuming various products with identifiable gendered traits have also been studied in the literature (Holt and Thompson, 2004; Östberg, 2013). Belk (1988) was one of the first who discussed how possessions can become part of the self, a notion he calls the “extended self” (p.139). According to him, objects can become a part of the self through undergoing certain psychological and social changes through time which gives them relevance. For example, when one invests time, energy and emotions into an object, it can gain symbolic meanings and become part of the self (Belk, 1988).

Since Belk, research has grown to show how consumption aid consumers to create and define themselves through time (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998a; Schau and Gilly, 2003; Ahuvia, 2005; Shankar *et al.*, 2009; Ruvio and Belk, 2013; Keller *et al.*, 2017). For example, studies discuss how consumption of self-caring and self-changing products and services, such as plastic surgery (Schouten, 1991; Askegaard *et al.*, 2002), dieting and exercise (Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995) allow consumers to construct and define themselves.

Consumption has also been shown to play a role in resolving identity conflicts and in creating a personal biography. For example, Ahuvia (2005) showed how loved possessions can allow

people to resolve identity conflicts between two competing identities, and aid consumers to create a coherent sense of identity through time, which connects their past, present and future selves. They discussed how consumers can use resolution strategies such as “demarcating” (letting go of one identity), “compromising” (finding a middle ground between the two identities), or “synthesising” (creating a new identity) to resolve identity conflicts through managing their possessions (Ahuvia, 2005, p.181). Similarly, Tian and Belk (2005) discusses how consumers can create and manage their office and domestic identities through negotiating their possessions in these spaces. Karanika and Hogg (2010) discusses how consumers negotiate between their desired and undesired identities which could be in conflict with each other through managing their consumption experiences. Shankar *et al.* (2009) too studied how consumption of past music records aided consumers to create a coherent narrative of their identity through time. However they argued that although consumers can have an agency in constructing who they want to be, social constraints such as family and social class can still influence and hinder people’s ability to construct their identity projects.

Using Goffman’s (1959) theories of self-presentation and identity performance, Schau and Gilly (2003) discussed how consumption does not only mean tangible goods, but people can build and express their notion of self through consuming intangibles such as digital avatars, personal web pages and digital technologies as well (see also Belk, 2013). They argue that people perform their identity (both online and offline) based on how they want to be perceived. But in digital spaces, people are able to “project a desired impression” in a more limitless and prolonged manner as they have more opportunities to construct their ideal identities (Schau and Gilly, 2003, p.387). However, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017, p.591) discusses “liquid consumption” and its implications for consumer identity. According to them, with contemporary forms of consumption in the marketplace, consumers do not necessarily identify themselves with any particular project but prefer to consume in a more “fluid” way (*ibid*, p.583). Developing from Bauman, they suggest that especially consumption in a virtual space allows consumers to be attached and unattached in a more flexible way (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017).

Research has also shown how consumption can aid consumers’ self-transformation during transitional periods of their lives, leading to new forms of identity (Mehta and Belk, 1991; Bates and Gentry, 1994; Noble and Walker, 1997; Schau *et al.*, 2009). Especially in the area of role transitions, studies showed how consumption of market products aided women’s

transition into a new mother (Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Banister and Hogg, 2006; Voice Group, 2010; Ogle *et al.*, 2013; McNeill and Graham, 2014) or an “empty nest” mother (Hogg *et al.*, 2003; Hogg *et al.*, 2004). For example, Thomsen and Sørensen (2006) discussed how buying a new pram allowed women to construct and display their identity as a new mother. They show how prams are associated with many symbolic meanings such as style, social status and personality, which enables the mother to communicate who they want to be and be seen as. Similarly, Bettany *et al.* (2014) discusses that technological devices can aid men’s transition into a new father. The Voice Group (2010) identifies four roles consumption has shown to play in aiding consumers’ identity transitions during transitional periods. According to them, previous research show that 1. Consumption can aid in reducing consumer’s “uncertainty” in a role performance (p.374), 2. Consumption can aid consumers to attain their desired selves in the new role (e.g. Schouten, 1991), 3. Consumption can help people experience the transition (e.g. Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006), and 4. Consumption can help people manage their conflicting and competing identities during transition (e.g. Ahuvia, 2005). However, they argue that consumption does not only have positive attributes but consumers often experience “ambivalent” feelings of doubt and anxiety during transitional consumption as well (Voice Group, 2010, p.382).

Thus, as people consume products and services that positively contribute to their self-identity project, there are increasing research that show how consumption can also be a source of anxiety and stress (Voice Group, 2010; Voice Group, 2013; Theodorou and Spyrou, 2013; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Banister and Hogg, 2004). Especially in relation to mothers’ consumption during transitional periods, there are increasing studies that show how consumption can be a source of guilt, anxiety and tension in for example, not knowing how to consume in a new role, not being able to consume the best product for their children, or not being able to live up to their ideal expectations of motherhood (Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Voice Group, 2010; Banister *et al.*, 2010; Gram and Pederson, 2013; Ogle *et al.*, 2013; Theodorou and Spyrou, 2013). Thus, as the Voice Group (2010) contends, we should not ignore the problematic aspects of consumption as well especially during transitional periods when people are moving into a new role.

There are also increasing studies that show how consumers try to avoid and dissociate themselves from consumption that are considered ‘not me’ or that they don’t want to be affiliated with (Hogg *et al.*, 2009; Morales and Wu, 2013). These ‘not me’ products and

disassociation with them can also shape identity, as Wilk (1997, p.183) discusses how “non-consumption” can equally be important for showing who one is (see also Gram *et al.*, 2017a). Similarly, voluntary disposition of particular consumption practices can also be an identity work (Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Ahuvia, 2005; Price *et al.*, 2000). For example, Cherrier and Murray (2007) show how consumers can construct and de-construct identity at will through choosing to adopt or dispose off particular consumption practices. Identity for them is thus an ongoing process, always under construction with a “*continuous process of negotiation with different dimensions of the self*” taking place (p.2). Previous studies have highlighted the relationship between consumption practices, objects and identity. In the next section, I will now turn to show how food - as an object and a practice - is an integral part of the self-identity.

2.5 Food and Identity

2.5.1 We Are What We Eat

Food is one of the most basic and most consumed object in one’s life (Belasco, 2008). It is assumed to play an integral part in our self-identity project. Fischler (1988) very meticulously analysed how “*food is central to individual identity, in that any given human individual is constructed, biologically, psychologically and socially by the foods he/she chooses to incorporate*” (p.275). According to him, within such incorporation - we become what we eat - not only physically but also symbolically. He attributes food practices to its symbolic connotations, as “*man feeds not only on proteins, fats, carbohydrates, but also on symbols, myths, fantasies*” (Fischler, 1980, p.937). And since humans are “omnivores” (i.e. we can consume all types of foods), we are able to assign symbolic meanings to a wide variety of foods, which can lead to identification of ourselves with certain types of food, such as particular cuisines from our cultural upbringing (Fischler, 1988, p.276). Bell and Valentine (1997) similarly suggest how food is filled with social, cultural and symbolic meanings such that “*every mouthful, every meal, can tell us something about ourselves, and about our place in the world*” (p.3). They highlight how food related activities such as shopping, cooking, and eating also allows individuals to express their cultural and social values, lifestyle and identity. Thus, at times people’s food activities becomes even more meaningful than the actual food, ingredients and recipes (Bell and Valentine, 1997).

Such symbolic and cultural meanings attributed to food and eating has been widely developed

in anthropology and sociology of food literature. Most notably through the anthropologist, Levi-Strauss, who holds that “*food must not only be good to eat but also good to think*” (in Bell and Valentine, 1997, p.44) – there is increasing interest to understand the symbolic and meaningful aspects of food in people’s lives (Lupton, 1996; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Beardsworth and Keil, 1997; Belasco, 2008; Murcott *et al.*, 2013). Developing from Levi-Strauss, Douglas (1972) tries to decipher codes and meanings in food and eating especially in relation to the meal. She suggests how meals and rules associated with them are filled with symbols, albeit these meanings are derived and passed down from the culture and society we live in. Caplan (1997, p.77) shows how foods are eaten as “markers of difference” as it allows us to show certain aspects of our identity such as social class, age, gender, ethnicity, to others. And in consuming certain foods and avoiding others, people form a “oneness and otherness” with others who eats similarly or differently to them (Fischler, 1988, p.275).

It has been highlighted how food taste and memories associated with food are gained through family, cultural upbringing and society (Lupton, 1996; Belasco, 2008; Visser, 1993). Visser (1993) for example discusses how rituals associated with the dinner meal such as how to prepare the food, how to eat, how to behave on the dinner table, the knowledge and norms of table manners, are often learnt and taught through one’s social and family upbringing through time. Children are socialised into the family meal and taught the rules pertaining to their particular culture from a young age (Visser, 1993). However, with individualisation and the increase of food choice available in the market, research also shows how food consumption is increasingly an individual matter for the symbolic project of the self (Fischler, 1980; Fischler, 1988; Warde, 1997), an aspect I will now turn to.

2.5.2 Food Choice and Individual Identity

In understanding that individuals are active agents who consume what is meaningful for them, food choice then could be one of the most important and most reflexively monitored consumption practice in one’s life as it can play a central theme in one’s identity project (Fischler, 1980; 1988). In fact, as Lindeman and Sirelius (2001) contend, food choice can be a means for people to express their “philosophy of life” (p.183). Many such decisions people make every day of what to eat, what not to eat, how to eat, amount to eat, when to eat, where to eat, all these consumption decisions can be made to symbolize and communicate who one is or who one would like to be (Slater, 1997; Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

Especially with the commercialisation of healthy eating, individuals are increasingly depicted as responsible beings who can make the right food choices to control their own health and their own bodies (Giddens, 1991; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Lupton, 1996). Lupton (1996) argues how such burden of responsibilities are increasingly geared towards women. Women who can display self-control and self-restraint in consuming certain foods over others are able to communicate their self-caring attitudes, freedom and other aspects of their identity such as social class (Lupton, 1996). However, there are also increasing research that show how men are more concerned about their diet and health as well (Sobal, 2005; Sellaeg and Chapman, 2008). Various consumer research have shown how consuming healthy and diet related foods can be a means for constructing and displaying a personal identity, through expressions of meaningful values of self-care, self-love, self-restraint and self-discipline (Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007; Newholm and Shaw, 2007; Connolly and Prothero, 2008; Fox and Ward, 2008; Ristovski-Slijepcevic *et al.*, 2008; Grosplik, 2017).

Fox and Ward (2008) for example analyses how vegetarian diet adoption allows individuals to show personal values of commitment to health and self-care, contributing to development of identity. Grosplik (2017) shows how organic food consumption not only allows for construction and display of one's ethical values but can be a means to display social standing and "cosmopolitan identity" (p.735). Other studies similarly suggest how ethical food consumption forms part of an individual's moral project of the self (Newholm and Shaw, 2007), and consumers often legitimize their consumption through presenting themselves as moral beings who have a responsibility towards others and society (Grauel, 2016). In concurrence with accounts of how values and meanings are formed through culture and society one lives in, studies have shown how meanings are communicated through magazines, advertisements and medical professionals to influence how and what one should consume to have a socially desirable identity (O'Donohoe, 2006; Ristovski-Slijepcevic *et al.*, 2008; Connolly and Prothero, 2008). As O'Donohoe's (2006) discussion on "yummy mummies" illustrate, advertisements intentionally and continuously provide images of how mothers and mothers-to-be ought to consume to be a contemporary mother.

Research has also shown how avoidance of some foods can contribute to identity project. For example, Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007) show how consumption of certain foods can lead to a desired sense of self and avoidance of undesired selves. Choosing to consume or avoid some

foods can symbolise 'me', 'not me' identifications leading to association and disassociation with certain foods that consumers want/don't want to incorporate into their identity project (Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007). Likewise, by choosing to consume various cultural cuisines, people can construct and display their multicultural identity (Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). Bardhi *et al.* (2010) has also analysed how food can be a tool to maintain a sense of boundary and difference with the Other in different environmental settings. Food can also be a tool to aid consumers during transitional periods of their lives (Mehta and Belk, 1991; Wood, 2009; Gram *et al.*, 2015). For example, Wood (2009, p.950) discusses how consumers prefer "comfort" and known foods during transitional periods of their lives. Hogg *et al.* (2004, p.246) discusses how food can aid mothers transition into their new role as "empty nest" mothers. They showed how purchasing food items for their children's new home, and spending lesser time cooking food for themselves can aid mothers transition as their children leave home (Hogg *et al.*, 2004). Similarly Gram *et al.* (2015) discusses how young adults who have left home for University learn to negotiate and adapt their mother's food practices, to create their own individual food practices, which can also aid their out of home transition.

Thus, food practices such as cooking and preparing foods can also contribute to identity work. Bugge (2003) for example conducted a study on Norwegian women's discourses on cooking, and discusses how food activities can be equally important for the construction of a personal identity project as it can allow individual expressions of knowledge, self-care and social differentiation. According to her, knowledge and use of various kitchen appliances, technology, exotic recipes can all be seen as tools to construct and present the self, as these skills and objects can be "symbols" of display to show one's sense of creativity, fun, trendiness, lifestyle, all of which are aspects of identity (*ibid*, p.22). Similar to O'Donohoe (2006), she too contends that these values and symbols of identity are produced and communicated through the media, various food programs, cook books, celebrity cooks, that show visual representations of cooking as a "front stage activity" (Bugge, 2003, p.3). In her study, she showed how some women used gourmet cooking style, knowledge and use of exotic foods as a means to represent their identity as a trendy, aspiring, urban, and distinguished individual. Others used healthy cooking and eating as a representation of their identity as an autonomous, self-disciplined, self-caring, moral individual with a knowledge of health and beauty (Bugge, 2003).

Hence, food is an integral part of one's identity (Fischler, 1988). As Bugge (2003) shows, one

can communicate and display one's identity through food but also food activities such as cooking. These identities could be part of the ongoing identity project that gives one a sense of meaning in life (Giddens, 1991). Thus, people have their "comfort foods" and preferred food activities that is ongoing through time (Wood, 2009, p.950; Gram *et al.*, 2015; Giddens, 1991). However, as the individualisation theorists suggest that with individualisation comes a new kind of social change that is affecting the family life, there are also few studies in family context that show how food can be a means to fulfil personal identity projects within the collective as well (Bell and Valentine, 1997; Valentine; 1999; Bugge and Almås, 2006).

2.5.3 Food Agency and Identity in Family Settings

Valentine (1999) analysed how the "home" can be a site for multiple consumption practices and multiple contesting identities (p.491). She shows how in each household, every member can have different consumption styles and patterns. Hence, "*it is not uncommon for multiple meals to be on a household dinner table each evening: a 'proper meal' for the children, low-calorie meal for one parent who is trying to lose weight, and a high-carbohydrate diet for the athletic parent*" (Bell and Valentine, 1997, p.32). Also, a teenage daughter could decide to become a vegetarian portraying her individual freedom and deviation from the family even though the mother could still identify with being a meat-eater; a husband could portray his adventurous and cosmopolitan spirit through cooking new recipes and ethnic cuisines, while the wife's style of cooking traditional foods could symbolize her dogmatic and working class mentality (Valentine, 1999). Thus, food can be a means to show individuality, differentiation in the household, but also individual meanings, values, desires and emotions. Valentine suggests how vegetarianism in the West is an example of individualized consumption associated with personal lifestyle choice as it is not a norm in families, and especially in family meals, vegetarians might require a different dish altogether (Valentine, 1999).

Other studies have shown how mothers' display of cooking and preparing meals for the family can be a process of personal identity construction as well. Bugge and Almås (2006) for example show how young Norwegian women's discourse on cooking "proper meals" for the family are not necessarily only acts of caring for them but is a strategy to position oneself in the eyes of others and also something they do to construct a desired social identity symbolizing their "womanliness and motherliness" (p.211). They argue that through talks of doing "proper meals" for the family, these women are actively constructing their desired identity to show who

they are, their culture and values of being a “good mother” (Bugge and Almås, 2006, p.207). Thus in a sense they are able to justify their responsibility of being the cook of the family through being able to do something for themselves as well.

More recently, Harman and Cappellini (2014; 2015) showed how mothers’ accounts of preparing lunchboxes for their children can be a tool to construct and display their own identity as a good middle class mother. They analysed how mothers constructed and displayed their “moral” identity of being a “good mother” who is self-sacrificial and cares for the family through preparing lunchboxes for their children, but it can also be a means to display their social class position as a middle-class mother who knows what to feed their children (Harman and Cappellini, 2015, p.775). Studies have also looked at how mothers used family food consumption to make sense of their own identity. For example, Carrigan and Szmigin (2006) showed how mothers use convenience and pre-packaged foods for the family to establish their sense of dual identity as a working woman and caretaker of the family. Similarly, Thompson (1996) showed how baby boomer generation mothers cook and prepare meals for the family to negotiate their own personal conflicting sense of identity as a working woman and a good mother, thus negotiating their individual ideologies of culture and gender norms in a collective atmosphere.

These studies show how family meals can be used as a tool for personal identity construction, even in collective settings.

2.6 Discussion and Gaps

This theme on the symbolic project of the self via consumption has been very influential in understanding how consumers engage with consumer objects and practices to construct and express their personal identity. As highlighted, the consumer culture stream of research contributed to plenty of empirical analysis highlighting the socio-cultural and experiential aspects of consumption to show how consumers consume as a means for creative identity construction and expression, rather than simply for utilitarian and economic purposes (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). I have highlighted the role of food consumption as a means for consumers to construct and display their personal identity, morals and values (Fischler, 1988; Lupton, 1996; Bugge, 2003). Consumers can use loved objects and favourite foods as a tool to resolve identity dilemmas and maintain a sense of self through time (Ahuvia, 2005; Wood,

2009). Even in collective settings, family members can use the meal as a tool to express individual tastes and freedom (Valentine, 1999), social status (Harman and Cappellini, 2014), and personal identity goals (Thompson, 1996).

Although this school of thought was very influential, many have argued that such analysis of consumption is flawed as it gives too much agency to the individual consumer and does not take into account the social restrictions and institutions in which the individual is confined (Gronow and Warde, 2001; Warde, 2005; Atkinson, 2007; Bottero, 2010). For example, scholars have argued that consumers are still confined to economic and financial restrictions, and that the individualization thesis is a Euro-centric and middle class identification (Warde, 1997; Brannen and Nilsen, 2005; Atkinson, 2007; Dawson, 2012). Many scholars have also argued that the bulk of our ordinary consumption is non-reflexive, routinised and habitual, taking place without much conscious thought (Gronow and Warde, 2001; Duncan, 2011; Southerton, 2013). We therefore cannot give discursive accounts for all our actions (Giddens, 1984; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017), but we prefer to follow routines and old habit patterns as it saves time and energy in making decisions all the time (Ilmonen, 2001).

Most prominently in Gronow and Warde's (2001, p.3) book, *Ordinary Consumption*, they argued how researchers have focused mainly on the "spectacular and glamorous" activities of consumption, but ignored the mundane and routinised activity, which constitutes the bulk of our everyday consumption. They contend how this school of thought and its priority to choice, freedom and personal image as an arena for analysing consumption is flawed as it puts too much emphasis on the consumer as a reflexive and reasonable agent, who is consciously aware of every consumption choice as a means to further oneself. However, most of what we consume in our everyday life is indeed habitual and non-reflexive, done without much conscious thought (Gronow and Warde, 2001; Wahlen, 2011). We have a practical and embodied sense of knowledge on how to do various routine practices (Phipps and Ozanne, 2017). For example, as Wahlen (2011) discusses how the everyday domestic tasks of doing the laundry, washing, cleaning is very much routinised and practical, and rarely reflected upon.

From another angle, Miller (1998; 2012) has also contended to show how consumption is never individualised but always embedded in social and personal relationships. In his ethnographic work on mothers' shopping in North London, he showed how consumption can help mothers understand themselves as a loving, devotional, sacrificial being who consumes in relation to

their loved ones (their husband and children) (Miller, 1998). He demonstrates how in routine shopping, mother's individuality is sacrificed as they tend to dominate their shopping as a devotional act. However, he also discusses how objects gain their meanings and in turn agency in the process (Miller, 1987; 1998). I will return to Miller's works later in the next chapter, as his theory is crucial to my discussion. In showing how objects have an agency, other research has also shown how objects can shape and steer consumption and contribute to developing relationships with others as well (Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014; Marchant and O'Donohoe, 2014; Epp and Price, 2009). For example, Chitakunye and Maclaran (2014) shows how an object such as the television can transform, facilitate as well as constrain family relationships and family consumption practices (e.g. the family meal). Similarly, Marchant and O'Donohoe (2014) discuss how a technological device can alter and re-construct how families interact with each other, especially as young adults transition out of home. Epp and Price (2009) also shows how material objects can have agency, transforming family "networks" and creating new identities and meanings in the family experience (p.820).

However, what was also pre-dominantly missing from the identity literature was understanding *how a collective identity was born from a collective perspective*. According to Epp and Price (2008), collective identity is a sense of "we" identity, that is constructed and shaped through sharing consumption practices. Since Beck, Giddens and Bauman emphasize how couple relationships are now resulting in "pure relationships" (Giddens, 1991, p.6), where each member has their own agency and voice within the collective to "do their own thing" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p.3) and further their own individual projects, how is the collective born? How do families build their collective identity together? How does consumption play a role in their construction of a collective identity project? Do they consume as a means to further their own individual projects (Giddens, 1991) like the individualisation theorists predict? Or is consumption also a means to express love and care for others (Miller, 1998)? Moreover, how do we take into account the collective perspective? Do we analyse *each* member of the family separately? Or can we capture their interactions and negotiations, and how this shapes their collective identity? These were the questions I initially set out to answer. I will highlight here that I use the context of newly cohabited couples to understand such phenomena, but I will address my context later in Chapter IV.

Thus, as Warde (2016; 2017) argued, the identity as a project school of thought has received numerous criticisms, due to the fact that it is very individualised. The individual actor – and

associated meanings, values, beliefs, attitudes of the actor – was the focal unit of analysis. And most of the analysis were based on the assumption that actors can deduce what is meaningful for them through recalling thoughts, and researchers are able to read a person's identity through interpreting what they say and how they think of their own beings (Warde, 2016). Thus, he argues that this type of analysis provides an incomplete picture of understanding identity and consumption as it obscures the power of material objects, surroundings and *significant others* [my emphasis] in people's lives. In order to understand consumption and identity from a more collective and dynamic perspective, turning attention to practices as units of analysis can serve as an alternative approach.

Chapter III

Identity from Practice

3.1 Introduction: Moving from the Actor to the Practice

Since the past decade or so, there has been a rising research theme that analyses consumption as mundane practices of everyday life (Warde, 2017; Watson and Shove, 2008). Halkier *et al.* (2017) called this the “practice turn” (p.5). According to them, theoretically there is an upsurge in looking at consumption through the lens of practice theory, whereas, empirically there is an upsurge in looking at routine and mundane consumption (Halkier *et al.*, 2017). A highlight of this turn is that researchers do not focus on the individual consumer as the unit of analysis, but take practices as units of analysis, where consumption is embedded and performed (Warde, 2005; 2016; 2017).

According to Schatzki (2016), practice analysis serves a “flat ontology” (p.46). He defines ontology as “*accounts of, or ideas about, the fundamental nature of social life*” (p. 44). According to him, analysing practices can provide a “flat” lens to understand social phenomena, as it does not emphasize the individual but gives equal emphasis to all elements involved in the practice (human and non-human) (see also Warde, 2017). Halkier and Jensen (2011) also suggests that analysis of practice allows researchers to analyse “ways of doing [...] and consuming” in everyday life (p.115). Being inspired from such an approach, I thus wanted to shift my focus from analysing the individual actor (analysing what and why people consume) to analysing their practices (analysing how consumption is performed) in order to not only analyse what people say, but also their doings to understand their consumption and identity (Epp and Price, 2008; Molander, 2011). As in order to understand how collective identity is formed from a collective perspective, I believe turning one’s attention from the actor to the practice can provide a more dynamic, balanced and impartial approach, taking into account all the elements (perspectives of both actors and materials) involved in the practice.

Although I have to highlight here that most practice theorists are not concerned with identity, but argue that actors function through an unintentional and “embodied sense of how to behave”

(Bottero, 2010, p.4). And as the “practice turn” emerged as a critical response to the identity school of thought that focused on individual agents (Halkier *et al.* 2017, p.5), scholars adopting practice theory tried to stay away from notions of identity as it can be seen as emphasizing the individual (Bottero, 2010; 2015). However, as I will show in this chapter there are few studies that discuss how identity can emerge from doing practices (Bottero, 2010; Schatzki, 2001). I will also show how Miller’s (1987) dialectical theory of thesis-antithesis and synthesis can be loosely grounded in practice approach and inform identity emergence from consumption, as Miller discusses identity as a consequence of engaging in the material world.

Thus, in this chapter, I will first review literature on practice theory and its application in consumption studies. I will then discuss my approach to analyze practices and its relation to identity using Bottero’s (2010; 2015) and Miller’s (1987; 2010) theories. I will then turn to discuss existing literature on collective practices and identity, through the lens of family consumption literature. I will discuss how the meal practice is especially relevant to study family. The chapter will gradually unpack these concepts to inform my approach to understanding collective practices and collective identity in the context of newly cohabited couples.

3.2 Practice

3.2.1 Theories of Practice

Practice theory emerged as a critical reception to the research body that focused on consumption as tools in symbolic display of the self which dominated the discourse on consumption since the 1990’s (Warde, 2005). It created a platform for researchers to shift their attention to mundane and routinised consumption (Molander, 2011). According to Warde *et al.* (2017), practice theory emerged from earlier works of Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1990), however, was developed later by Reckwitz (2002a, b), Schatzki *et al.* (2001) and more recently Shove *et al.* (2012). To date, there is still a very contested definition of practices and what it entails (Schatzki, 2016). But, their central joining feature is that, they do not engage in “individualism” (Warde, 2014, p.297), i.e. they do not emphasize the individual actor as the active decision maker in an activity nor does it emphasize their social structure, but focus on the dynamics of the practice itself (Warde, 2016; Warde *et al.*, 2017; Halkier *et al.*, 2017; Halkier and Jensen, 2011).

Practices have been described as co-constituents of various elements interacting with one another (Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002a; Warde, 2005; Shove *et al.*, 2012). According to Schatzki (2001), practices constitutes a set of “*doings and sayings*” (bodily activities) organized and in coordination with sets of “*shared understandings, rules (norms) and teleoaffective structures (emotions, purposes, ends)*” of the human mind (mental activities) along with arrangements of the non-human entities that make up the practice (p.53). He discusses how these elements are co-dependent and equally important for a practice to be performed. As Molander and Hartmann (2018) explains, during a practice performance, these elements that comprise the practice comes together to create “a whole in the form of a specific outcome” (p.4). Practitioners are seen as “carriers” of the elements in the practice, who can “carry” and “carry out” the practice performance (Reckwitz, 2002a, p.256). Thus, unlike other theories that aims to understand human action through meanings derived from the actor, practice theorists argue that elements such as meanings, understandings, norms, are part of practice. And in order to understand how a practice is performed, one needs to see all the various elements involved in the practice (Molander and Hartmann, 2018; Schatzki, 2001).

Reckwitz (2002a; 2002b) makes this point very clear. In giving as much importance to the material and human aspects of practices, he discusses how material resources and human bodies are comparable, as they both need the mental qualities of the individual to “be practiced” (Reckwitz, 2002b, p.212). As material elements of the practice, objects need to be “interpreted” and “handled” in certain ways, bodies also need to be organized in certain ways to be effective (*ibid*, p.210). But both of these require mental qualities of the individual to interpret, organize and arrange themselves into a certain way to function for the specific practice. Thus: “*Bodies and artefacts are [both] sites of understanding, in the form of materialized understanding*” (*ibid*, p.212). One can understand all the mental qualities of the mind through its manifestations at the physical bodily level. For example, know-hows, skills, emotions, feelings, desires can be developed and expressed through its materialization and manifestation at the bodily level. Similarly, one can understand such mental qualities through its materialization in artefacts and resources. Like Schatzki, he also attributes practices as constituting of various elements: “*forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.*” (Reckwitz, 2002a, p.250).

Shove *et al.* (2012), taking Reckwitz and Schatzki's definitions further, simplifies practice into three main elements: those of "*Competences, Meanings and Materials*" (p.14). According to them, *competence* includes "skills, know-how and technique", *meanings* includes "symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations", whereas *materials* include "things, technologies, tangible entities and the stuff of which objects are made" (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.14). In conjunction with other practice theorists, Shove and colleagues also argues that these elements are interconnected and have a relationship to each other (Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Watson and Shove, 2008). They highlight how practices can only be performed smoothly when these elements come together and when there is successful "linkage" between the elements (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.24). Thus, in order for a practice to exist and thrive, elements need to be in harmony with each other. However, elements can have a "life of its own" (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.44), as they have been in many other practices in other times and space throughout history; But in the moment of doing, these elements join together for the specific practice to be performed (Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Shove *et al.*, 2012).

As Molander (2011) shows the practice of cooking for example, requires the performance of social actors – their mental and bodily capabilities – including emotions, norms, techniques, bodily skills, alongside the various ingredients, brands, space, and material aspects needed for the practice. All of these elements are as necessary and need to be in sync to have a successful practice performance. However, these elements have a history of its own as they have been developed through time and generations (Schatzki, 2010; Shove *et al.*, 2012). Molander and Hartmann (2018) for example discusses how emotions have a social characteristic, especially emotions relating to the doing of "good mothering" (p.378). But in engaging in the practice, they discuss how individuals can also "assess" and refine emotions to a desired emotional outcome in the performance (Molander and Hartmann, 2018, p.383). Thus, as Warde (2005) argues although elements have a social characteristic, each practitioner can carry slightly different variations of the elements, making each practice performance slightly different.

In analyzing the "linkages" between elements though, Shove and colleagues contend that changing, removing or adding any one of these elements of the practice will result in adaptation, disappearance or emergence of the practice altogether (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.24; Shove and Pantzar, 2005). As "*practices change when new elements are introduced or when existing elements are combined in new ways*" (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.120). Analysis of elements is thus important to understand how practices are created or evolved over time.

My study adopts Shove *et al.*'s (2012) definition of practice, as their tri-elemental approach seemed more applicable to analyze practices at a collective level. However, in understanding the other versions of practice theory, I expand Shove and colleagues' definition of these elements further by including bodily competences, norms, attitudes and material spaces in the breakdown of their definitions. In my understanding, Competences include: *techniques, skills including embodied and non-embodied skills, knowledge (e.g. of brands) in consumption.* Meanings include: *attitudes, norms, emotions, values, aspirations and ideals in consumption.* Materials include: *objects (tangible and non-tangible) and space in consumption.* As will be shown in sections 3.4 and 3.5, I use these elements of practice to analyze the practice of the everyday meal (Cappellini *et al.*, 2016) in order to understand how the meal is co-performed in the context of newly cohabited couples. I will explain this application when put in context in the later section of this chapter. For now, I focus on reviewing how practice theory has been applied to consumption studies, and its application on understanding identity.

3.2.2 Consumption as a Practice

In recent years, there is increasing application of practice theory to analyze consumption. Warde (2005) was one of the first scholars who developed this application. According to him, almost all practices consists of and require consumption to be performed. And as such, "*consumption is not itself a practice, but is, rather, a moment in almost every practice*" (Warde, 2005, p.137). For example, the practice of making a meal entails consumption on various fronts: shopping for the ingredients, using and transforming the ingredients into a meal, eating of the meal – all of which requires materials, competences and meanings – and all are practices where consumption takes place (Warde, 2017). Warde followed the same line of thinking as Reckwitz, Schatzki and Shove, who emphasized on looking at the "*performative character of social life*" to understand practice development (Halkier and Jensen, 2011, p.106). Thus, according to Warde, practices – in its emphasis on understanding the doing rather than the doer– can reveal apparent systems of consumption and the complexity and messiness involved in human action, hence can be very useful for analyzing consumption (Warde, 2005; 2014; 2016). Though there is still an active debate on how best to apply practice theory to study consumption, Halkier and Jensen (2011) suggest we can focus on "*ways of consuming*" and how consumption is a continuously changing phenomena situated within practices of everyday life (p.105).

Various empirical research in sociology of consumption and consumer culture have applied practice theory to study consumption. It has been applied in various consumption sectors such as music consumption (Magaudda, 2011), sports consumption (Woermann and Rokka, 2015), waste disposal (Evans, 2012), craft consumption (Watson and Shove, 2008) and sustainable consumption (Shove, 2004; Hargreaves, 2011; Gram-Hanssen, 2011). In the area of food consumption, it has also been applied to the study of eating (Warde, 2016), food preparation (Halkier, 2009; Julier, 2016), as well as performance with cooking gadgets (Truninger, 2011) and freezing practices (Hand and Shove, 2007). These studies focused mainly on the mundane, routinized and practical activities of consumption (Gronow and Warde, 2001) and how researchers need to de-emphasize the human actor and give as much importance to other elements involved in the practice. Hargreaves (2011) for example showed how practice theory can allow to understand sustainable consumption and behavior change from a more holistic approach.

Studies have also shown how elements play a key role in development of practices, as change in any one element can result in adaption, disposal or creation of a new practice altogether (Shove *et al.*, 2012). Woermann and Rokka (2015) for example in their study on “timeflow” in skiing practices, looked at how mis-alignments between elements in the practice can cause a disruption in performing the practice as it affects the “temporal experiences” in consuming (p.1505). They showed how elements within a practice can influence and shape the practice experience, such that when all elements are in sync there is a stable performance, but if any one element “demands attention” or “sticks out” it can result in stressful performance altogether (p.1499). Similarly, Phipps and Ozanne (2017) shows how during events like natural droughts, ordinary domestic consumption practices such as water consumption can become disrupted; and how consumers adjust to these disruptions through strategies of changing, adjusting, adding or removing one or more elements in the practice. For example, they showed that consumers at times integrate new elements such as new meanings of hygiene, new material resources to collect water; or at times change existing elements such as ways of washing with less soap, less flushing frequency, so on – in order to “re-align” their mundane practice and re-establish their sense of routine (Phipps and Ozanne, 2017, p.376). But they discussed how adding, removing, changing and adjusting elements can result in creating new practices altogether.

Shove and Pantzar (2005) in their study on Nordic walking also showed how new practices emerge when there is a synthesis of new meanings, competences and/or artefacts in the practice. They discuss how new meanings of fun, health and ordinariness as well as new skills of “walking with sticks” (*ibid*, p.47) helped Nordic walking emerge and spread in Finland, but such meanings may not be adopted in another context. Other studies like Magaudda (2011) and Truninger (2016) discuss how new elements such as material objects can be integrated into an existing practice, causing the practice to change over time. For example, Magaudda (2011) shows how the iPod can be integrated into existing music consumption practices through consumers’ appropriation of new symbolic meanings and new competences into performing with the object. In all these studies, consumption meanings and competences are seen as embodied within humans and embedded in the practical use of things (Warde, 2014).

3.3 Practice and Identity

Most scholars applying practice theory do not address identity, but focus more on the practical aspects of consumption activities such as temporality (Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Mylan and Southerton, 2018), routines (Southerton, 2013; Shove *et al.*, 2009) and embodied taste (Arsel and Bean, 2012). Perhaps this is because the concept of identity have been very much linked to the identity project school of thought (Bottero, 2010), that scholars adopting practice theory do not want to be associated with as it can be seen as emphasizing on the individual and thus contested as not applying the theory properly. However, as Schatzki (2001) contends, practices, as a site where activity takes place and where human and material entities co-exist, can be a place where meanings and identities, of actors and things, are manifested.

Thus, I am inspired by practice theory to analyze how engagement in consumption practices can allow identities and meanings, of the actors and materials, to emerge. In doing so, I wanted to shift my focus from analyzing the actors (what and why they consume), to analyze their practice (how they consume) in order to understand materialization and manifestations of identities. According to Schatzki *et al.* (2001), analysis of practice can help uncover complex phenomena such as deep meanings, norms, agency, power, ethics, gender, reason, and “nature of subjectivity” underlying human behavior (p.13). Theoretical issues of “individual and collective identity”, meanings and knowledge can be understood through practices (Schatzki, 2007, p.98). Practices are also readily observable (Reckwitz, 2002a) and provides a more

balanced approach to understanding such phenomena (Schatzki, 2016). Hence, I believe analyzing practices to understand emergence of identities can be very fruitful.

3.3.1 Identity Emerging Through Practices

According to Schatzki (2001), “*as elements of the arrangement, these entities also possess identities (who someone is) or meanings (what something is). For something’s meaning/identity is a function of its relations, just as conversely its relations are a function of its meaning/identity*” (p.43). What he implies is, both meanings and identities of the elements (human and non-human actors) involved in the practice emerge through their related engagements in the practice. It also depends on how the practice is organized and how the relations between elements are formed, that the meanings/identities of these elements are manifested. As he says, “*being [identity] also springs from contexts in which arrangement exists*” (Schatzki, 2001, p.43).

Drawing from Schatzki (2001), Bottero (2010; 2015) was one of the few scholars who applied practice theory to understand identity. Using the practice of tracing family history (through archival research) as a context, she analyzed how identity can emerge through the conduct and organization of such practices. According to her, it is the engagement in a practice that shapes the desires, emotions, values and goals for the practitioner performing the practice. Through doing a practice, the practitioner adopts the norms, competences and meanings inherent to that practice. “*Identity is [thus] carried within and steered by social practices*” (Bottero, 2015, p.535). She shows how people who engage in practices of tracing family history are engaging in identity-work through performing particular tasks and using particular resources of the practice. And thus, “*identity-work emerges as a consequence of [engaging in] the practice*” and not through the result of one’s choosing per se (Bottero, 2015, p.552, my emphasis).

However, Bottero (2010) also discusses how practice theorists normally think of an actor’s identity in a practice performance in “dispositional terms”, which is based on a tacit “embodied nature” (p.4). According to most practice theorists, actors function in a practice through an “embodied sense of [knowing] how to behave” (*ibid*, p.4). Schatzki (2001) for example discusses such engrained aspects of identity which is shaped by performance in a practices as “practical understandings” (p.50). According to him, such understandings help ascertain what makes sense for people to do. He compares this sensibility to Bourdieu’s (1990) *habitus* and

Giddens's (1984) *practical consciousness*, where there is a consensus that there is an embodied, tacit and unarticulated knowledge that governs human activity (Schatzki, 2001; Bottero, 2010). Such dispositional aspects of identity structures practical activity, but it is gained through engagement in social practices through time (Bottero, 2010).

3.3.2 Miller's Dialectical Materiality Theory of Thesis-Antithesis and Synthesis

Miller (1987; 1998; 2005; 2010; 2012) similarly gains insight into understanding human identity through his in-depth ethnographic studies. Though he takes a different theoretical approach using Hegel's dialectics as a framework, his conceptualization on how identities emerge as a consequence of engagement with the material world can be loosely identified with a practice approach. Using Hegel's theory of dialectics, Miller (1987; 1998) discussed how subjects and objects have a dialectic relationship to each other as one co-creates the other. A dialectic, according to him, is a way of seeing how contradictory and paradoxical natures interact with each other, which leads to new forms of understanding the world (Miller, 2001). It consists of a thesis (the subject and his world), an antithesis (the object and material world), and when these two contradictory life worlds interact with each other (objectification process), it produces a synthesis (a subject-object co-creation) (Miller, 1987; 2001). Figure 1 shows my illustration of Miller's theory of dialectical materiality.

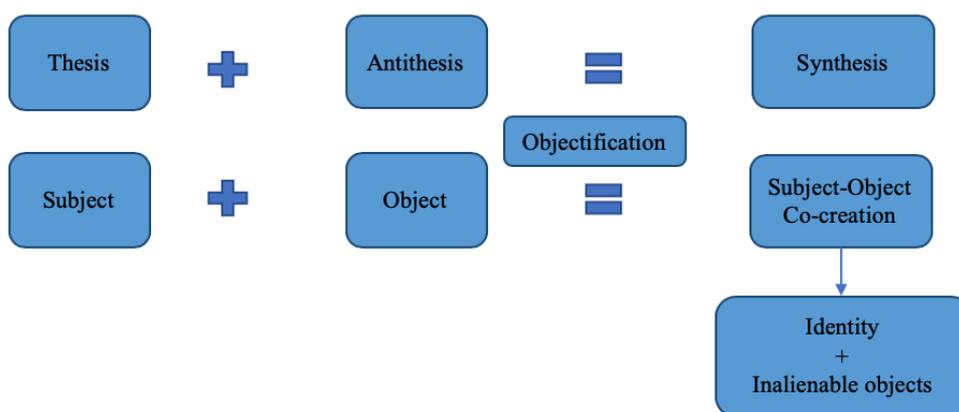


Figure 1: Miller's theory of dialectical materiality

Through his ethnographic works of mothers shopping in North London, Miller (1998) discusses how human subjects [in Miller *et al.* (1998), he uses the word identity] can only

emerge through the process of “objectification” with the object world (p.151). As it is only through engagement and submersion with the material world they live in such as through shopping for others, that mothers can come to understand themselves and form their identity as a loving, devotional mother. The subject (the mother) cannot constitute itself outside of its material counterpart (the object), as he argues that only through materiality can we “*know who we are and become what we are*” (Miller, 2005, p.8). This is because materiality allows new meanings to emerge, which plays a role in development of the subject. Miller thus discusses consumption as a process of objectification in the Hegelian sense - a process requiring labor, time, effort, resources to be performed (Miller, 1987; 1998; 2010). It is through consumption in everyday life that people can find, re-appropriate and develop their identity. As he puts it: “*It is only through the development of subject-object relations that the subject as such comes to be constituted*” (Miller, 1987, p.70). Identity thus is the synthesis that results from the subject-object interaction through time, as I illustrated in the figure above.

However Miller argues that this process of subject-object (thesis-antithesis) interaction is dialectical in the sense that objectification (consumption) not only produces the subject, but objects also gain meanings, relevance and inalienable position in the process (Miller, 1987). He gives the example of how mass commodities becomes inalienable possessions through this process of objectification. But as engagement with material object becomes the basis through which one can appropriate and develop oneself, Miller (1987) argues it can paradoxically represent the person altogether. Thus as the figure above illustrates, the synthesis results in both subject-object co-creation, which I explained as identity plus inalienable objects.

Miller further argues that consumption is always in relation to others, as “*following the initial creation of subject-object creations [...], there arises an increasing awareness of the existence of other subjects, and therefore the possibility of other values and social relations of the world*” (Miller, 1987, p.70-71). Thus, as he discussed mothers form their identity as a loving, caring human being who consumes in relation to their loved ones through their engagement in the material world (through shopping for others) (Miller, 1998). Engagement in shopping for others allows the mother to develop and express their meaningful values such as love and care for others. Miller also sees this process as dialectical in the sense that as shopping becomes the means through which mothers develop their love and connection with others, it can gain its significance and paradoxically become the mode of realizing that love and connection altogether (Miller, 1998). Thus “shopping as a practice of obtaining, using and imagining

goods” can constitute and refer to relationships altogether, as it is a means of objectification that allows one to have an imagination and desire of the other in mind (Miller, 1998, p.141). In sum, the subject and object is thus in a dialectic material interaction, where one constitutes and co-creates the other (Miller, 1987). The synthesis is the identity (and materiality) that emerges from this process of interaction.

Albeit Miller’s studies have been very influential (and inspirational) for me to understand how identities emerge through consumption and engagement with the material world, he has mainly analyzed the process from a uni-lateral perspective. His emphasis on mothers’ consumption and their identity as a loving, caring, devotional mother has resulted in a dominant view of understanding consumption and care mainly from one (mothering) perspective. Although he highlights how our consumption is often embedded in social relationships and consumption is rarely performed in isolation, as we always consume with the imagination of the other in mind (Miller, 1998), he did not analyze the process of subject-object-subject co-creation from the perspectives of more than one actor. However, what happens when two or more actors co-perform the same practice together? As I have argued in the previous chapter, how can we account for the collective identity emergence? Many a times people not only do shopping with an imagination of the other in mind (Miller, 1998), but often engage in the practice together. Bottero’s (2010) study on identity emergence through the lens of single practitioners is also based on an individual level of studying identity.

Moreover, Miller also does not show ‘how’ the process of synthesis is achieved over time. He has mainly focused on the reflexive accounts of the mothers, and did not analyze how consumption is performed in action. He therefore did not show how identity of the subject emerge and meanings in material practices emerge through performances and time. And as practice theory reminds us, subjects are carriers of meanings and competences in a practice (Reckwitz, 2002a; Warde, 2005). When subjects engage in a consumption practice, they are carrying out the coordination of competences, meanings along the material configurations in the performance (Warde, 2005; Shove *et al.*, 2012). Miller has focused mainly on material objects and materialization of meanings in shopping. His emphasis on subject-object interaction and how this lead to transformation of commodities to inalienable possessions did not consider other elements involved in the practice. But as practices have been defined as co-constituents between various elements including meanings, competences and materials interacting with each other (Shove *et al.*, 2012), it is perhaps more fruitful to analyze the

process of engagement in consumption as involving interactions between these elements. In analyzing practice as a set of elements, I believe it can give a more dynamic and collective approach to understand the process of synthesis through time.

Especially when one is studying how two subjects interact in the material world together, analysis of their co-engagements in consumption can lead to understanding how collective identity emerges from a more collective perspective. In order to understand how collective identity and collective practices have been studied, I take inspiration from existing literature on family consumption and family identity to shape my approach. According to Epp and Price (2008), collective identity is an aspect of family identity, as each family houses various identities which can constitute the “individual, relational and collective” [identity] (p.51). And since I study newly cohabiting couples, which I define as couples that have newly settled to live together, I regard the couple household as a family household. It is a family of two. Couples in my study themselves regard their household as akin to family, as they do their collective practices and identities as they would to start a family. I also take the definition of cohabiting couples from the Office of National Statistics as a family type, as according to ONS (2017) the cohabiting couple household is the second largest family type in the UK. I therefore henceforth use the term family and collective loosely and interchangeably, as the couple household does their family of two through doing the collective. I will now review literature on family practices, identity and routines, which have been very inspirational in shaping my approach to analyse the couple household, before turning to discuss my context.

3.3.3 Family Practices and Identity

Although not using a practice theory approach, research in family studies have similarly developed understanding of family identities through arguing that we need to focus on analysing practices that families engage in. Morgan (2011) for example contemplated how families should be analysed in terms of their practices, which he defines as a “set of activities” they do together routinely as a family, to understand how families realize themselves as a family (p.6). Coming from an understanding of individualization in modern families, he contends that families are always changing and conceptual understanding of what constitutes my family for an individual is always changing as well. Hence, understanding families as traditional belonging members are no longer suitable for the modern and always changing family (Morgan 1996). He suggests one need to look at the practices, family practices, to fully

understand how members participate and perform activities together, leading to realization of themselves as part of the family. In other words, families should be understood through *doing family* things rather asking them their thoughts about being a family (Morgan, 1996; 2011).

Developing from Morgan (1996), Finch (2007) however suggest that we need to look at family “display” along with their “doings” (p.65). Display, according to her, legitimizes family relationships and confirms to the family that their relationship is meaningful and it’s working. For her, display is more prominent in non-conventional family forms (such as new families, homosexual families or single parent families), as they have a greater need for societal sanctions. She argues how these families can be considered “families of choice” where they have to actively negotiate their family practice, so as to create more meaningful interactions (Finch, 2007, p. 71).

Taking the above understandings of family practices further, within consumer research Epp and Price (2008) provided a framework for analysing family as a product of shared practices. According to them, families constitute “*a bundle of identities*” that are constructed, negotiated and enacted through “*complementary and competing consumption practices*” (*ibid*, p.50). They suggest how each family has three levels of identities interplaying with each other: 1. Collective identity of the family, 2. Relational identity of various groups (e.g. between siblings, spouses, parent-child), and 3. Individual identity of each family member. And through everyday consumption practices, where members engage in performances of doing family, these various levels of identities emerge and are managed (Epp and Price, 2008). For example, they suggest how collective “we” identity can be constructed and enacted through practices of sharing the meal and eating together; Relational identity can be constructed through mother-daughter shopping trip, or husband-wife dinner date; Whereas, multiple individual identities can be managed through practices of eating different dishes in a family meal to suit individual tastes. Hence, they suggest researchers need to look at consumption practices or *doings* of the family in order to gain a deeper insight into family identities. Their point of departure is that family is not simply a “*construct that resides in the minds of individuals but is co-constructed in action*” (Epp and Price, 2008, p.52).

According to Southerton (2013), repeating practices over time leads to routine. Routines have been shown to provide meanings to families (Rania *et al.*, 2015), which could most potentially play a role in strengthening the family identity and relationships (Morgan, 2011). I will now

turn to discuss this concept of routines in families.

3.3.4 Family Routines

One of the key characteristics of practice is that it is routinised. Warde (2014) highlights how practices are regularly repeated performances, routinised activities, arising from “embodied and embedded” competences which have been acquired through time and experience (p.292). There are many definitions of routines within practice theory, but I take Barnes (2001) conceptualisation of routines as “*things people learn by repetition so that they can do them smoothly, easily and competently*” (p.23). Routines allows practices to be performed without much conscious thought (Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). They are “*performances of stable practices*” (Southerton, 2013, p.337). Many practice theorists have argued that routines are meaningful, as it gives order, security and a sense of stability in one’s lives (O’Dell, 2009; Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). It helps people achieve normality, especially during transitional periods of their lives (Wilk, 2009; Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). Wilk (2009) highlights how repeating practices over a period of time allows the body to internalise the practice, and so “the mind can move on to other things” (p.148), allowing people to relax, save time and energy in making conscious decisions all the time. Repeating performances of practice over a period of time also reproduces the practice as “stable entities” and these are often described as routines (Southerton, 2013, p.339).

Wahlen (2011) shows how almost all domestic consumption practices are routinised. Using time diary data, he showed how everyday practices at home are repeated and rarely reflected upon, as it gives structure to everyday life. Warde (2014) also discusses how domestic environments, as a site of comfort and familiarity, encourages routines and habits to be formed. Routines have been shown to be very beneficial to families especially during transitional periods of their lives. For example, Rania *et al.* (2015) in their study comparing Italian and Ecuadorian immigrant mothers’ routines in Italy, shows how routines helped the families adapt to change in their life cycle (e.g. migration, arrival of children), as it helps them achieve normality and create new meanings of the family during these transitional periods. They suggest how routines are unique to each family and reflect the family’s norms, values and goals (Rania *et al.*, 2015). Other studies have also highlighted how routines help families achieve a sense of stability, order, normality in their lives (Fiese *et al.*, 2006; Budescu and Taylor, 2013).

Although the above studies highlight how routines are beneficial to the family and it helps to understand family norms and meanings, they are rarely analysed as a shared practice co-performance, i.e. analysing routines from a collective perspective. And since routines are described as stable repeated practices (Southerton, 2013), how we can understand the emergence of a *new* practice that has never existed before? And can and if so how does this lead to collective identity formation? Ehn and Löfgren (2009) highlights how in a new couple relationship, when “my normal routine encounter your strange habits” (p.105), routines that are never thought about comes into the forefront of consciousness to be evaluated judged and compared to the other persons’. As each person brings with them their own set of routines (including meanings, values, norms, competences, knowledge, skills and use of things) into the collective, how do they co-construct their collective routine? They may both engage in a new ritual activity together but how does this become engrained into the unconscious i.e. routinized? Albeit not concerning identity, Ehn and Löfgren (2009) highlight how more work needs to be done to understand emergence of such collective routine phenomena, but they did not delve deeper into the area.

3.4 Shared Routines and Collective Identity

As mentioned, shared practices as a collective activity has rarely been analysed in practice theory. Although most practice theorists acknowledge the idea that practices are shared and collective in nature (Southerton, 2013), most empirical research have focused mainly on the experience of single practitioners who perform an inherently shared social practice (Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017). Barnes (2001) however, argued that shared practices can be understood as the collective “*accomplishments of competent members of the collective*” (p.24). In sharing a collective accomplishment of practice, actors are not passive beings but actively engage in sharing thoughts, values and abilities in co-performance. As he puts it: “*Shared practices are the accomplishments of competent members of collectives. These are accomplishments readily achieved by, and routinely to be expected of members acting together, but they nonetheless have to be generated on every occasion, by agents concerned all the time to retain coordination and alignment with each other in order to bring them about*” (Barnes, 2001, p.24-25). Hence, Barnes (2001) suggests shared practices as a collective activity requires continuous mutual alignment and coordination of bodies, meanings, knowledge and use of things. Members have to routinely align such elements in order to have a collective accomplishment of practice. For ease of convenience, I will henceforth refer to shared practices

(as a collective activity that entails co-performance) simply as ‘collective practices’.

Being very much inspired by theories of practice (Schatzki, 2001; Barnes, 2001; Warde, 2005; Bottero, 2010; Shove *et al.*, 2012; Southerton, 2013) along with literature on family practice and routines (Epp and Price, 2008; Wilk, 2009; Ehn and Löfgren, 2009; Morgan, 2011; Southerton, 2013), I will analyse how two members of a family co-perform and co-engage in a consumption practice together. I will look at shared practices as a collective performance to understand identities of those engaged within it. As being inspired from Miller’s materiality theory (1987; 2010; 2013) on how identity emerges through engaging in practices; I will analyse how collective identities can emerge from doing collective accomplishments of consumption practices (Barnes, 2001) over time. Collective identity is thus approached as a sense of sharing meanings (Cappellini and Parsons, 2012a), but also competences, materiality, and the doings of everyday life. In analysing collective identity, I aim to take a more collective perspective, taking into account the perspectives of both actors and their interactions involved in the practice. Figure 2 below illustrates my preliminary theoretical model for analysing identity emergence through co-performing practices over time.

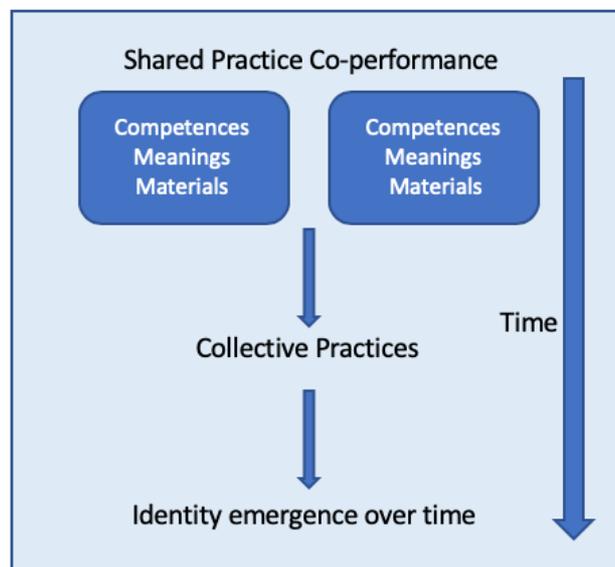


Figure 2: Preliminary model of shared practice co-performance

The figure above illustrates my preliminary model of actors’ co-engagements in practice co-performance over time. The boxes represent the elements involved in a practice as practices are co-performed. As mentioned, I will adopt Shove *et al.*’s (2012) version of practices as comprising of three elements: “Meanings, Competences and Materials” (p.14). I will analyse

how these elements are interacting with one another at the collective level over time, hence the two boxes show the two sets of elements carried within both actors. I will look at how meanings such as attitudes, morals, aspirations, values, emotions in consumption are co-performed; how competences such as techniques, bodily skills, knowledge, as well as how materiality are co-performed at the collective level. The arrow on the right signifies the temporal dimension, as I analyse the process of co-performance over time. But since I'm concerned with collective practice, I will look at how these elements can become mutually aligned (Barnes, 2001) and shared at the collective level. I will analyse if and how elements and their interactions play a role in the collective practice emergence. And in understanding how the collective practice is born and how actors co-engage in the practice together, I will analyse how collective identity can emerge over time. Although having a preliminary framework provides a useful layout to structure my thought process, in reality it doesn't follow such a neat or fixed timeline. But in capturing the processes through time I was able to capture the complexity and nuances emerging from such interactions and processes.

3.5 Practice of the Everyday Meal

As I have suggested that I will be analyzing practice co-performances to understand how collective practices and in turn collective identities emerge, it is now time to put my practice analysis in context.

As mentioned, I will analyze practices as comprising of “*Meanings, Competences and Materials*” (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.14). I use this definition of practice to analyze the meal as a set of consumption practices involving “*acquisition, appropriation, appreciation, and disposal*” (Marshall *et al.*, 2016, p.6) in order to understand how the collective meal is co-constructed, co-negotiated and co-performed in newly cohabited couples. For each of these practices, we can analyze how elements in the practice (competences, symbolic meanings and materials) are exchanged, communicated, negotiated and become shared between the practitioners. Before I elaborate on my approach further, I first have to review literature on the meal and its significance for family identity, especially new families.

3.5.1 The Meal as an Emblem of Family Identity

The meal is an important family practice. Its importance for the reproduction of family identities and relationships have been highlighted time and again (Charles and Kerr, 1988; Devault, 1991; Moisio *et al.*, 2004; Epp and Price, 2008; Cappellini and Parsons, 2012a; Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014). According to Yates and Warde (2015), the meal refers to and includes: “*both to foods that are ingested and to the encompassing social arrangements of an event involving locations, times and companions*” (p.299). It is both an object and a practice of consumption.

Sharing the meal together as a family has mostly been connoted with bonding, sharing love, care, intimacy and other affectionate emotions as well as transference of collective norms and rituals (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991; Moisio *et al.*, 2004; Brannen *et al.*, 2013; Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014; Yates and Warde, 2015). As Warde (2016) highlighted, the meal can be an activity where relationships are formed, maintained, communicated and where social and cultural reproduction takes place. It can be considered a very precious event in many societies as it has personal, cultural as well as social significance (also Warde and Martens, 2000). Mealtimes and meal etiquettes can reveal important rituals of the family (Fox, 2003). Marshall (2005) highlights the distinction between meal rituals and routines. Rituals involve the highly symbolic nature of eating and tends to be enacted in more special occasions, for example in a formal family dinner or Thanksgiving (Marshall, 2005; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). In a ritualized meal the aesthetics, customs, sequence and content of the meal is very important (Marshall, 2005).

However as Marshall (2005) discusses most of our everyday eating and meal patterns is highly routinized; we rarely reflect upon our mundane meal and meal related activities. For example we can rarely remember what we ate a couple of days ago or what we bought in our last grocery shopping. But as discussed routines are also highly meaningful as it provides a sense of security and normality to people’s lives (Wilk, 2009; Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). Especially within families, people often attach meanings to mundane and routine aspects of eating together (Marshall, 2005). The everyday family meal can thus be a site where families enact and routinely transfer meanings, symbols, norms, knowledge, values of the family to each other (Warde, 2016; Cappellini *et al.*, 2016; Marshall, 2005). However, in today’s times, we cannot ignore how much the meal is interlinked with marketplace, institutions and brands (Marshall

et al., 2016). As Cappellini *et al.* (2016) discuss how markets and marketplace resources provides ideals, conventions, norms, which can play a crucial role in influencing and shaping how people engage in planning, preparing, eating, sharing and doing their everyday meals.

Within domestic spaces, studies have shown how consuming everyday family meals are an important aspect of doing family (Marshall, 2005; Cappellini and Parsons, 2012a). The importance of the meal in creating and reproducing family identity has been studied time and again in various contexts (Cappellini and Parsons, 2012b; Edirisingha *et al.*, 2015; Davis *et al.*, 2016; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). Cappellini and Parsons (2012b) for example show how families are called to take part in collective sharing of thrift responsibilities during everyday dinners. And in doing so, the family as a whole can materialise their bonds to each other, their meanings, values, and collective identities through doing the family meal together (Cappellini and Parsons, 2012a). Studies have also shown how material objects can play a key role in shaping family practices, identities and relationships. Chitakunye and Maclaran (2014) for example discuss how the television can play a role in facilitating and altering family relationships and family identity during mealtimes as it becomes part of the “collective ritual” of the family (p.66). They show how the TV can shape and reproduce individual, relational as well as collective identities, and how it can transform “mealtime rituals” such as the timing, location and type of food consumed (*ibid*, p.65). Similarly, Truninger (2016) show how new technology, when incorporated into the everyday family meal, can redefine cooking practices as it can create new expectations, new ways of cooking and renegotiation of the “proper” meals in the family (p.93). These studies highlight how the everyday meal is an important aspect of doing family. But that consumption of new market resources such as new technologies (Truninger, 2016; Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014), or new meanings of sharing (Cappellini and Parsons, 2012a) can help re-define the family practice and in turn family identity.

Some of these studies have responded to the call for analysing family as a collective body, and retracted from solely focusing on unilateral/dominant discourses, such as those of the mother, an aspect that has been notable in the past (e.g. Thompson, 1996; Bugge, 2003; Moio *et al.*, 2004; Bugge and Almås, 2006; Carrigan and Szmigin, 2006; Harman and Cappellini, 2014). Cappellini and Parsons (2012a) and Chitakunye and Maclaran (2014) for example, observed family members doing the everyday dinner together and argued that we need to see how various identities emerge when families do practices together. Although these studies have been very influential for me to analyse doing family from a practice and collective perspective (such as

taking into account the perspectives of various family members), they have mainly focused on already established families. However we know very little about how new families do their collective practices and identities together during their transitional periods.

As discussed in the previous chapter, studies have shown how practices of consumption play a key role in people's transitional periods (Voice Group, 2010; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Banister and Hogg, 2006; Schau *et al.*, 2009; Ogle *et al.*, 2013; McNeill and Graham, 2014). There are studies on how mothers-to-be prepare for their new role during pregnancy through doing practices of consumption (Voice Group, 2010; Ogle *et al.*, 2013; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006), and how men transition into their new role as a father through consumption (Bettany *et al.*, 2014). Although these studies on identity transitions did not take a practice theoretical approach, they show that new mothers and new fathers can do their new identities through doing new practices of consumption. Life course transitions can thus provide a key ground for analysing change in practices (Paddock, 2017). Although as Voice Group (2010) discussed such practices may cause feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and stress, and might not be such a straightforward, unproblematic approach. However, previous studies on identity transitions have also focused on consumption doings mainly from a single perspective, such as doing new motherhood or new fatherhood. As discussed in the previous chapter, there has been less consideration of doing identity transitions from a collective perspective.

Especially in a new couple household, when two people newly settle to live together, how do they 'do' their collective practices and collective identities from a collective perspective. Doing the everyday dinner has been shown to play an integral role in couple's transitional period (Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Marshall, 2005). I will now turn to discuss literature on newly cohabited couples and identify gaps in previous approaches.

3.5.2 Dinner Practices in Newly Cohabited Couples

Most research on family identity and meal consumption has been focused on families with young children (Marshall and Anderson, 2002), with the mother's perspective as the dominant source of analysis (e.g. Moisisio *et al.*, 2004; Bugge, 2003; Bugge and Almås, 2006; Carrigan and Szmigin, 2006; Harman and Cappellini, 2014). There has been less consideration of the couple household and how the marketplace plays a role in shaping the couple relationship (Marshall and Anderson, 2002).

In today's society, especially in Britain, many young couples would be unwilling to get married without "testing the waters" of their joint domestic life beforehand (Murphy, 2000, p.124). Therefore, as Marshall and Anderson (2002) contend, the newly cohabitating couple household provides a unique lens to understand the onset of family life, as it is the time when people move from singlehood to coupledness. The new couple household is the time when people are most keen to negotiate and build their collective unit (Sobal *et al.* 2002). It is the period when couples actively and "consciously" negotiate their practices as they try to join their values and norms to form the collective routine (Kremmer *et al.*, 1998, p.49). It is also a period when they have the most time and effort to negotiate such practices as their relationship is not complicated by a child's presence (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998). This transitional phase from singlehood to coupledness thus provides an interesting area of investigation into understanding how collective practices and collective identities can emerge from a collective perspective.

Research has shown how eating the everyday dinner together can aid the couple's transition (Marshall, 2005). For example, in studying newly cohabited couples in Scotland, Kemmer *et al.* (1998) showed how negotiation of food choice was most important for the couples' adaptation to a shared family life. They found that merging the weekday evening meal in terms of the timing, content, structure and format, was important for couples, and it represented their idea of the ideal family life. Couples spent more time and effort to cook and eat together in the evenings after work, and tried to prepare the same foods that both of them could enjoy (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998).

Similarly, Marshall and Anderson (2002) showed how couples wanted to compromise and share the same foods in the evening as they recognize this event as part of the process of "normalization" (p.203) to become a couple and aids in establishing their identity as a couple. They attributed changes to the meanings of eating together and "eating properly" which was becoming an important essence for both partners in the new couple relationship (Marshall and Anderson, 2002, p.194). However, they also found that the idea of the "proper meal" in these new couples were changing with the times, such that it doesn't need to be eaten on the table (as traditional family studies suggest, see Murcott, 1982; Charles and Kerr, 1988) but "proper meals" can also mean eating in the lounge or in front of the TV, but the more important aspect of the notion is spending time together (*ibid*, p.198). Although not looking at this transitional period, Cross and Gilly (2014a) in analysing binational couples in the US also discusses that

spouses at times forgo part of their personal (cultural) identity to create a common collective identity through compromising their food consumption in everyday life.

Thus, previous studies show how eating together temporally (at the same time), spatially (at the same space) and materially (eating the same things) holds important values and meanings for the new family (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Bove *et al.*, 2003). Studies show that couples try to converge their individual eating habits to form one collective routine (Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Marshall, 2005). The everyday dinner can aid couples transition to a collective unit (Marshall, 2005).

However, previous studies analyzing the merging of meal practices in new couples have mainly focused on convergence of food choice (Bove *et al.*, 2003; Hasford *et al.*, 2017), eating habits (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Lupton, 2000), or on understanding how food purchase decisions are divided (Marshall and Anderson, 2000; Cross and Gilly, 2014b). Most of these studies have also focused mainly on uni-laterally interviewing the couples separately, thus not as a collective entity. With the exception of Bove and Sobal (2006), who interviewed some couples together to look at how “foodwork” was negotiated (p.70), there is no study that analyze how the collective meal routine is created from a collective perspective over time using a practice theoretical approach. There has also been no study that adopted an ethnographic method to observe the couples’ practices over time.

Being inspired from practice theory and Miller’s materiality studies, I will show first the process through which collective meal routines can emerge over time as couples co-perform their meal together. I will then analyze how collective identities of the couple can emerge over time through their doings of the meal together. In doing so, I will be able to show the process of the couple’s transition from a more collective and dynamic perspective, taking into account both their perspectives and interactions in the process, as well as the materials involved. Very recently, Darmon and Warde (2019) analyzed how French and UK bi-national couples negotiate their eating habits. They discuss how couples enter into a relationship with a history of “incorporated habits” and dispositions (p.1032), and creation of a couple involves negotiating and changing “embodied habits” (p.1036). Although they did not study the formation of a collective practice and identity through time, they discuss that we can analyze how habits change in this transitional period. And since the weekday evening meal has been shown to play an important role in aiding the couple’s transition (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998;

Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Bove *et al.*, 2003; Marshall, 2005), I will analyse the doing of the shared dinner to understand the couples' collective practice and identity emergence. I will now turn to show my approach to analyse the dinner as a set of interconnected practices (Marshall *et al.*, 2016).

3.5.3 Dinner as a Set of Interconnected Practices

Recently, Marshall *et al.* (2016) proposed a framework for studying the meal as a set of consumption practices involving “*acquisition, appropriation, appreciation and disposal*” (p.6). They borrowed Warde's (2010) definition of consumption as processes involving acts of provisioning, using, and giving meaning to goods and services (in Warde, 2017). According to Marshall *et al.* (2016), acquisition can involve analysing how the meal is acquired, such as during planning and shopping; Appropriation can involve how the meal bought is used at home, such as preparation and cooking of the meal; Appreciation can involve how the meal is used up, such as during eating of the meal; and Disposal can involve how the meal is discarded or recycled. They highlight how these practices do not necessarily follow a linear model of linked practices, but in studying the meal as a set of practices one can study the complexities, messiness and nuances involved in the process of meal consumption (Cappellini *et al.*, 2016).

Being inspired from their framework, I will therefore analyse the shared dinner practice in newly cohabited couples as involving a set of practices. For ease of convenience, I will henceforth refer to these practices as planning, cooking, preparing, serving, eating and disposing the meal (Cappellini *et al.*, 2016). In adopting the understanding that practices comprise of a set of elements involving material objects, symbolic meanings and competences (Shove *et al.*, 2012), I will analyse how these elements interact with each other at the collective level across these various practices over time. I take the approach that each practice of the meal (planning, cooking, preparing, serving, eating, and disposing) can comprise of these three elements interacting with each other. I therefore will analyse how these elements embodied in actors and embedded in the use of things (Warde, 2014) can interact with each other at the collective level over time during dinner co-performance. In studying the meal as a set of practices, I hope to show a more holistic understanding on how doing the everyday meal can play a role in the couple's identity-work (Marshall, 2005). Although I have to highlight that I am not approaching these elements interaction as a neat or fixed process, but elements itself may be carried in more than one practice across various times and space (Shove *et al.*, 2012).

But in studying the practices over time, I hope to unpack the nuances and complexity involved in the process.

As Warde (2016) suggests how studying everyday meal practices can reveal insights into the process where cultural and social norms, values, rituals, emotions and other meanings are negotiated and enacted; I too use these understandings to study how the meal as a dynamic practice, involving multiple actors and things, can unpack deeper meanings of social life. In studying how the meal can become collectively shared and routinized, I will try to provide a thorough analysis to show how identity-work is being done and emerge as a consequence of co-engaging in practices.

Chapter IV

From Reading to Looking at Practices

4.1 Introduction

As highlighted in Chapter II, although there is research interest in understanding how consumption plays a role in consumer identities, most research in this theme have focused on the individual consumer, either as the agent of consumption who can fulfil an identity project (Giddens, 1991; Bugge, 2003; Fox and Ward, 2008; Bugge and Almås, 2006) or from a unilateral perspective to analyze consumption (Miller, 1998; Moisio *et al.*, 2004; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Banister and Hogg, 2006; Bettany *et al.*, 2014). There is very little research on how collective identity emerges from a collective perspective over time. Being inspired from analyzing practices as units of analysis (Warde, 2005; Shove *et al.*, 2012) and how engagement in practices can allow identities to emerge (Miller, 1987; Bottero, 2015), I adopted an interpretivist approach applying ethnographic methods (Tadajewski, 2006; Willis and Trondman, 2002) to look at the meal consumption doings of newly cohabited couples over time to understand the emergence of their collective practice and in turn collective identity.

As to recap, the specific research questions at the core of this study are: how do collective practices emerge over time in newly cohabiting couples? And how does collective identities emerge through co-performing practices over time in newly cohabiting couples? The theoretical aims of this study was therefore to understand first how a collective practice is born, and second how identities emerge from co-performing practices over time. Thus, there were three research objectives. First, I analyze the co-performance of dinner consumption practices of newly cohabited couples over time in order to understand how the collective practice is born. Inspired by a practice theoretical approach, I approach co-performances in practices as interactions between various *elements* in a practice (Shove *et al.*, 2012). As mentioned in particular, I look at interactions between “Meanings, Competences, and Materials” (*ibid*, p.14) which are interacting with one another at the collective level over time during the couples’ doing of the meal. The second research objective is to analyze how these elements of symbolic meanings, materials and competences along with their interactions can play a role in the collective practice emergence. And third, I analyze how individual and collective identity-work of the couple is being done during co-performing meal practices over time. In taking practice

performance as the focus of analysis (Warde, 2005), I will thus be able to analyze identity construction from a more dynamic and collective perspective, taking into account the perspectives and interactions of all actors and materials involved in the co-performance.

Since I study practices, an obvious way for me to analyze such practices is perhaps to look at them and observe the people and materials engaged in the practice. As Saunders and colleagues (2009) notes, “*if your research question and objectives are concerned with what people do, an obvious way in which to discover this is to watch them do it*” (p.288). My research aims and objectives guided me to take up ethnography as a method of enquiry. Analyzing co-performance of practices over time also implies a longitudinal approach. As will be discussed in this chapter, I adopted a set of ethnographic methods (Arnould, 1998; Willis and Trondman, 2002) to observe the meal consumption practices of newly cohabited couples over time. In doing so, I aimed to gain an insight into their subjective meanings, values, norms, beliefs, emotions, competences to be able to interpret their identities emerging from engagement in such practices. Indeed, mine is an exploratory study to analyze how mundane food practices can play a role in identity negotiation and construction.

This chapter will be structured in the following format. I will first outline my philosophical position, my ontological and epistemological assumptions in conducting this research. I will then detail my ethnographic research design and discuss its increasing application in consumer research. I will then focus on the various data collection methods I adopted. The last sections will focus on data analysis procedures and reflexivity in doing the fieldwork.

4.2 Philosophy of ‘looking at’ Practices – The Research Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm (Tadajewski, 2006; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008) to understand subjective human experiences in their everyday consumption. A paradigm, as Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest, is the “basic belief system or worldview” (p.105) that guides the researcher, and are characterized based on differences in their philosophical assumptions about knowing and acquiring knowledge of the world – their ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological assumptions. Ontology, the view about “nature of reality” (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p.508) and epistemology, what is acceptable knowledge (Saunders

et al., 2009), are underlying philosophical assumptions that will inform and guide the researcher on their choice of research methodology. Axiology, the underlying belief about research ethics (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) also forms part of the paradigm assumption. Methodology, described as the process of acquiring knowledge, depends on these underlying philosophical assumptions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), but as Carson and colleagues (2001) highlight, identifying one's research position in the paradigm is crucial as it has clear implications on the method and on what, why and how the research is carried out.

4.2.1 Ontological, Epistemological and Axiological Assumptions

An interpretivist's ontological assumption, their belief about the "nature of reality" lies in viewing the world as having multiple realities, which are socially and experientially constructed (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p.508). Unlike positivists who view the world as objective reality, as a definite one 'true' world out there waiting to be studied (Saunders *et al.*, 2009), the interpretivist stance lies in understanding that reality is socially constructed, thus there can be multiple realities according to different subjective experiences with social phenomena (Tadajewski, 2006; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Carson *et al.*, 2001). Being inspired from analyzing practices as units of analysis (Schatzki, 2016), where one analyses meanings, competences and materiality involved in the social performance of practices (Shove *et al.*, 2012), I understand that practices are socially constructed (Halkier and Jensen, 2011). Thus there can be multiple realities that are socially and experientially constructed according to various experiences within a performance (Molander and Hartmann, 2018; Warde, 2005). Such view of the world also allows understanding how meanings are created through interaction with others in the world (Carson *et al.*, 2001; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

Hudson and Ozanne (1988) discusses how context then becomes very important in the interpretivist stance, as understanding behavior and experiences in a specific social context can reveal deep insights into a particular social phenomena. In doing so, Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that researchers must also acknowledge that every social phenomena, every action and situation is constantly changing, thus, there can never be a one absolute 'true' reality, but that reality is complex and always changing. Hence, we can understand but a complex array of experiences and meanings imminent in social life (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

In such a world view, the epistemological stance - the philosophical assumption of what is acceptable knowledge - lies in focusing on particular details of the social and cultural context in which the social phenomena and underlying practices take place (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). As Hudson and Ozanne (1988) contend we can understand reality through its emergence in the situated context. And in order to analyze the context in its natural form and get a more holistic understanding of a social phenomenon, one needs to 'be there' and study the social phenomena from the perspectives of those engaged within it (Szmigin and Foxall, 2000). Miller (1998) also contends that the only way to understand and interpret subjectivity and meanings arising from social interactions (in his case interactions in subject-object formation) is through observation of the life worlds of subjects and objects. In this view, the researcher and the objects and subjects of research are in close constant interaction, they shape each other (Ritchie, 2003; Ormston *et al.*, 2014). Thus, unlike positivist research where the researcher is detached from the study and the phenomena under research is objective and external, in interpretivist research the researcher and the participant co-create understandings and knowledge as the research proceeds (Snape and Spencer, 2003; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Thus, axiologically interpretivist research is more all-inclusive as it views knowledge inquiry as a means to social liberation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

4.2.2 Interpretive Consumer Research

In the past fifteen years or so, interpretive consumer research has been on the rise as many marketing scholars working within this paradigm have defended this approach arguing that it can provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumption and consumer behavior (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Goulding, 1998; Goulding, 1999; Szmigin and Foxall, 2000; Black, 2006). Black (2006) suggested how the tenacity of this approach lies in its emphasis on understanding hidden meanings and complexities of consumption situations. As interpretivist researchers understand that there are multiple and changing realities that are dependent on context (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988), researchers adopting this approach attempt to understand how particular experiences with consumption, including interactions with particular objects, artefacts and possessions means for consumers (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Belk, 1988; Goulding 1999) and how this contributes to construction of social phenomena (Arnould, 1998). Since my research aims to understand how identities emerge through engagements in practice performances, I adopt this paradigm as a means to understand *how* meanings, knowledge,

materialities, and identities are emerged through interactions between consumers (and consumers and objects) in the social world (Halkier and Jensen, 2011; Barnes, 2001). In doing so, I will try to interpret collective meanings arising from the social situation using a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973 in Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p.511).

Although there are increasing consumer research adopting interpretivist approaches (Goulding, 1999; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008), this view of knowledge acquisition is still often criticized from other paradigm’s standpoint (e.g. positivist). I will address some of these issues here before presenting my methodological approach. There has been a long standing criticism by positivists that interpretivist approach produces biased results as there is the influence of the researcher’s subjectivity and presence in the social phenomena (Kvale, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In fact, I have been questioned several times regarding the veracity of my research approach (in conferences), since I – the researcher – is present and situated within the social world through which consumers co-perform their social practices. I argue that such a criticism arises from the very basis of positivist’s ontological assumption about the nature of understanding reality. Since their paradigm assumes that knowledge is objective, external and exists outside of the subjective experience, the researcher needs to be “value free” (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p.13). However, in interpretivist approach, since I adopt the stance that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction with the participants in their social world and not discovered (Szmigin and Foxall, 2000; Saunders *et al.*, 2009; Ormston *et al.*, 2014), and we can merely grasp only a partial account of knowledge (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Thus as Oakley (1998, p.710) contends, there is no research that is “value free”. Since all research involves insights into social world of participants, quantitative research can also have biases – but what we need to do is make knowledge production as transparent as possible, rather than to claim objective truth (Oakley, 1998).

Oakley (1981; 1998; 2016) also discusses how the positivist paradigm, its view on objective truth and treating research participants as research objects is a masculine attitude. As qualitative researchers we cannot shy away from the fact that we are the research tools (Oakley, 1981; Snape and Spencer, 2003). Findings of the research are co-produced and negotiated between the researcher and the research participants (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Thus, as Oakley (2016) suggests qualitative researchers can adopt a more “feminist methodology” (p.195), which is to include the researcher and research participants as equal collaborators in the research process in order to reduce power hierarchy in the research. One way to engage with participants and

interpret meanings arising from social interactions from a more collaborative perspective is to immerse oneself in their situation (Miller, 1998). As Gray (2014) contends, immersing oneself in participant life worlds can allow to observe and understand “first-hand what is happening” (p.24). This methodological approach requires the “vulgarity” of ethnography (Miller, 2002 in Borgerson, 2005, p.441), an approach I will now turn to discuss.

4.3 Process of Seeing Practices – The Research Design

Ethnography, originally rooted in cultural anthropology, requires the researcher to immerse themselves in a field for a period of time to study a phenomena in their natural context (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Although Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) highlight how there is no fixed definition of ethnography, I adopted Saunders and colleague’s (2009) definition of it as a “research strategy” (p.134) that involves the researcher being immersed in the natural social world of participants over a period of time. According to Arnould (1998), the aim of ethnography is to analyze “*the ways that culture simultaneously constructs and is constructed by the behaviors and experiences of [its] members*” (p.86). In other words, it allows one to gain insights into the lived experiences and behaviors of social actors to understand how they construct and are constructed by their particular social or cultural realities (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In understanding this aim, I approached ethnography as a strategy to look at what and how consumers do in their everyday life to gain insights into their “shared systems of meanings” – i.e. collective culture of consumption (Goulding, 2005, p.298).

Unlike naturalistic inquiry or simply observing people in a normal situation, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) contend ethnographers enter the field in order to achieve a research objective and to answer particular research questions. Hence, as Willis and Trondman (2002) suggests, ethnography needs to be “theoretically informed” (p.400) – we need to have a pre-understanding of theory before entering the field. However, as ethnography is deeply rooted in inductive approach, i.e. we allow theory to emerge from field data (Mariampolski, 2006), Arnould and Wallendorf (1994, p.485) discusses how “thick descriptions” produced in ethnographic data can allow one to find relationships, patterns and themes emerging from “emic” (subjective) experiences of participants to develop an “etic” (cultural) representation of their accounts. Willis and Trondman (2002) similarly propose that in developing a continuous “dialectical” relationship between both the inductive and deductive approach (as theoretically informed ethnography is used to reshape or form new theories), ethnographers can allow for

(and rely on) elements of “surprise”: knowledge one didn’t think about to emerge (p.399). For example, although my initial research questions, objectives and theoretical lens guided me in the field, I was flexible in my theoretical thinking with the aim to allow for new ideas and patterns to emerge. In doing so, I encountered surprising elements such as how couples were also negotiating their gendered individual identity as a consequence of doing the collective meal, an aspect I will discuss in Chapter VII.

4.3.1 Ethnography in Consumer Culture Studies

Miller (1998) highlights how ethnography allows researchers to gain a much deeper analysis into consumers’ lives, as it reveals what and how people do (e.g. how they consume, how they use objects), rather than what they say they do. As he puts it:

“Ethnography tends to lead to a much deeper involvement in people’s lives than just what they say about themselves. Ethnography used in material culture also tends to emphasize careful observations of what people actually do and in particular do with things. As such we are constantly faced with the everyday discrepancies between what people say matters to them and what they actually give their attention to.” (Miller, 1998, p.12).

Thus, ethnography is a useful method to understand consumption meanings and experiences of consumers in real-time (Mariampolski, 2006). Arnould and Epp (2006) suggests how involving oneself experientially in a consumption context for a period of time and recording the lived experiences and behaviors of consumers involved in the consumption, can reveal deep insights into a cultural phenomenon. Within consumer culture studies, there is a growing research body that adopts ethnographic approaches to study consumer behavior in their natural contexts (Goulding, 2005; Arnould, 1998). Wallendorf and Arnould’s (1991) Thanksgiving paper, Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) study of a new subculture, as well as Arnould and Price’s (1993) River magic paper has been much cited. Similarly, Coupland’s (2005) study on brands storage, Cappellini and Parson’s (2012a) study on sharing family meals, Hein and O’Donohoe’s (2014) research on male friendship groups as well as Chitakunye and Maclaran’s (2014) analysis on the influence of material objects in family life; all of these studies show how immersing oneself in a cultural context of consumption over time can produce understandings of subtle and complex meanings in consumption (Goulding, 2005). These studies show how ethnography doesn’t mean privileging the consumer as the center of its analysis but allows one to gain deeper insights into the whole cultural surrounding.

4.3.2 Ethnography as a Set of Methods

Various scholars have argued how ethnographers can use a variety of methods to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and behaviors of people in their social world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Willis and Trondman, 2002). For example, Arnould (1998) suggests how combining multiple data collection methods in ethnography can be useful to achieve “thickness” and “consistency” in the data as they aid researchers to “*access different realms of experience*” to understand a phenomenon (p.90). Doing so would aid interpretations of meanings from different angles of understanding, which can help researchers to unpack the layered and often competing meanings in consumption (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994).

In their ethnographic study of Thanksgiving celebration, Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) show how using multiple data sources such as interviews, participant observation and photographs can provide insight into consumers’ “disjunctures” between what they say (their “self-conscious ideals”) and what they actually do (their “observed praxis”) (in Arnould, 1998, p.87). They showed how interviews can provide insights into what people believe they did, which are often memories of particular experiences, and what people think they ought to do, which are often beliefs and norms pertaining to proper conduct. Whereas observations provided insights into what people actually did, their behavior, practices, interactions in a social setting (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). Thus according to them, both observations and interviews are important sources of information as one provided “*perspective in action*” and the other “*perspective of action*” (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994, p.501), both of which are enactments of social practices (Halkier and Jensen, 2011). Using multiple data sources would also allow for “deep theorizations” (Lillis, 2008, p.353) as we need to have enough data from multiple sources to recognize patterns in “emic” understandings to develop “etic” culturally relevant theories (Arnould, 1998; Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). Richardson (2000) offers the idea of “crystallization” in adopting a multi-methods ethnographic approach. According to him, “*crystals grow, change, and alter, but are not amorphous [...] [they] reflect within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose.*” Different sources of data can thus “*provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic*” (Richardson, 2000, p.934).

Like a crystal that reveals different patterns and colours depending on how or where we view it from, my research project adopted a set of methods within the ethnographic approach to gain a richer deeper understanding into how a collective consumption practice emerge in everyday life. I used participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews to gain a “thicker description” (Arnould and Epp, 2006, p.20) on how the shared meal was enacted, performed, negotiated and constructed in newly cohabited couples over time. In doing so, I aimed to get various perspectives of enactments including viewing performances in action and understanding performances of actions (Arnould, 1998). Various sources of data also revealed the messiness and contradictions of collective performances of practices as it granted me access into understanding how individual perspectives of behaviour was different to the collective perspective, how interactions between social actors were being performed, how idealizations were enacted and narrated. Thus, in adopting various data collection methods, I hoped to represent all the different perspectives and dimensions of experience encountered during studying meal practices of the newly cohabited couples to uncover the messiness in analysing such constructions of a new family life. I will now turn to illustrate and discuss the research methods adopted.

4.4 Research Methods

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) highlight how there is no fixed guideline on how to do ethnography, but the conjoining feature of this approach is that it requires time immersion in a context. Since my research objective was to analyse the co-performance of meal consumption practices of newly cohabited couples over time, I adopted participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews (Saunders *et al.*, 2009) to observe and understand how couples perform and share their meal practices over time. A 1-year participant observation was conducted with 13 newly cohabited couples residing in London area to observe their everyday dinner consumption practice. I was immersed in the field for 1 year from March 2017 – March 2018, and visited each couple 5 or 6 times during this period. Individual and collective in-depth interviews supplemented the observational data to get a deeper understanding on underlying personal and group-level feelings, attitudes and goals which would aid my emic interpretations. As an overview, the data consists of speech-in-action recordings of conversations during observations, in-depth interviews, field notes and pictures which resulted in over 130 hours (7,800 minutes) of data, 960 pages of transcriptions and over 2000 photographs. I will now turn to discuss participant observation and the various data collection methods employed.

4.4.1 Participant Observation:

Participant observation is a method of observing people over a period of time (Nicholls *et al.*, 2014). Saunders and colleagues (2009) describe it as “*systematic observation, recording, description, analysis and interpretation of people’s behaviour*” (p.288). It allows the researcher to capture and interpret the actions, interactions, and experiences of people as they occur in real time (Ritchie, 2003; Mariampolski, 2006). O’Reilly (2012) suggest how participant observation is an ideal method to study the social performance of practices, how routine practices are enacted, and how actors interact with each other and materialities in everyday life. As observation allows access into the cultural surroundings within which accounts of actors are shaped, we can analyse both behaviours of actors and their social surroundings (O’Reilly, 2012).

The underlying assumptions behind participant observation is that participants often cannot recollect their actual behaviour and often only remember the memorable experiences such as the ones that had most impact on them (Atkinson and Coffey, 2003; Nicholls *et al.*, 2014). Arnould (1998) suggests how sometimes participants cannot verbally articulate some experiences such as emotional or embodied experiences. Thus, participant observation allows researchers to capture behaviours as they happen, but also the implicit, tacit, and often taken for granted actions such as the unintentional slips, (e.g. what people do when they add the wrong ingredients in the meal, when they over-cooked the meal, when they did something they didn’t want to) (Arnould, 1998; Arnould and Epp, 2006). Observations also allow access into the “backstage” of participants lives, where performances are less scripted (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994, p.486). Meeting participants over a period of time also allows researchers to build trust and rapport with participants (Edirisingha *et al.*, 2014) and as such, a degree of normality is negotiated. Ritchie (2003) highlights how participant observation is a very useful method when we want to study a situation involving *several actors*, and that understanding their tacit norms and interactions are important.

Since I study how two actors co-perform a practice together, I intended to use participant observation to capture interactions and negotiations between actors and their material surroundings as they occurred in real time. Indeed I witnessed a lot of unintentional disputes (Chapter V is dedicated to analysing conflicts in action). I also intended to observe how tacit

and inarticulate knowledge and norms were performed and negotiated at the collective level. Although she analysed focus groups, Halkier (2010) suggests how methods that can capture interactions between actors in a practice performance can be very useful as interactions can reveal relational meanings and allow researchers to understand how relationships are expressed. I too wanted to capture how relational meanings and knowledge in practices were expressed and communicated during interactions between actors. As in order to achieve my aims of understanding how a collective practice is born, and how collective identity emerges through co-performing practices over time – as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, I will analyse the elements of practices and their interactions at the collective level over time. Participant observation can thus be a useful tool to capture materialisation of such interactions between the elements of practice (O’Reilly, 2012).

Table 1 below explains how I planned to observe the collective practice of the meal (Cappellini *et al.*, 2016) in relation to Shove and colleagues’ (2012) definition of practice. I looked at how each partner perform their carried competences, meanings and materialities while doing the meal. I looked for how these elements are exchanged, communicated, learnt, taught, and negotiated in shopping, planning, cooking, serving, eating and disposal of the meal. In doing so, I aimed to analyse how these elements of practice interact at the collective level over time, across the various practices of the meal (shopping, cooking, eating, disposing). However, although I started with observing all of these practices, in my findings I show the manifestations of some practices more than others. For example, planning, cooking, preparing, serving and eating the meal was illustrated more than disposing of the meal. This is because I had to be strategic in choosing what to illustrate of the couple’s new practice and identity formation. All of these practices required co-negotiation and had implications for the collective meal, but I had to be diplomatic in representing some aspects of the meal over others.

Acquisition	Shopping for the meal
Materials	I will look for how supermarket objects, brands and advertisements play a role in the negotiation and interaction between the couple
Individual Competences	I will look for how each partners’ norms, knowledge, techniques and rules of shopping is exchanged in the public space

Individual Meanings	I will look for how symbolic meanings, emotions and beliefs of the couple are exchanged during shopping and selecting of foods and brands, as well as during payment
Appropriation	Planning and cooking for the meal
Materials	I will look for how the foods bought are used at home. How the ingredients, brands and other material objects in the kitchen are performed in daily life. I will also look at how technological devices such as the fridge and cookbooks and existing brands are used and negotiated between the couple during the planning and cooking of the meal
Individual Competences	I will look for how each partners' know-hows, skills and techniques of planning and cooking of the meal is exchanged, performed and negotiated
Individual Meanings	I will look for how the cultural meanings, values and aspirations of the couple are exchanged during food preparation and cooking. For example, the different ways of preparing the meal, and belief about how the food should be prepared
Appreciation	Serving and eating of the meal
Materials	I will look for how the meal is served and eaten, the utensils and objects used. I will also look at how the furniture and space is utilized and negotiated during consuming the meal, and how these materials plays a role in the interaction between the couple
Individual Competences	I will look for how the individual norms, knowledge and habits of serving and eating the meal is exchanged, taught, learnt, performed and negotiated between the couple

Individual Meanings	I will look for how the symbolic and personal meanings, rituals and beliefs in serving and eating are enacted and managed
Disposal	Making use of leftovers of the meal
Materials	I will look for how the leftover food is used or thrown, how it's negotiated between the couple
Individual Competences	I will look for how the techniques, skills and habits of using leftovers are negotiated, learnt and exchanged.
Individual Meanings	I will look for how meanings in throwing away food is performed and negotiated.

Table 1: Observational guideline for observing meal co-performance

I used the table above as an observational guideline during my fieldwork. The guideline was constructed through my critical review of the literature, and therefore aided me to observe couple's practices in a more "theoretically informed" manner (Willis and Trondman, 2002, p.400). In analysing how elements within a practice were performed at the collective level over time, I was able to analyse how they interacted, conflicted, were negotiated over time. Although I entered the field with a set of observational guidelines and approach on how I want to analyse the data, I am not the first to adopt such a deductive approach in ethnography. Peñaloza (1994) in her study on Mexican immigrants' acculturation also conducted an ethnographic approach with a priory model, but adapted to change as she found new insights. Although I did not enter the field with a priory model as Peñaloza did, but I had a set of observational guidelines, which shaped my approach to study how the collective practice was formed. As shown, I mainly analysed the elements of practices to see the interactions between them, but I was open in my interpretation to allow for new understandings of the process to emerge.

I will now go through the technicalities of my fieldwork, starting from the fieldwork setting, to pre-field strategies for recruitment and ethics, then to data collection techniques followed by analysis and interpretation.

4.4.1.1 *The Fieldwork*

A 1-year longitudinal study was conducted with thirteen newly cohabited couples residing in London area. I was immersed in the field from March 2017 – March 2018. Each couple was visited 5 or 6 times during this period.

O'Reilly (2012) contend how ongoing visitations in a field over time can also be considered a longitudinal study as it allows one to capture “temporality” and “change” (p.519). As my research aimed to understand *how* a collective practice and identity was born, being immersed in the field over a period of time through re-visitations allowed me to capture such transitional changes. I had initially planned to visit each couple once a month continuously for a 6 months period. However, this proved to be challenging as my method required a long-term commitment from participants. And as sometimes couples would be away especially during the Christmas and Summer season, or they would be moving house or changing jobs, it was difficult to schedule the observations in a neat 6 month timeline as initially planned. However, the timeframe proved to be appropriate for observing the transitional changes occurring during the first year of cohabitation (Schramm *et al.*, 2005; Waller and McLanahan, 2005). I visited each couple 5 or 6 times during the 1-year period, which allowed me to see transitional change over time. The duration of fieldwork also followed Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) suggestion that the time period and frequency should depend on the research question and experience of the researcher and until data saturation is reached. As I started observations straightaway as soon as I recruited a couple, it meant that couples who started later would finish later, which prolonged the fieldwork period, but it allowed me to reflect on the emerging and recurring themes during the fieldwork itself (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). The couples who started later therefore had one less visitation as there was no new information emerging from the data (Guest *et al.*, 2006).

Every visit would entail different observational or interview activities. I had initially wanted to observe the whole process of the meal (from shopping, cooking, eating, to disposing) with the couples every month. However, after conducting 2 pilot studies, I realized that observing the whole process of the meal in every visit is very time consuming, and I would lose the interest of participants. Hence, I needed to break down my observation procedures into smaller sets of tasks. For example, observing the shopping in one visit, and observing the preparation of the meal in another. In this way I could keep the interest of the participants and also develop a

long-term relationship with them. Thus, as Table 2, shows, I had set a guideline of all the activities I would cover every month.

Month	Task	Location	Average Time
1 st visit	Couple interview	At a café near their house	1.5 hours
2 nd visit	Shopping observation 1 + storing of the food	At their local supermarket + initial access to their house	2 hours
3 rd visit	Dinner observation 1 (meal prep + cooking + serving + eating + storing leftovers + cleaning)	At their house	3 hours
4 th visit	Separate interviews	At their house/local café	1-2 hours
5 th visit	Shopping observation 2	At their local supermarket + their house	1 hour
6 th visit	Dinner observation 2 (meal prep + cooking + serving + eating + storing leftovers + cleaning)	At their house	2-3 hours

Table 2: Guideline for observation tasks

To ensure consistency and homogeneity in data collection, all couples would go through the same process of observation and interview activity during each month's visit. Observing the same activity multiple times and at different occasions also allowed me to see how the practice changed over time. However, as I will show later, it was difficult to keep to this guideline in a neat and fixed process. This was because sometimes I could 'tag along' in their shopping activity before the cooking observation, or sometimes they would cook dinner after the individual interview. Thus, I observed some couples more than others. However, at a minimum,

I did at least 1 couple interview, 2 shopping observations, 2 cooking observations (for a weekday dinner), and individual interviews with every couple (except one), averaging up to around 10 hours of immersion time with each couple. One couple dropped out the study after the individual interviews (4th month) due to health reasons. However, I included their data in the analysis as I felt it was substantiate enough (I already had 4 months with them) to be included.

Thus, I accompanied the couples to their grocery shopping trips in their local supermarket (which at times were still changing as they were still on the lookout for the ‘best’ supermarket nearby). I observed how their meal plans were communicated and executed in the supermarket or through pre-written plans, how they negotiated best item to buy in the supermarket, and their interactions in the public space. During the same trip, I would accompany them to their homes to observe how they stored and kept their foods. In another visit, I would observe how they prepared, cooked, served, ate and disposed their dinner meal on a weekday evening. In all these observational visits, I used the guideline in table 1 (Section 4.4.1) to look out for how the elements within the practice (the meanings, competences and materials) were being performed, exchanged and communicated. These dinner observations mostly took place on Mondays to Thursdays, which is a working day for all the couples. However, the shopping mostly took place on the weekends, which reflected most of the couples’ emerging schedules. Indication was given to them to prepare an ordinary weekday meal or meals that they think are becoming a routine. At their homes, I could observe how the food preparation and cooking was negotiated and executed, how the food was served and consumed and how the leftovers were dealt with. Throughout the observation process, I adopted the role of observer-as-participant (Saunders *et al.*, 2009), where I would watch the couples shop and prepare their meals without taking part in their activities, but could observe their behaviours and interactions with one another and ask informal questions in the style of natural conversations (Toerien, 2013). At times, couples would invite me to have the meal with them, where I would switch to adopt the participant-as-observer role (Saunders *et al.*, 2009) and take part in their emotional experience in appreciating the meal, which allowed me to further their trust and make them feel more at ease with me during mealtime conversations.

4.4.1.2 Recruitment and Ethics

Couples were recruited through Word of Mouth and snowball sampling techniques (Handcock and Gile, 2011) to find participants that fit the criteria. The criteria for selecting couples were: They have recently cohabited (moved in together) for not more than 6 months and they were living in London area. This 6 months timeline followed previous research guidelines indicating how most transition occurs during the first year of cohabitation/marriage (Schramm *et al.*, 2005; Waller and McLanahan, 2005). Apart from convenience in travelling, London was chosen as it is an urban modern city that comprise many different types of couples. I wanted to focus on one geographical area to have a sort of homogeneity in understanding the structural conditions shaping young couples' lives (inspired from Miller, 1998), but at the same time show the diversity and messiness of this process of family identity construction applicable to majority of newly cohabited couples.

Advertisements calling for participants were placed on campus notice boards and circulated via email and social media through my social circle. This strategy proved very beneficial as my research method needed a degree of trust for the initial contact (Edirisingha *et al.*, 2014), thus referrals allowed me to gain access into participants' domestic lives in a trusted and safe manner. However, in order to ensure validity and reduce bias in the research findings (Atkinson and Flint, 2001), none of the couples who took part in the study were personally known to me before the study commenced.

Since my method involved observation and access into peoples' private lives, especially new couples who are in a transitional phase of their lives, recruitment proved quite a difficult process. I realized this so, when one couple withdrew their consent to take part after I sent them the information sheet on the method process. They had initially wanted to take part being a referral from a friend, but after receiving the information sheet, they informed me that it would perhaps be too intrusive for me to observe them especially when they are still settling in and trying to establish a routine together. They had initially thought I would simply be conducting interviews, but observations seemed a bit too prying.

Moreover, since the observations were done in participants homes, and there would be close contact with participants, ethical considerations were very important for my research. In accordance with Royal Holloway University of London code of conduct, a self-assessed ethical

form was completed and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee before commencing the fieldwork (please see Appendix A). Ritchie (2003) suggests that in qualitative research, especially ethnography, the main ethical issues to consider are informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and risk assessment. And as Hammersley and Traianou (2012) suggest, informed consent is to provide participants with the awareness of their voluntary participation in the research, as it involves basic information of the research and how the data will be used. In understanding these concerns, participants were given an information sheet entailing what the research is about, and what it will involve for them. They were then asked to give their informed consent to be audio recorded and photographed during the research prior to starting the interviews and observations. They were also assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. I have attached the information sheet and blank consent form in Appendix B.

4.4.1.3 Participant Profile

Since the criteria for selection was couples who have recently cohabited not more than 6 months and living in London area, this ensured a homogeneity in participant profiles, as I study the transition period of new couples residing in a particular city. However, couples could be varied in terms of their gender and ethnicity. In fact, as mentioned I wanted to get a wider range of understanding into how a new collective identity is formed, which is applicable to almost all new couples regardless of their gender, ethnicity or social class. Having a diversity in terms of couple profiles also meant I would gain an understanding into how these structural constructs play a role in their collective practice and identity formation. But since I used chain referrals to recruit my participants (Handcock and Gile, 2011), they were mostly from the same social class profile.

Thus, most of the couples who took part in my study were middle-class, with at least one partner earning full-time and both of them hold a higher degree education. Nine out of thirteen couples were mixed ethnicity while four couples were from the same ethnic background, and there was one homosexual couple. Table 3 shows couple profiles in more detail. Names have been changed to assure anonymity. All participants are in the age range of 25-36 years. Apart from the two older men James and Williams who have cohabited with other partners before, all the couples are cohabiting for the first time. Apart from Jenny and Paul who have recently got married and are living together for the first time, none of the other couples are married and

they are cohabiting together for the first time. At the time of the first interview, all couples were within 1-6 months of cohabitation.

#	Names	Nationality	Age	Occupation	Cohabitation at time of 1 st visit	Location	Sharing with other people?
1.	Hannah & James	German & English	31 & 36	Credit Controller + University English Teacher	1st month	North London	Yes, 3 more people in the house – Strangers
2.	Joanne & Tom	Both English	26 & 27	Restaurant Deputy Manager + PhD Student	6th month	South-West London	Yes, 2 – Joanne's friends
3.	Ted & Elias	Both Israeli (Gay Couple)	32 & 29	Drama PhD Student + Journalist	5th month	South London – Brixton	No
4.	Sara & Nick	Chinese & English	30 & 27	Media PhD Student + IT Engineer	6th month	South London – Twickenham	Yes, 1 – Nick's friend
5.	Olivia & Alex	Italian & Portuguese	26 & 28	Project Manager + IT Security Consultant	2nd month	North London – West Hampstead	Yes, 1 – Alex's friend
6.	Julia & William	Canadian & English	33 & 36	PhD Student + IT Sales	6th month	South-West London	No
7.	Max & Pia	Italian & English (British-Indian)	28 & 30	Finance Banker + Psychologist	3rd month	Central London – Barbican	No
8.	Vanna & Simon	Indian & Italian	27 & 29	Post-doc research + PhD Student in IT	4th month	South-West London	Yes, 1 – Simon's friend
9.	Milena & Bernard	Thai & French	29 & 31	Project Manager + Statistician in a Bank	1st month	Central London – Paddington	No

10	Barbara & Roberto	Both Italian	27 & 28	Data analyst +IT Security Consultant	2nd month	North London – Wembley	No
11	Jenny & Paul	Indian & English (British-Indian)	31 & 35	School teacher + Project Manager	3rd month	South London	No
12	Annie & Chris	Serbian & Portuguese	31 & 33	Accountant + Web Developer	5th month	North London	No
13	Harry & Emily	Both English	30 & 28	Physicist + Researcher in Biology	3rd month	South London	No

Table 3: Participant profiles

As can be seen from the table, some of the couples were sharing flat with other people, which at times had consequences in their construction of a collective practice, an aspect that emerged from my findings and I will discuss in one of my analysis chapters. For now, I will turn to show my data collection techniques.

4.4.1.4 Data Collection Techniques:

4.4.1.4.1 Speech-In-Action Recordings

Concurring with Hein, O’Donohoe and Ryan’s (2011) paper on how the mobile phone can be seen as an augmentation of the ethnographer, my mobile phone became a very valuable tool for me to record, reflect, and strengthen my observational data and interpretations, throughout the research process.

Firstly, during observations I used the audio recording application on my phone to document speech-in-action (Sanjek, 1991) data that were occurring when the observations were taking place. As Arnould (1998) highlights speech-in-action is a valuable source of data in its own right. It allowed me to capture the naturally occurring conversations (Toerien, 2014) taking place between the couples as they were going about doing their normal everyday practices. It also allowed me to capture my own voice and the conversations I was having with couples while they were doing their mundane tasks, which played a key role in my reflexive writing (May and Perry, 2013). And as Hein *et al.* (2011) contend using the mobile phone as a

recording tool in this way is less “intrusive” (p.263) than using other devices (such as recorders), I too used my phone to seem more unobtrusive, which encouraged couples to relax and have more informal conversations with me. In fact, it seemed more natural to do so (use my phone as a recording device). Initially I started using my phone as a means to save time and money, but it soon became more than just a device to record the conversations during my fieldwork. It allowed me to reduce power hierarchy between participants and myself (Oakley, 1981; 2016) as I was seen as a normal young person who was having a friendly dinner with them, rather than as an orthodox researcher who is constantly making notes of what they do. As almost all my participants had a smartphone as well, my iPhone could very well fit into their domestic background. I was able to place my phone on the kitchen tops and dining tables as well as walk around with it while we were in the supermarket, without seeming weird or unnatural. During the dinner meal when they invited me to eat together, I would place my phone on the dinner table sometimes alongside theirs, and if I wanted to make notes or check if the recorder was still running, it didn’t seem to disrupt the flow of interaction between them. Thus, I could say that my iPhone helped me to establish a common material ground, and thus a common consumption community (Muniz and Schau, 2005) with the couples.

Another key role of the phone and the speech-in-action recordings was that it allowed me to recollect, remember and reflect on the interactions and conversations that took place during the observations. Especially minute details of the interactions such as small comments, phrases, overlapping talks, exchange of knowledge, noises of what was done with objects, all of these would have been lost had I not recorded the interactions. This source of data was very valuable as it allowed me to replay the scenes in my head and make sense of what was happening after I left the field site. I worked on transcribing these speech-in-action recordings but also used them to “trigger memories” to write fieldnotes (Hein *et al.*, 2011, p.263). Firstly, in transcribing these audios, it helped me to interpret and analyze my data from participants view to a great extent (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). I tried to get an understanding of their “doings and sayings” along with their interaction with material objects in the specific context (Schatzki, 2001, p.53; Warde, 2005). Hence the ongoing speech-in-action allowed me to represent my participants’ voices in a more ‘true’ manner. Secondly, as mentioned it helped me to write fieldnotes, which I used mainly to write non-verbal and behavioral gestures.

4.4.1.4.2 Fieldnotes and Photos

Fieldnotes firstly were written as a supplement to the speech-in-action recordings. As the audios already provide the ‘verbal’ accounts of what was said during the observations, I believe these can enhance the quality of observations (Hein *et al.*, 2011) so I used them as my main source of data. However, fieldnotes were also written directly after the observations. Here I would use the commuting time on the London Underground from the participants’ homes to my own, which usually lasts 30 to 50 minutes, to scribble down notes of the scenes I can remember. I tried to focus on recollecting the non-verbal behavior (Saunders *et al.*, 2009) or the gestures during conflicts (as mentioned, I witnessed a lot of conflicts!). These fieldnotes were usually written in fragments and in an unstructured form (Sanjek, 1990) also through using the notepad function on my mobile phone (Hein *et al.*, 2011). I would then re-write them once I transferred the file to my computer the next day. An example of a fieldnote excerpt is provided in Appendix C. Many a times, these fieldnotes would be incorporated into my speech-in-action transcripts. As I do the transcriptions and replay the scenes and conversations in my mind, I would integrate the non-verbal behaviors recollected (that might or might not be in the fieldnotes) from replaying the audio into the transcriptions. In a sense, I would re-live the lived experience as I could feel the presence of my participants once again. This proved to be a very useful method for me to combine both my verbal and non-verbal descriptive fieldnotes into one file, and helped me make sense of my data even more.

I also used my mobile phone to capture pictures during the observations (Hein *et al.*, 2011). Photos were taken as an evidence of me being there to demonstrate “authenticity” (Hogg and Maclaran, 2008, p.130) but also as a tool to “feel, think, imagine and empathize” with my participants (Belk, 1998, p.315). Following Peñaloza (1998), photos provided support for capturing the behavioral aspects of consumption, as a supplement to the field notes. It aided me to capture behind-the-scenes moments (moments when participants felt nothing was going on) as well as emotionally charged moments (Arnould, 1998) such as when they were making a new dish or when the shopping negotiation was being performed. Based on my research objectives to analyze co-performances in meal practices, I mainly took pictures of the interactions between the couples and their interactions with material objects. For example, I took pictures when the couples were discussing about what to buy, or when they were doing the meal together. I took pictures of when material objects were being handled and communicated during their planning, shopping, cooking, eating and keeping of leftovers.

Although I do acknowledge that in photographing some moments and not others, I intentionally chose to represent some things over others (Peñaloza, 1998). However, as Peñaloza (1998) argues, like fieldnotes, photographs allows the researcher to detail the contents in the field and make explicit what is important in communicating meanings. I used photos as a means to capture the “essence of behavior” that I encountered and sought to represent (Belk, 1998, p.331). Photos also took me back to the memories in the scene, which helped me to remember behavioral descriptions for writing my fieldnotes. And as the recordings, fieldnotes, reflexive notes and photographs were all stored in the same device (my mobile phone), it allowed me to systematically combine, organize, store and upload (to my personal computer) these multiple data sources in an efficient and secure manner.

4.4.1.4.3 Ethnographic Interviews

Supplementing the observational data, I conducted individual and collective ethnographic semi-structured in-depth interviews to gain a richer emic understanding of underlying meanings and competences in practices. Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) suggest how ethnographic interviews can be used to understand “*perspectives of action*”, which is “*people’s value-laden stories and accounts of their own and others’ behaviours*” (p.490). It allows participants to explain and give accounts of their consumption and what these consumption means to them, an aspect which cannot be grasped from the observations alone. Doing so can also allow researchers to not only understand meanings behind behaviour but also compare what people say (and their idealisations) to their observed behaviour (Arnould, 1998).

The couple interview was conducted in the first meeting, mostly at a café near their house. Here I not only could gain the trust of the couples in order for gain access into their homes, but it also allowed me to see the interactions between the couples at the first instance in a public space. As Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014) highlight how interviewing couples together is very useful as it allows the researcher to see the interaction and the non-verbal behaviours taking place between them, which is an observational data in its own right. The interview started with a general topic on the couple’s relationship, followed by how the food organisation is being done in their household. I then ask in turn how their shopping, planning, cooking, eating, cleaning is being divided, and the problems they were encountering, how are they different, and any stories they would like to share. I have attached my interview guide in Appendix D

(both individual and collective interviews). This first (couple) interview usually set the scene for the observations as they revealed ongoing problems and negotiations which helped me to make sense of what was happening when I went to observe them in the next month.

The individual interviews were conducted usually in the 4th month of the study period, after at least one shopping and one dinner cooking observation. Having a gap between both the interviews allowed me time to analyse the first interview so that I could be prepared for the individual interviews. Individual interviews mostly took place at participants' kitchens however at times, it was conducted at participants' workplace or at a café near their house. The individual interviews focused on their upbringing, how their family practices were like, how have they changed during the various phases of their lives, and how moving in with their partner is changing them (see Appendix D). Here, I gave each partner a chance to give their individual accounts of their behaviours and what it means for them, and again asking for as many examples as possible. As Halkier and Jensen (2011) suggest how asking participants to narrate stories of their practices or give specific examples can allow one to focus on analysis of the practice rather than focusing too much on the individual actor.

Although I prepared a set of questions for these interviews, in the field I mostly followed participants' answers and adapted my sequence of questions based on their answers. The duration of interviews varied from 40 minutes to 2.5 hours. I had also initially wanted to use photo diaries (Szabo, 2014) to supplement the interviews. However, during the beginning of my fieldwork, as a trial I had asked 2 couples to keep a 7-day meal diary, indicating that they take photos of the dinner meal, and write small descriptions such as how did they cook it (methods and ingredients), who made it, did they eat together, why/why not, etc. I then would have used this to probe further discussions in the individual interviews. However, they were inconsistent and I also realised that I was already demanding a bulk of their time from the observations and interviews, hence did not continue with this method. I did not include the diaries from the 2 couples in my analysis.

4.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.5.1 Overview of Fieldwork Data

In total, the speech-in-action recordings, in-depth interviews, fieldnotes and pictures generated over 130 hours (7,800 minutes) of data, 960 pages of transcriptions and over 2000 photographs. Table 4 and 5 below summarises the actual observational and interview activities conducted. Each couple (except Julia and William who as mentioned dropped out after the 4th month) went through at least 1 couple interview, 1 individual interview each, 2 shopping observations, and 2 dinner meal observations averaging to around 10 hours of time immersion with each couple. Julia and William had to drop out due to Julia developing a severe food allergy during the study. However, they were happy for me to include their data in the analysis, which I felt was substantiate enough (I already had 4 months with them) to be included.

#	Couple	1 st visit	2 nd visit	3 rd visit	4 th visit	5 th visit	6 th visit
1.	Hannah + James	Couple interview at a cafe	Shop + Storing +Lunch (frozen pizza)	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean	Hannah indiv.* interview	Dinner Shop + Cooking + James's indiv. interview	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean
		17 March 2017	13 May 2017	24 July 2017	14 Aug 2017	21 Sept 2017	17 Jan 2018
2.	Joanne + Tom	Couple interview at a cafe	Shop + Storing	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean	Both indiv. interview	Shop + Storing	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean
		21 March 2017	3 April 2017	6 June 2017	18 & 27 July 2017	11 Sept 2017	13 Nov 2017
3.	Ted + Elias	Couple interview at a cafe	Shop + Cooking (lunch)	Dinner Shop + Cooking +Eating +Clean	Ted indiv. interview	Elias interview + Observe Online grocery shopping	Dinner Shop +Cooking +Eating
		4 April 2017	26 May 2017	23 June 2017	20 July 2017	10 Aug 2017	12 Nov 2017
4.	Sara + Nick	Couple interview	Shop + Storing	Dinner	Both indiv. interview	Shop	Dinner Cooking

				Cooking +Eating +Clean		+ Cooking (lunch)	+Eating +Clean
		14 July 2017	22 July 2017	4 Aug 2017	6 & 19 Sept 2017	11 Oct 2017	5 Dec 2017
5.	Olivia + Alex	Couple interview at a café	Dinner Shop +Cooking +Eating +Clean	Olivia indv. interview + Dinner Cooking +Eating	Alex indv. interview	Dinner Shop +Cooking +Eating	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean
		23 April 2017	9 June 2017	1 Aug 2017	2 Aug 2017	16 Nov 2017	6 Dec 2017
6.	Julia + William	Couple interview	Dinner Shop +Cooking +Eating +Clean	Julia indv. interview	William indv. interview at home		
		30 March 2017	19 May 2017	18 July 2017	22 Oct 2017		
7.	Pia + Max	Couple interview	Shop + Storing	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean	Both indv. interview	Shop + Storing	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean
		22 May 2017	17 June 2017	22 July 2017	8 & 12 Aug 2017	5 Sept 2017	21 Nov 2017
8.	Vanna + Simon	Couple interview + Shop	Cooking (lunch) +Eating +Clean	Vanna indv. interview	Dinner Shop +Cooking +Eating + Simon indv. interview	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean	
		25 May 2017	18 June 2017	19 July 2017	17 Sept 2017	30 Nov 2017	
9.	Milena + Bernard	Couple interview at home + break-fast prep	Shop + lunch	Both indv. interview	Dinner Cooking +Eating	Shop + Storing +Snack	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean

		8 Oct 2017	18 Nov 2017	29 Jan 2018	16 Jan 2018	26 Feb 2018	12 March 2018
10	Barbara + Roberto	Couple interview at a cafe	Shop + Storing	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean	Both indiv. interview	Shop + Storing	Dinner Cooking +Eating
		12 Aug 2017	18 Sept 2017	4 Oct 2017	25 Nov	4 Dec 2017	11 Jan 2018
11	Jenny + Paul	Couple interview at a cafe	Shopping	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean	Both indiv. interview	Dinner Shop +Cooking +Eating +Clean	
		23 Sept 2017	9 Oct 2017	24 Jan 2018	6 & 16 Feb 2018	6 March 2018	
12	Annie + Chris	Couple interview at a cafe	Shop + Storing	Dinner Shop +Cooking +Eating +Clean	Both indiv. interview + Dinner (frozen meal)	Dinner Shop +Cooking +Eating +Clean	
		9 August 2017	7 Sept 2017	20 Oct 2017	23 Jan 2018	14 March 2018	
13	Harry + Emily	Couple interview at a cafe	Shop + Storing	Dinner Cooking +Eating +Clean	Both indiv. interview	Dinner Shop +Cooking +Eating +Clean	
		10 Sept 2017	8 Oct 2017	9 Nov 2017	13 Jan 2018	29 March 2018	

**indv. = individual*

Table 4: Observational and Interview activities conducted

As mentioned, all the observations and interviews took place at or near the couples' homes. I visited each couple 5 or 6 times during the 1 year period, which allowed me to see transitional change over time. And to ensure consistency and homogeneity in data collection, all couples started with the collective interview, followed by the shopping and cooking observation, then the individual interviews, and then another round of shopping and cooking observation. However, at times, as shown in Table 4 above couples would do additional activities (shopping or cooking) which allowed me to gain additional data. The table shows the total observational

and interview activities done with each couple and the date it was conducted. Whereas Table 5 below gives a summary of the number of observations and interviews (couple and individual), and the total time spent with each couple.

#	Couples	No. of Shopping Observation	No. of Dinner Observation	No. of Interviews (individual collective)	Total Minutes of data
1.	Hannah + James	2	3 + 1 lunch	3	415 m
2.	Joanne + Tom	2	2	3	681 m
3.	Ted + Elias	3 + 1 online shop	2 + 1 lunch	3	1041 m
4.	Sara + Nick	2	2 + 1 lunch	3	701 m
5.	Olivia + Alex	2	4	3	611 m
6.	Julia + William	1	1	3	523 m
7.	Pia + Max	2	2	3	588 m
8.	Vanna + Simon	2	2 + 1 lunch	3	617 m
9.	Milena + Bernard	2	2 + 1 breakfast 1 lunch	3	660 m
10.	Barbara + Roberto	2	2	3	578 m
11.	Jenny + Paul	2	2	3	467 m
12.	Annie + Chris	3	3	3	575 m
13.	Harry + Emily	2	2	3	443 m

Table 5: Summary of observational and interview data

4.5.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

According to Bryman and Burgess (1994) there is no fixed technique on how to do data analysis but preliminary data analysis would have already started while still in the field. I too used each time interval between the visitations to listen and transcribe the speech-in-action audios and combine them with fieldnote data. In doing so, I tried to make short summaries of my interpretations. Here I would write about the couples, their practices and my interpretation of what was being negotiated in a Word file. In doing so, firstly it allowed me to remember the conversations and interactions that happened in the last visit, and I could prepare myself for the upcoming one. Secondly, I could get a sense of the recurring themes and narrow down my focus of observation and initiate more focused questions/conversations (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). For example, third month into my fieldwork I realized that the issue of varying competences, such as different types of skills in the kitchen, knowledge, techniques so on, was a recurring theme that couples' were negotiating the most. I made notes and questions on my phone to then ask them more about it and also tried to narrow down my observations.

However, as Flick (2014) argues in-depth data analysis can only start once fieldwork is completed and when one has stepped out of the field. After I completed my fieldwork, I took some time to transcribe the data. Initially transcription was a long, boring and never-ending process. I was overwhelmed with the amount of data I generated. However, I started doing the analysis alongside the transcriptions, which allowed me to be more strategic and break down the analysis of my data. As I started transcribing the couple interviews and first rounds of observations, I had already began the process of 'sorting my mess' through coding (Spiggle, 1994).

Coding has been described as a process of "*labeling segments of data to allow the researcher to categorize, summarize and interpret each piece of data*" (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014, p.156). It involves the research to "*dissect, reduce and sort to reconstitute data*" (Spiggle, 1994, p.492). It is a key step in data analysis (Bryman and Burgess, 1994) and helps to reduce complexity of the data (Flick, 2014). I immersed myself in my data to try and arrange my 'mess' through existing theories (Spiggle, 1994). Inspired by the process of open coding in a grounded theory approach (Goulding and Saren, 2010; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014), I started manually coding my data. According to Goulding and Saren (2010), "*open coding involves the breaking down, conceptualization and categorization of data*" (p.72). In open

coding, researchers remain open to their interpretations of the data (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014). I first read each transcript line by line and highlighted keywords, phrases or chunks of text with codes. These chunks of texts could be a conversation the couple were having each other or a line said by one participant. I coded the texts based on existing theories (Spiggle, 1994), but also surprising elements (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) that I thought was interesting in the data. In this step, my codes were descriptive, short and simple, and so I generated many different codes. For example, I used labels like emotions, planning, ritual, routine, conflict, competences, materiality, so on to highlight the texts in the transcript. For an example, see Appendix E. I then sifted through the data again and looked for recurring themes within the codes, and grouped them into categories (Spiggle, 1994).

Inspired by Goulding and Saren's (2010) process of axial coding, I began finding relationships between the open coded categories. I identified overlapping themes and grouped similar codes together into categories through using an Excel spreadsheet where I gave titles to categories. For example, themes of conflict were grouped together, themes of material domination in a practice were grouped together. I extracted the chunks of coded text to the Excel file, and sorted it into various coded categories. The excel spreadsheet helped me to sort, arrange and organize the codes and categories in a more systematic manner. I could then breakdown the categories into sub-categories, where I started finding relationships within the categories. For example, I categorized conflict as a recurring them, then created sub-categories of the types of conflicts in the Excel file. In the same file, I would identify the strategies for resolving conflicts and which couples showed manifestations of this conflict. See Appendix F for an example. During this whole process, I was travelling back and forth between the emic experiences of participants from the data, and existing theoretical concepts (Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014; Bryman and Burgess, 1994).

According to Willig (2014), interpretation is a process of making sense of the data. It involves producing a "*deeper and fuller understanding of the meaning in an account*" (p.137). As I was immersing myself in the data, doing the coding and sorting it into recurring themes and patterns, I went back to the abstract level of theory, and analyzed the data based on theoretical concepts. At first, I used existing theories that underpinned my study, for example practice theory. I developed the categories of conflict based on the various elements of practice. However, I also tried to identify new categories and build on the existing theory through interpreting how practices interact at the collective level. Hence, during this process, I was

trying to build theory and go beyond just identifying recurring themes (Spiggle, 1994). I did the coding the same way for my interview and observational data (speech-in-action recordings and fieldnotes).

Photographs were analyzed through a rough thematic analysis to find common themes (Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014). I first sorted and labelled the photographs from each visit with each couple in a chronological manner in my computer. By chronologically I mean based on their timeline in the visits. I gave labels to photographs in terms of what I saw was taking place (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). I then went through all the photographs and analyzed them in relation to themes that were emerging from my textual data. For example, I sifted through the photographs for representations of conflict interactions, as that was one of the first themes that were emerging from my observations. I also analyzed the photographs for evidence of any changes that took place over the couple's transitional period. I thus use pictures to provide a more trusted representation of the aspects I'm trying to convey (Peñaloza, 1998; Basil, 2011).

After I did the coding and analysis of my textual data, I went back to the summaries I wrote about each couple and their practices. Here I expanded on the original data through my interpretations (Flick, 2014) and inserted quotes where relevant. For example, for each couple I would write how they formed a collective routine, based on my research question and objectives of the study. I would then write a summary of what were the issues they were facing and how it was being resolved. This helped me to do a second round of analysis and interpretation. I found manual coding as a method to code and categorize my data to be very effective for dealing with my large amounts of data. I had attended an NVivo training workshop at Royal Holloway in my attempt to use it for sorting, storing, highlighting and indexing my data (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). However, as my ethnographic work generated immense amount of data, my data wasn't 'neat', I felt I had to do the manual task of sorting my 'messy' data by myself. As the anthropologist Okely (1994, p.25) highlights, analysis of fieldwork data is a continuous and creative process, hence no computer program can succeed the ethnographer's resilience, revelation and reflections of themes emergent in the field. Moreover, computer programs cannot analyze interactions and non-verbal communications, which only through reading the transcripts multiple times and manually coding the paragraphs could help me telepathically 'go back' to the field and understand the "bigger picture" (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002, p.37).

Apart from this, I also wrote memos, which helped me to think through themes and structure as I was doing my analysis. According to Thornberg and Charmaz (2014), memos are writing of ideas, questions, and thoughts as the researcher does the analysis. It is sort of a mind map (Goulding and Saren, 2010), and helps to strengthen analysis and stimulate the theorizing of data. Creating a mind map on a piece of paper several times a day as I thought of the themes and how I will structure my analysis allowed me to think of new relationships and patterns between the different categories, and also helped me to structure my thoughts for writing. It gave me new analytical lens every time I re-mapped and re-visited it.

4.6 Reflexivity and Ethical Reflections

The importance of being reflexive in ethnographic research has been much documented (Finlay, 2002; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; May and Perry, 2013; Flick, 2014). Scholars have argued how reflexivity is a crucial part of ethnography, as researchers should acknowledge and be wary of their role in the process of knowledge production and analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). I embraced reflexivity as a process of self-awareness, that following Finlay (2002) “*involves a shift in understanding of data collection from something objective that is accomplished through detached scrutiny of ‘what I know and how I know it’ to recognizing how we actively construct our knowledge*” (p.532).

Although I acknowledge that my presence in the domestic lives of the couples may make them perform differently and I cannot say that I am observing routine formation in a natural context, however, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) contend “*we are part of the social world we study*” (p.14). As data is produced through the researcher and the researcher is the instrument of research (Spiggle, 1994), I take the stance that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and participant (O’Reilly, 2012). Hence, we cannot fully eliminate the influence of the researcher if we are to study and understand the social phenomena – there will always be some level of contamination (Finlay, 2002). However, I argue that my being there in the field (although it may have consequences for how the data was produced) does not mean that I have weaker data set. In fact, my participation and entanglement in the couples’ lives (Oakley, 2016) would have produced richer data that can aid in deeper insights (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). For example, I was there with them to see how they shared the meal, how they enacted the practice together, how the negotiation was performed in action, how the disputes were managed, things that I wouldn’t have been able to see and analyse had I not ‘been there’.

Moreover, although I recognize the fact that observations may lead to displayed performances (Finch, 2007), such as intentional acts (Arnould, 1998), I felt that observations through time revealed various back-stage (Goffman, 1959) performances as well, which allowed me to capture both ordinary and ritualised aspects of practice formation through time. For example, during the observations, I had asked couples to prepare one of their everyday evening meals, and the indication was given to them that I wanted to observe their ‘normal’ weekday meal. Sometimes I even specifically remarked (teasingly) not to clean the house. However, many a times I could still feel that they made some arrangements and at times made a ‘nicer’ weekday meal when I was there. For example, they would try to cook from scratch and at times have a drink (a wine, beer, or juices). The bathroom and living room would be relatively clean and tidy. Although the observations mostly took place on Mondays to Thursdays, which is a working day for all of the couples, and couples would reassure me that this is their ‘normal’ workday evening meal, I acknowledge that they could still perceive me as a guest. In fact, since they are quite new in the relationship I probably was their first guest, and perhaps sometimes they needed to display their new and good relationship (Finch, 2007) to me. However, since I observed them over time, I felt that my presence became more normalised as time passed, which allowed me certain privileges to capture various revelatory moments. For example, when couples hadn’t planned on a meal, and they were discussing it impromptu during the interview sessions or in the supermarket. Or when they haven’t got much time after the shopping trip, and decided on making something quick and easy, which could be different to the ones they prepared for the dinner observation. Or when they were still trying out a new dish together and this caused heated arguments on how to make it properly. I believe these moments were unplanned and unintentional and allowed me access into their back-stage performances.

However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) highlighted, we as ethnographic researchers need to be self-reflexive as much as possible to understand how we might have played a role in such moments, and we must put ourselves to the same scrutiny we did with our participants (O’Reilly, 2012; May and Perry, 2013) to gain a richer meaningful interpretation. I have a reflexive paper at the revise and resubmit stage for the *Qualitative Market Research Journal* on my emotions and ethical implications in observing family conflicts in action (Khanijou and Pirani, 2020) [see Appendix H]. By keeping a reflexive diary, I was able to record my reflexive thoughts, such as emotions, feelings along with any pre-conceived assumptions (Snape and Spencer, 2003) about the couples. By having the speech-in-action recordings, I was also able

to reflexively analyse my role in data collection as listening to my own voice aided me to be aware of how I was co-constructing the discussions and practices.

Reflexive notes were written at various times throughout the fieldwork period. For example, sometimes I wrote them when I was stressed after an observation session, sometimes I wrote them while having thoughtful sessions with myself, and sometimes alongside writing the fieldnotes. They were mostly written in the notepad app on my iPhone (Hein *et al.*, 2011). For example, I wrote about my feelings when I was caught in the moment of conflicts between couples; I wrote about how I felt when some men were rude towards their female partners; I wrote about how I felt when women were being very controlling; I wrote about how uncomfortable I felt when my presence was not welcome by one of the partners; or when I realised I was named as the ‘food lady’ in their text messages to each other. For an excerpt see Appendix G. Although I did not include these notes in the data analysis and interpretation, as it is a methodological issue and it is also highly personal, I made sure to be aware of my personal feelings and also be as objective as possible.

Moreover, O’Reilly (2012) argues how re-visiting the field from time to time in a longitudinal study can aid the researcher to develop their reflexive awareness. This is because ‘stepping in and out of the field’ allows the researcher to balance the relationship between being present in the field and distancing from it, which would help in developing reflexivity and thus deeper insights. As my longitudinal work required me to jump to and from the field, from my own house to theirs as well as from one couples’ house to the next, I used these spaces of commute and time-off periods to develop my reflexive notes. As in O’Reilly’s study, this practice gave me intellectual time and space to reflect on my observations, their intentional displays, and the discussions I initiated with participants, which helped me to ‘perform’ better in the next visit.

I will now end this chapter with my ethical reflections. Although my research followed the ethical code of conduct prescribed by the University Research Committee, I am aware of the ethical implications of my research process. As mentioned I have a manuscript under review on my methodological reflections on observing conflicts and the ethical implications of it (Khanijou and Pirani, 2020). I acknowledge that the privilege to gain access into peoples’ lives and to observe moments such as conflicts is built on trust and rapport over time (Edirisingha *et al.*, 2017), and that I should not exploit their situation for the research gain (Watts, 2008). However, I argue that on the other hand, participants have consented to take part in the study

and understand that they can withdraw at any time. Thus, the power of deciding when to ‘close off’ conflicts is in their hands. But with the awareness and mindfulness of ethical code of conduct, as Gilbert (2000) suggests, we as researchers can steer such emotionally charged moments to be enriching for both the researchers and participants in the process (see also Corbin and Morse, 2003).

For the participants, it may feel almost therapeutic to have someone listen to them without judgment and interference. As Schouten (2014, p.595) notes how “ethnotherapy” – a term he uses for combining consumption ethnography with therapy – can reveal people’s inner selves and help them understand their problems. For the couples too, it may feel like a therapeutic effect as they can talk through what they do and how they do it differently in order to ‘let off their steam’. Perhaps such conflicting moments can allow them both to feel empowered rather than vulnerable (Gilbert, 2000). However, as researchers I understand that we need to be wary of our role in their situation, and at the same time be able to show our sensitivity and empathy with them. Watts (2008) highlights how empathy is “*an intuitive connection to others that, without words, communicates interest in and care about others*” (p.9). One of the ways I was able to establish empathy with the couples was through sharing experience. As I was myself newly cohabiting with my partner during the start of my research, I was in the same life stage as my participants. I therefore understood how it might feel to have a third person there observing us, and how uncomfortable it might be to have a fight in front of somebody. Thus, I revealed to the couples my similar status as a new cohabitee and may reveal a similar conflict (if any) I had with my partner after they have ‘closed off’ their conflicts, which allowed me to communicate my empathy and also reduce power hierarchy in the research (Duncombe and Jessop, 2012; Oakley, 2016).

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined my philosophical position, my research paradigm and methods adopted for studying the meal consumption practices of newly cohabited couples that took part in my study. I discussed the tools used for capturing data, the methods of recruitment, my participant profiles, as well as the various data sources. I have also outlined my reflexive awareness and ethical reflections in the research process. I will now turn to show the findings that emerged from my study.

Chapter V

Conflict

5.1 Introduction

In observing the everyday meal consumption practices of newly cohabited couples residing in London, conflict emerged as an important aspect of negotiation. Conflicts, which may take the form of direct confrontational arguments (Vuchinich, 1987) or passive aggressive (behavioral) disagreements, were revealed to be key instances where individual meanings, competences and materials collide and where the negotiation of collective practice was being performed.

This chapter will discuss the themes of conflict that emerged from the study. I will show the different aspects of conflicts and understandings of how conflicts are repeated through time and space, which hinders the couples' process of merging a collective routine. Spousal food conflicts have been defined as "*incompatibilities or antagonisms of ideas, desires and actions between the two partners*" (Margolin, 1988 in Bove *et al.*, 2003, p.26). Previous studies on family meal conflicts mainly analysed the symbolic and materialized aspects of conflict, such as during serving the meal (Wilk, 2006), sharing the meal (Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2008; Wilk, 2010), difference in food choices (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Bove and Sobal, 2006), as well as objects in mealtime (Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014), which helped us understand the underlying phenomena of conflict such as social class, culture, moralities and family values (e.g. Wilk, 2006; 2010).

However, most of these studies have analysed such conflicts either from a uni-lateral perspective such as through interviewing couples separately (e.g. the studies on newly married couples – Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Kemmer *et al.*, 1998) or on already established practices (e.g. Wilk, 2010; Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014) and there has been no study capturing and understanding conflict at a *collective level over time*. Being inspired from a practice theoretical approach (Shove *et al.*, 2012) and also Wilk's (2006) autoethnography on his and his wife's conflicting practices, this chapter will discuss how conflicts are a result of mis-alignments between various elements of practice during co-performance of practices at the collective level, and how these conflicts can be carried through time.

The chapter will be structured in the following format. I will first discuss past literature on conflict in family meal practices. I will then go on to reveal the various aspects of conflict that emerged from my findings. The chapter will end with a discussion on how practice elements (meanings, competencies, materials) can interact and at times compete with each other through time at the collective level.

5.2 Conflict in Family Practices

Consuming a shared family meal has traditionally been associated with the “image of a happy family” (Wilk, 2010, p.428), where research have mainly focused on the role of the meal in creating and reproducing family identity (Devault, 1991; Moisio *et al.*, 2004; Cappellini and Parsons, 2012a; Edirisingha *et al.*, 2015). As discussed in my literature review, the role of the meal in creating and transferring family bonds, values, meanings, norms and beliefs to other members have been much noted (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991; Moisio *et al.*, 2004; Carrigan *et al.*, 2006; Cappellini and Parsons, 2012a; Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014). But as Wilk (2008) argues, consuming the shared meal can also cause “conflicts, rebellion and disunity” (p.66), which can lead to problems and stress.

Although scant, there has been some studies that show how family dinners can be a site of conflict, leading to tensions between family members (Price, 2008; Wilk, 2006; Wilk 2010). For example, Wilk (2010) discusses how mealtimes can be a place where “power and authority” is played out and negotiated between parents and their fussy children (p.428). In another study, Gutierrez *et al.* (2008) discusses that family dinner time is an important project for the family as it imposes “disclosure, intimacy and collective identity” (p.190), but it can also create tensions when it has different meanings and is enacted differently by each member. For example, they found that “daily emergencies” (e.g. because of the parents’ work) and the invasion of technology (e.g. iphones/tablets on the dinner table) can cause problems, creating a disconnectedness in what the family believes in/wants and what is actually performed (p.190). It was highlighted that families regard dinner as the ideal project of the family as they wanted to spend time to eat together, but reality was there are often interruptions for enacting these practices. They highlight how market resources (e.g. convenience foods) then become appropriate for dealing with this disruption in family time.

In a couple household, mealtimes can also be a place where meanings and family history are understood and performed. For example, in an auto-reflexive piece Wilk (2006) analyses how practices of serving the meal can cause a conflict in couples as there are plenty of sensitive meanings involved. He discusses how his and his wife's different ways of serving the meal has been an ongoing conflict, as it symbolizes their conflicting meanings associated with abundance (making a lot for leftovers or making just enough) and sharing (plating or helping yourselves). Such materialized aspects of conflict, according to him, is an embodiment of their different family values, deep rooted in social class and culture, and is very much gained through their different upbringing and family practice. The practice of serving can thus reveal how people are brought up, their social class history and moral principles (Wilk, 2006).

In all of these studies, consuming the shared family meal is seen as important, but conflicts can be a hurdle and a scene where negotiation takes place. However, these studies have mainly analyzed the symbolic and materialized aspects of conflict during the practice of *eating* the shared family meal and also mainly on already established families. As I analyzed newly cohabiting couples during their transitional period, I witnessed conflicts in transition and also throughout the process of the meal (from planning, shopping, cooking, eating, serving, cleaning). Inspired from a practice theoretical approach, I approached conflicts as routine disruptions (Ehn and Löfgren, 2009; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017) when actors attempt to do the meal together.

5.3 Routines Disrupted

Inspired from analyzing practices, I observed the inter-connected practices involved in meal consumption (Cappellini *et al.*, 2016) of newly cohabited couples residing in London. As can be recalled from chapter three, a practice consists of several elements which are interdependent on each other for the practice to be performed (Schatzki *et al.*, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002a). As mentioned, I'm influenced by Shove's version of practice as comprising of three elements: symbolic meanings, competences and materiality (Shove *et al.*, 2012), which are interplaying with one another. According to Shove *et al.* (2012), in order for a practice to be performed, these elements need to be coordinated and in sync with one another. But what happens when any one of these elements becomes constricted?

Woermann and Rokka (2015), in their study on “timeflow” in consumption practices, looked at how mis-alignments between any one element of practice can cause a disruption in performing the whole practice as it affects the “temporal experiences” in consumption (p.1487). Although they had 5 elements of practice, they show how each element influence and structure the performance, and the relationship/interplay between each element involved can shape the practice experience. Thus, they argue that when all the elements are in sync, there is a normal, stable and peaceful performance (and experience for the practitioner). However, when any one of the elements misalign, which is an element that “sticks out”, “demands attention”, there is an unstable, stressful performance altogether (p.1499). Similarly, Phipps and Ozanne (2017) looked at how ordinary domestic routines can become disrupted during events like natural droughts. During natural droughts, there is a restriction on household water consumption, and therefore elements in the practice such as practical/embodied understandings (meanings and competences) and material configurations becomes disturbed and mis-aligned (Phipps and Ozanne, 2017). They discuss how in routine disruption, forgotten norms, meanings, competences embodied in the actor (for example competences of using water, flushing the toilet, showering, so on) would come to the forefront of consciousness as actors attempt to re-align their practices. Both of these papers have been influential (and inspirational) in my understanding of how elements in the practice influence each other, and mis-alignments between any one can affect the practice (Woermann and Rokka, 2015).

However, what happens when there is more than one actor involved in the practice? How do elements interact with each other during co-performance at the collective level? The above studies looked at how mis-alignments within elements of practice caused a disruption for the practitioner, but there hasn't been any study that looked at how mis-alignments and re-alignments occur at the collective level over time.

5.3.1 When My Normal Habits Meet Your Alien Ways

Especially in a new couple household, when two people attempt to do a practice together, such as the family meal, how does their existing meanings, competences and materiality in doing the meal interact with each other? Giving an example of his and his wife's differences, Wilk (2006) highlights how most couples come into a relationship with different ideas and conventions in how to do a practice. Such differences will cause existing routines to be disrupted as actors confront each other's “strange habits” (Ehn and Löfgren, 2009, p.105). In

their theoretical piece on routines disruption, Ehn and Löfgren (2009) gives the example of a new couple household. In a new couple relationship, when “*my normal routine encounter your strange habits*” (p.105), existing routines will be disrupted and brought to the forefront of consciousness. ‘Especially in the first morning of waking up with your new partner, one often find oneself observing the other person’s morning habits to see if they are the kind of person we would want to share our home with’ (Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). In analyzing the other person’s habits, they discuss how people are often forced to think about the way they do things and how is it different to the other person.

In observing the co-performance of everyday dinner consumption practices of newly cohabited couples that took part in my study, many instances of conflicts were witnessed. Conflicts were approached as a manifestation of disrupted routines as actors confront each other’s “strange habits” (Ehn and Löfgren, 2009, p.105). Inspired from practice theory (Shove *et al.*, 2012; Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017), I will now turn to show how there was a mis-alignment between elements of practices at the collective level as actors attempted to co-perform practices together, which caused repeated conflicts through time.

5.4 Conflict During Co-performing Collective Practices

Drawing from Shove *et al.*’s (2012) version of elements in a practice, my findings reveal three main aspects of conflict: 1. Conflict in symbolic meanings, 2. Conflict in competences, and 3. Conflict in materials. Conflicting symbolic meanings include conflicting values and norms in co-performing practices; Conflicting competences include conflicting techniques, bodily skills and knowledge in co-performing practices; and Conflicting materials are material objects and spaces that cause the conflict. As will be shown, these conflicts are repeated over time and it can manifest itself in all the inter-connected practices involved in the consumption of the meal (from planning, shopping, cooking, serving, eating to disposal). The next section will unpack these different aspects of conflict.

5.4.1 Conflict in Symbolic Meanings

Meanings involve the “symbolic meanings, ideas, aspirations” in a practice (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.14). It is part of the understandings (Schatzki, 2001), the mental activities (Reckwitz, 2002a)

that forms part of the practice. Shove (2003) discusses meanings as conventions and norms that exist in practices. In order to understand symbolic meanings that exist in practices, many a times, we can look at its materialisation in and through the practice (Shove *et al.*, 2012). Studies have shown how meanings that is in the person can be manifested through their materialisation in consumption practices and use of material objects (Miller, 1998; Belk, 1988; Wilk, 2006). Thus, it was through looking at the conflicting materiality in meal practices, such as through shopping, cooking, eating, serving, cleaning of the meal, that conflicting symbolic meanings were revealed in my study. There were two main aspects of conflict in meanings that emerged from the study: 1. Conflicting Values and 2. Conflicting Norms. I will now unpack and show some examples of these aspects.

5.4.1.1 Values

Many couples in my study expressed conflicting values about and during doing domestic meal practices. Research has linked values to attitudes and behaviors in consumption (Richins and Dawson, 1992; Rindfleisch *et al.*, 1997). As I will show, values can be deep rooted attitudes such as those of gender roles gained from one's cultural and family upbringing, and most often manifest itself during co-performance of practices. Gender attitudes have been defined as the "beliefs about the roles appropriate for women and men" (Fischer and Arnold, 1994, p.166), and it's often been related to gendered values gained from familial upbringing (Šikić, 2007; Moen *et al.*, 1997).

Take the example of Sara and Nick, who had conflicting "gendered values and attitudes" (Šikić, 2007, p.459) about various practices of the meal. Sara and Nick constantly have debates about doing the meal work. When I first met Sara, she was struggling with coping up with the emotional and physical demands of her life after moving in with Nick. She poured her heart out to me during the individual interview about how she felt that within a month of cohabitation, the housework and especially the meal work became very gendered, as she feels a lack of help and support from Nick in keeping their house clean and in helping with the meal preparation. They live with another housemate, a friend of Nick's, but even he doesn't help with any house work. And Sara feels she is becoming responsible for every domestic task in the house.

Sara: We barely cook together because actually housework at our place is quite gendered. I do most of the housework. So I do most of the cooking [...] in the beginning, we did have a division of task but it

was highly voluntary until one day, I don't know what, how and why, they just stopped doing the housework. And I had to do it because I do want our house to be clean [...] and I want to eat proper food [...] I was a bit upset, and I even sent messages to them saying I am really busy and I do want our house to be clean. But it's just always me doing the housework. My boyfriend says I have different standards [of hygiene], I have OCD. And my other flat mate just ignores me, he just doesn't say anything in the [Whatsapp] group.

Being from China, Sara tells me how she was brought up in a very privileged family who never let her enter the kitchen. Her mother is a “very independent woman” (Sara), who has a full-time job. However, her parents are separated and she was brought up by her grandparents who never let her “do anything” (Sara) in relation to housework. Moreover, she tells me “this is very typical in China nowadays, women don't want to be housewives” (Sara). When she met Nick, her British partner, in University, he did cook and prepare meals for her in their initial dating period. However, such practices stopped when they moved in together. Because she wants her house to be clean and, as she mentioned, she wants to eat proper meals, she feels the roles (of the cleaner, and cook) are being imposed upon her. And studying feminism she often contends him about doing his share of the housework, but it would always end up in a quarrel.

Sara: No, I don't like cooking. Because I am so busy with my life and I personally don't like housework being gendered. I studied feminism and I categorize myself as a feminist, but my boyfriend doesn't give a shit about it. I try not to go into this kind of discussion with him, because each time it would just end up being a quarrel [...] I think it's a habit he formed since childhood, I don't see him changing.

Nick's upbringing on the other hand, is quite different. His parents divorced from a young age, and he grew up living in between his parents' and grandparents' houses, and from time to time with social services. Since the age of 16, he started living and earning by himself to pay for his college fees and expenses. Thus, he often bought convenience food such as “microwave meals” that could just be “put in the freezer” (Nick). He tells me he never had family meals growing up. When asked Nick how he felt about doing the housework, he replies she has more time so it's only fair for her to do the housework, and dinner isn't important for him, so he could very well skip dinner:

Nick: This might sound a bit nasty, but she has more time than me [...] And in all fairness, I've eaten 2 meals at work. So when I get home, I'm not extremely hungry, I'm just physically not. Like I've eaten two decent meals at work, I'm not hungry when I get home. But Sara is determined on eating so.

Such discussions about doing the housework and debates about gender was very ongoing in many of their interactions during the observations. For example, during their 8th month of

cohabitation, when I went to their house for a meal, these conflicts were still repeating over time. Sara made boiled potatoes and vegetables with tinned tuna that night. She tells me she made the same thing with salmon for lunch, but he didn't have his share. Thus, she is replicating the same meal but making a fresh one for him (and me), while she microwaves his uneaten lunch for herself. She tells me she doesn't like to waste. He was in his room when the food was being made. He then comes to sit in the living room where she will serve him the food (Picture 1). While we were eating dinner, they had a heated discussion about gender and relating it back to their own personal lives:

Sara: I really hate it when people say 'oh, men are better at something, women are better at something'. No, it's got a lot to do with education. If you educate men and women the same way, there is not going to be much of a difference.

Nick: I'm going to go against that and say it's evolution. (they have a discussion/conflict about evolution, relation in ancient history) [...] As far as evolution goes, people get better at stuff that they are doing for generations. (He gives the example of men as hunter gatherers, and women as housewives)

Sara: Last time we had this discussion he wanted me to leave (tells me).

Nick: yeah! It's annoying! I told her to literally get out. She was basically just screaming about gender role (mumbles) [...] I would say from what I've seen in British culture, I can't say from anywhere else in the world, women generally have an easier right than men [...]

Sara: [cuts him] yeah guess what I'm doing

Nick: yeah you do all the housework because you are going to be doing it anyway. Like for example when she cooks, she is going to cook anyway regardless (of me)

Sara: So you think putting your food in your plate does not take effort, does not require time?

Nick: I'm saying, that extra 30 seconds effort –

Sara: yeah, what if I don't want to spend that extra 30 second effort –

Nick: that's fine, you don't have to [change of tone to assertion]. I've said it multiple times today, I've said it multiple times in the past few weeks. Don't worry, I'm fine. I don't want to say it again [...]



Picture 1: Sara serves Nick the meal (left);

Picture 2: Sara mainly the one who cleaned (right)

When asked about cleaning the dishes, Nick again exerts that she has more time than him, so she can do it. Over the period of time that I met them, Sara was mainly the one who did the cooking and cleaning of the dishes (see picture 2) but there was a constant debate. In Wilk's (2006) auto-ethnography, he discusses how domestic meal practices can reveal very deep rooted sensitive meanings, such as how people are brought up, their social class differences, and political and moral ideologies. In Sara's and Nick's case too, their conflicting values manifested during their eating, cooking and cleaning practices is perhaps an embodiment of their different social class, political ideology, family values and upbringing, which played a role in shaping their gendered attitudes about domestic work. For example, Sara's political upbringing through in her eyes was from the modernisation of her country, her mother's inspiration and through studying feminism in a UK University has perhaps shaped how she would like to approach her domestic life, but they were not acknowledged by her partner. Whereas, Nick's attitudes in cooking and cleaning may be more related to laziness and lack of motivation in general, which could have also been acquired through his patriarchal family upbringing, or the fact that he did not grow up with family meals. However, these differences in values and attitudes about gender when in interaction with each other caused very verbally expressive debates that were ongoing through time, as it is very difficult to resolve. As shown how in the 8th month of cohabitation, they were still have such conflicts. Through their verbal debates and confrontations with each other, these embodied meanings (political and moral ideologies) were competing with each other for domination. For example, both tried to exert

their opinion over the other, using justifications of tradition, gender, culture and time to win the episodic debate.

Sara and Nick's audaciously expressive debates about gender roles were unlike majority of my participants. This was because majority of the couples would inform me they do share the household task quite equally, or they are less vocal about it. Therefore conflicts in regards to meal work were revealed at a more subtle level (and I will discuss more about gender in another chapter). But here I show how conflicting values and attitudes about domestic tasks were very much engrained and is difficult to resolve through time. Only in the materiality of doing the meal together, such as through cooking for each other or eating together, that these engrained values and attitudes becomes manifested in the meal task. These values interact and many times also compete with each other for domination in the collective practice. As shown, they both try to justify their values to each other. This might be because of how values have been acquired, through one's family or cultural upbringing, which is perhaps an embodiment and symbolisation of their difference in social class and political familial background, which makes it very difficult to resolve through time. Thus, an actor's carried meanings in consumption (Warde, 2005) can become an ongoing source of conflict that is repeated through time, during co-performance of practices.

5.4.1.2 Norms

Another aspect of conflict in meanings were in relation to conflicting norms. Norms are what is considered the 'normal' way of doing things. In my understanding, they are the patterns and rules (Schatzki, 2001) in a practice. For example the timing, the portion, the serving of the meal, so on. And they are most likely an embodiment of one's culture (Visser, 1993; Wilk, 2006) manifested in the practices of cooking, eating and serving the meal. Take the example of Pia and Max, who had conflicting norms during eating of the meal.

Pia and Max reflect the majority of my mixed-ethnic couples. Pia is British-Indian, her parents immigrated to England at a young age. Whereas Max is from Italy, but he has been living in London for the past 7 years. They met at a salsa class in central London. Before the cohabitation, they often met outside after work for dinner. Hence scheduling and differences in eating were not a problem. However, when they moved in together, individual mealtimes,

habits of how much to eat and ways to serve the meal became a major source of problem in merging their food practices. As Pia voices out her concern to me in the first interview:

Pia: I guess before we were living together, every time we went out and every time food was involved, because we were both out, it wasn't an issue to schedule it into our usual lives. Because we were like 'oh let's meet for dinner' and we both knew we were going to go and eat. But then [now since] we started living together, we realized that we have very different eating habits and we eat at different times.

Such conflicting eating habits were evident when I went to their house the first time. It was their 5th month of cohabitation. They made pesto pasta with added potatoes and tomatoes that night. As Max takes out the plates for serving in the kitchen, Pia tells him "we can put this [the pot] on the table" (so we can help ourselves), which they did (Picture 3). But here they reveal their conflict in norms on how to share and serve the food, which has been a problem in the past, especially during breakfast:

Pia: He'll do this thing where we'll cook something together, often our breakfast we'll eat from the same plate – again [because of] laziness – and he'll very neatly divide it into equal portions and I'm like what are you doing?

Max: No, to make sure that I don't overeat or maybe sometimes like if it's just one piece I might be tempted to eat more... so...

Pia: No, so this is what I'm saying, but even when –

Max: So I feel like okay, I will put a hard limit.. [he tells her] [the conversation drifts off as they continue with serving the food on the table]

Me: Tell me about it!

Pia: So for breakfast we tend to eat salmon and eggs, and we cook three eggs - two for Max and one for me [...] So we cook it in a small pan and we break all the eggs at the same time so they kind of become one egg. And then when we put it in the plate, he'll, you know, divide it into what he thinks is his two eggs and one for me. And the other day, I came out of the shower and I just took a bite, and I think I took one from his, and he was like 'what are you doing?'

Max: I prepared this other egg for you, it's there for you –

Pia: I'm like, yeah but I can eat whatever I want.. if I take the one, you can take the other

Max: yeah, of course, but then we don't know how much... maybe I overeat more [...]

Pia: yeah, I don't have cuts, you take what you want

Max: mine was for category, I try to make it equal, otherwise I would eat the breakfast myself... the cutting is a limit for me to –

Pia: which you have done in the past. Remember you have done it in the past? I think it was at my old house when you stuffed yourself because you thought the whole thing was for you [laughs]

They tell me the story of how Max managed to eat the whole breakfast by himself one day when they were newly dating because he thought it was all for him. She had made avocado and

toast that morning as he was in the shower. She then went to shower after him as they took turns to get ready. When she came out she realized her breakfast was over because “he’d eaten all of it. He was like Oh was that all... like was that all for us to share?” (Pia). Similarly in dinner, she tells me about how Max will be careful to serve the portions equally: “He’ll be like ‘yeah, this looks alright, this has got two olives’ and I’m just like ‘what are you doing?’... Like he tries to make everything even... Whereas I would just be like one spoon, one spoon... like I’ll try and make it balance, but it’s not the end of the world” (Pia). I too observed how Max took time in serving the food in one of their dinner observations (picture 4) while she waits (with her hands on her chin).



Picture 3: Pia prefers to help themselves on the table (left);

Picture 4: Max tries to make equal portions (right)

Here the different norms in sharing and portioning food was a surprising element of conflict when they attempted to merge their eating practice. Norms are normally gained through one’s cultural upbringing. As the anthropologist Margaret Visser in her book *The Rituals of Dinner* (1993) highlights how “children learn and become accustomed to the food norms of their culture” (p.41) through their parents and cultural surroundings. For example, we learn table manners, the etiquette, how to use cutlery, how and when to talk, how much to eat, the sequence of courses, so on, through our childhood, which plays a role in shaping our habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). And as adults, people normally continue to do the same habits they have learnt to do as a child. But when two people attempt to share a routine, such engrained habits may cause a problem, as Pia’s and Max’s example shows. They themselves reflect on their own differences,

relating it to their different cultural contexts and ethnic upbringing. For example, after they closed off the conflict, they tried to reason ‘why’ they have such differences. They tell me Max is an only child and being from Europe, most of his family meals are often portioned out on individual plates. Whereas, Pia has often lived with flatmates, and her food and family meals are often shared, relating it to her ethnicity:

Pia: Max is an only child, so you know he didn’t share [while growing up]. It’s a thing about having this feeling that somebody else would want it. Whereas I’ve always lived with flatmates, we’ll leave each other the last biscuit, like ‘I’ve left you the last biscuit, because I know you will like it’.

Max: Right, I have no brother or sister [..] But you’re also I- (inaudible)

Pia: Racism.

Max: How do you know what I was...

Pia: He was about to say something racist [turns to tell me]

Max: No, no, cause..

Pia: Maybe it’s because you’re Indian [she teases]

Max: You know in Indian culture, you tend to share food more...in Italy you share sometimes, but it’s not very common

Pia: You get your own meal, yea

Here, we see a mis-alignment in norms of how to serve the meal, which can cause a conflict through time. Pia and Max justified their individual norms through relating it to their ethnicity and difference in cultural upbringing. For them, their rule of serving is the ‘normal’ and most comfortable way. But since they embody different norms in doing the practice, it caused a problem for them to align this practice through time. Such norms were mostly un-discussed and un-reflected upon prior to doing the meal together, but as shown it was only during serving the meal that such embodied norms becomes materialized in the practice. In his reflexive paper, Wilk (2006) also analyzed how his and his wife’s difference in ways of serving the meal symbolized their conflicting meanings associated with abundance and sharing, and is also a revelation to their different ways of upbringing, their ethnicities, as well as class history. He highlights how “*we cannot escape our roots and habits that our parents endowed us, but later in life we all have to learn to deal with these habits and expectations*” (Wilk, 2006, p.12). Especially when we set up home with someone who has a very different upbringing, such norms need to be confronted and dealt with in order to share the practice.

Previous studies that analyzed mixed-ethnic or bi-cultural couples showed how the native partner’s cultural norms (such as U.S. social norms) were adopted (Cross and Gilly, 2014b) as couples relinquished part of their cultural selves to create a bi-national collective family (Cross

and Gilly, 2014a). However, in my study since many of the couples were both different cultural backgrounds and living in a multi-cultural city, there was no dominant culture which served as a source of benchmark for them. Coming from my own experience as a multi-cultural couple living in London, we do not have a native or dominant culture that influences our creation of a mutual norm appropriate for living in the city. There is therefore more diversity of ways through which we could possibly negotiate. If Pia and Max were living in Italy, it would perhaps be more normal for Pia to adapt to three course meals and serving in individual plates. However, here we see that they both wanted to exert their own cultural norms to each other, and found the other's foreign ways to be very different and not what they are used to. In trying to exert their cultural norms to each other through time, it resulted in an ongoing repeating conflict. Pia and Max's case shows how conflicting norms in eating and serving practices are very much engrained and difficult to resolve, and that elements of conflict can be carried on in different practices in various times (e.g. during breakfast in the past; dinner in the present) and space (old house; new house). But in the moment of sharing the meal, such embodied norms comes to the surface of consciousness to be conflicted and disputed upon.

5.4.2 Conflict in Competencies

Competence involves the “techniques, skills and know-hows” in a practice (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.14). Watson and Shove (2008) define it as the “skills implied in the use, integration and desiring of items required for the effective accomplishment and performance of daily life” (p.71). Schatzki (2001) discusses competence as part of “practical understandings”, which is defined as “abilities that pertain to those actions” (p.51). According to him, such understandings help ascertain what makes sense for people to do. He compares this sensibility to Bourdieu's (1990) *habitus* and Giddens's (1984) *practical consciousness*, where there is a consensus that there is an embodied, tacit and unarticulated knowledge that governs human activity (Schatzki, 2001; Bottero, 2010). Here there is a shared agreement that such embodied knowledge is acquired mostly unconsciously/passively through engagement in one's social conditioning through time (e.g. particular class, culture, schooling environment).

However, there has also been research that looks at how competences may develop later in adult life as well, such as when one learns a particular skill (such as taste appreciation) by teaching oneself, or through learning from other people (Arsel and Bean, 2012; Maciel and

Wallendorf, 2016). Maciel and Wallendorf (2016, p.728) for example theorised three processes through which “cultural competence” can be developed in forming taste in the context of craft beer aficionados. They found that through strategies of using market-based institution resources, self-teaching experimentation techniques, and collaboration and learning from those involved in the social practice, taste evaluation competences can be achieved. Their research was useful to understanding how competence develops in adult life, as they highlight the role of “inter-consumer collaborative practices” (p.728), including interaction with the community for learning, teaching and developing competence (although they still argued that habitus plays a role in conditioning one’s intellect and understandings).

Previous research on family meals and practices tended to focus on negotiation of meanings only (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991; Moisio *et al.*, 2004; Wilk, 2006; Wilk, 2010; Edirisingha *et al.*, 2015), with less consideration of competences in the practice (apart from Cross and Gilly, 2014b). Similar to meanings, competences are equally a part of practice and are also materialised in practices and in things (Shove *et al.*, 2012). There were three main aspects of conflict in competences that emerged during observation of co-performance of meal practices in newly cohabited couples that took part in my study: 1. Conflicting Techniques 2. Conflicting Bodily Skills and 3. Conflicting Knowledge. The next sections will unpack and show some examples of these forms of conflict.

5.4.2.1 Techniques

Techniques on how to do the meal practices was one of major repeating conflicts that emerged in my study. Here couples demonstrated contrasting methods and know-hows on doing the practice, and it was manifested in all the inter-connected practices involved in the meal consumption. For example, there were conflicts on how to arrange the vegetables in the fridge, in the shopping bag, how to store leftovers, how to make rice, how to cook pasta, how to julienne carrots, so on. Take the examples of two couples: Ted and Elias, and Vanna and Simon.

Ted and Elias are a homosexual couple. They are both from Israel. Ted moved to London more than 5 years ago, whereas Elias came less than two years ago. They have been living together for 5 months when I met them. Both of them enjoy cooking and food preparation, but not together. Since they are both competent cooks (Elias worked in a professional kitchen), they

often had conflicts during performing the task together very early on in the relationship. Thus, their roles/division of task (to cook on separate days) was established even before co-habitation. However, similar to other couples, shopping together initiated after co-habitation. It was only in observing their shopping co-performance and arranging of the vegetables, did the conflict of competencies in storing of the meal reveal itself. During their shopping expedition, after the ‘things’ have been chosen and lined up in the checkout counter, they had conflicts about their ‘logics’ of storing (Picture 5). As can be seen from this field note excerpt: [At the checkout counter, Elias takes out the bag and starts putting the scanned items in it, then Ted says, ‘no I’ll do it’. They start mumbling about it to each other, subtly arguing during check out, both were trying to exert their opinion over the other].

Ted: It will get ruined

Elias: No, you need to put them in the end, because they are light

Me: [Later while walking to the bus station to go to their home] What was the argument about?

Ted: While we were packing? Just about how to organize.... First of all there is a logic of cold and not cold, and then just not to squash the more vulnerable vegetables, the more precarious [ones]... so the things that are cold, like the yogurt and the fish and stuff like that [has to be inside first], we just had different attitudes towards how to be more protective [of the fruits and vegetables]. And it ended up being squashed –

Elias: No they were squashed before –

Ted: I didn’t put the cucumber on them.

Elias: No that’s exactly the opposite. I said, ‘you need to put them last’ [the raspberries], and he said ‘no no, you can put them there, they are not that light’

Ted: I said it didn’t need to be in my pack [Sainsbury’s bag] because I didn’t want them to squash the tomatoes

Elias: You think raspberries can squash tomatoes? [turns to me] You understand how [his logic is] - ?



Picture 5: Lining up vegetables at the check-out counter

Such logics of storing (techniques) in order to protect fruits and vegetables (from being squished; from getting spoiled), are perhaps normal often taken for granted practical things people do in the supermarket and at home (Gronow and Warde, 2001). Like showering, washing the dishes, brushing one's teeth – putting the items in a supermarket bag is perhaps also a mundane practice that one performs with a “practical consciousness”, which is an embodied tacit sense of knowing how to do the practice (Giddens, 1984, p.7; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017). One simply does what makes sense for one to do (Bottero, 2010). However, in encountering the mutual knowledge of the other person, this often undiscussed competence are brought to the forefront of consciousness to be evaluated, judged and compared to the other person during co-performance. Here, we can see how Ted and Elias tries to justify their techniques to each other (through the researcher) in order to legitimize their technique and for it to dominate in the practice (e.g. through debate). Such techniques that were rarely thought about when one shops for oneself, now have to be consciously reflected upon and justified in order to win the episodic debate. Of course their debates through the researcher, and bringing in the researcher to legitimize their individual techniques [as when Elias turns to ask me “you understand how (his logic is)?”] does have ethical implications. But this is a methodological issue that I have included in my methods paper – such as having to learn how to be remain equanimous in the situation (Khanijou and Pirani, 2020). But here I show how techniques in a practice are in interaction and competition with each other.

Similarly, difference in techniques can manifest itself during the practice of keeping leftover meals as well. Take the example of Vanna and Simon. They had disagreements on how to store the leftover fajita wraps bought from the supermarket (See picture 6):

[During cleaning, there was a few fajita wraps left in the pack. Simon puts a rubber band and keeps it in the cupboard, while he was keeping, Vanna asks:]

Vanna: Did you close it?

Simon: I closed it yeah [shows her]

Vanna: This is why it dries, exactly why it dries

Simon: Yeah ok Vanna, I don't know how to do it, so you do it. I can watch you.

Vanna: Then you can clean the pan... [she takes the pack from him].. [turns to tell me] Simon doesn't seal it, and that's why they go bad. The one that's sealed from this week was absolutely fine.

Simon: Oh the one I ate? [teases]

Vanna: That wasn't the sealed one

Simon: Wasn't it? Seal it, seal it... Just wants to put fire on things [tells me]

Vanna: No Simon, it stays fine. And even on this one, he freaks out, because it smells of plastic, obviously I'm burning plastic.

[she takes it, and seals it with the gas fire]

Vanna: That's what you have to do, it stays perfect. Normal kitchen that's what they do

Simon: [mumbles something I can't hear]



Picture 6: Conflicts about storing the leftover fajita wraps

Here too, such techniques interact and are in conflict with each other. Varying techniques on how 'best' to store the wrap to protect it from getting crunchy, dry, hard were in dispute. It was evident that both had competences on how to store, but should it be stored through simply binding it with a rubber band, or should it be stored through sealing the plastic for an airtight packet? Here, techniques that were once probably normal and never been questioned, suddenly is brought to the forefront of consciousness to be questioned, evaluated and justified. But during such debates, techniques also compete with each other for domination in the collective practice, as couples try to justify their own ways. And most often justifications were done through using the basic language and understandings of science. For example, in Ted and Elias's case, their competing references to temperature (cold and not cold), pressure (heavier and lighter), density, humidity, so on, allowed them to justify/legitimize their techniques of storage during the debate. Similarly, Vanna's reference to the state of the food ("they won't go bad") as well as her act in burning the plastic ("it will seal") also involves basic understandings of scientific mechanisms such as chemistry and physics (how to create a vacuum/airtight container, how to delay dehydration, how to create a non-permeable sealing, so on). Like many of the couples who took part in my study, Ted and Elias, and Vanna and Simon thus illustrate

how scientific knowledge and language can play a strong role in aiding the new couple's negotiation of practice.

The practice of storing food is an unusual unit of analysis but it was able to reveal an interesting understanding of differences in existing competences and habits. Coupland (2005) discusses how consumers rarely reflect on mundane brands as they become part of the household habit of storage. Cappellini and Parsons (2012b) also discussed how the practice of storing leftovers can reveal meanings and beliefs about "frugality" and "thrift" (p.130), and how such meanings can be communicated and transferred within the family during the practice. Here I show that when two people newly co-perform the practice of storage together, such often undiscussed habits and techniques of storing food items (in the supermarket bag, in the kitchen pantry) materialises to be communicated, reflected and justified for it to be adopted by the collective. Here too it was only in doing the practice of storing together, that such differences were able to materialise and manifest itself.

These conflicts were also repeated through time. For example, Vanna's competence in using the fire on the hob to 'do' things has been a source of conflict in the past. She uses the fire not only to seal the plastic for keeping the leftover packs, but also to grill the wraps and rotis while cooking (See picture 7). And Simon had contested this 'way of doing' (using fire directly on the things) in the past as well. This conflict was reminisced during their cooking observation as can be seen from this fieldnote excerpt:

[Simon had finished making the fajita filling, and Vanna says to him 'You can set the table, I'll do it on the hob', meaning she can now take charge and do the wraps on the hob. He goes off to set the table. Almost simultaneously, Vanna then takes out the branded tortilla wraps from the cupboard, turns on the gas on the hob and using a thong starts grilling the wraps. She turns it every 10 seconds and it was done within 2 minutes. While she was doing this, Simon was sitting and waiting at the dining table, almost ignoring what she was doing.] While she was cooking, she tells me:

Vanna: This way is faster than putting in the oven and in the microwave it gets soggy. I mean if you do roti on the pan, it's the same thing [...] I used to do this [way] in the past [using the fire], and it's so fast. And I like the flavour, when it gets a bit burnt [...] Yeah, people find it dangerous, but this way I've seen it so much [...] When I did it the first time, Simon was like, what are you doing? It's burning! It's not burning, it's fine.

Simon: I mean if I see you putting fire to the house – [he exclaims from the dining table]

Vanna: I'm not putting fire to the house.

Simon: You are crazy

Vanna: How is this different to putting something in the wood oven? Or cooking on the fire?



Picture 7: Using fire on the hob to grill tortilla wrap

Vanna justified her competence in arguing that “it’s faster”, and “I like the charred taste”. Whereas Simon conflicted this competence in arguing that “she just wants to burn things”. Although I was not present when this conflict in competence played out the first time (when she first used fire directly on the wrap), but the couple recalled the first encounter of this conflict when it happened again. However, I was able to witness the conflict of using fire to seal the plastic packet (see previous example) when it happened the first time. The first occasion of conflict is important as it reveals how the justifications played out, who won the episodic debate, and it determines how the collective practice is being negotiated. In this instance, Vanna’s repeated usage of the fire reveals that she won the justifications the first time. However, this technique in using fire to ‘do’ things (warming the rotis, sealing the plastic) was still a continuous source of conflict for this couple.

Similar to many of my participants, Ted and Elias, and Vanna and Simon showed how techniques and methods of knowing how to do something is very much gained through education and one’s cultural upbringing. For example, the usage of scientific knowledge and understandings to justify their know-hows, or when Vanna sealed the plastic with fire, she refers to “normal kitchens, that’s what they do”. Such references and justifications of science

and culture can be traced back to how the competence was acquired, perhaps through their different ways of upbringing, different education system and practice within their family.

5.4.2.2 Bodily Skills

Apart from conflicting techniques on how to accomplish practices, conflicts could also arise due to embodied bodily skills in practices. Here couples had differing efficiencies in bodily skills, for example, being able to do things faster, being able to do things more quietly, being able to touch and to taste things, so on. Let me give the example of Jenny and Paul, who had conflicting bodily skills in various dimensions.

Jenny and Paul are a newly married couple, but they've never lived together before the wedding. Jenny moved into his place, thus most of the things in the cupboards and freezer are his. During their first shopping trip, their conflicting palates for certain parts of the meat were revealed. We were in the meat section at Sainsbury's. While they were choosing which meat to buy, Jenny tells him she wants boneless chicken. They then reveal their conflicting aptitudes for different parts of the meat:

Jenny: Boneless or with bone? [asks him] We can have boneless and I can make green curry, you want me to make green curry? [...] I like boneless [chicken] rather than with bone [turns to tell me]

Paul: While I prefer the chicken thigh and just sometimes dice it myself and sometimes not

Jenny: And I like the breast and already diced, because it's just easier

Paul: I think the thigh [with bones] has a different taste

Jenny: I don't like biting into the cartilage of the chicken thigh, and he likes that whole part.

[They decide to get the chicken thigh but without bone. Paul then checks the meat, he compares the different packs on the shelf, deciding which one should they get. And Jenny turns to tell me:]

Jenny: He is good with this whole checking which one is good and which one is not [while he checks the meat].

Here, not only did they have conflicting capacities to sense flavour and texture of the meat, but they also had conflicting bodily skills at biting and masticating at for example, the cartilage of the meat. As Paul reveals he prefers the chicken thigh because it has a different taste, showing his competences in knowing how to differentiate flavour of the different part of the meat – something not shared by his partner. Similarly, as Jenny reveals she does not like to bite into the cartilage of the meat, illustrating her difference in bodily aptitude for such parts. Darmon and Warde (2016) in their study on the change of tastes in Anglo-French couples in UK and

France, showed how tastes also included “bodily capacities” (p.706) which are engrained bodily tolerance and “fit” (p.711) for certain types of food, for example, raw meat such as *magret* for the French. They showed how changing tastes were not only about the desire to change, but one also needed to train one’s body or “play tricks with one’s body” (p.711) to develop a physical ability to eat difference. Here, Jenny’s body might not have the gustation for eating difference (the bony part/cartilage), but moreover, her body also does not have the skills to differentiate the taste of one part of the meat from another, to ‘bite’ or ‘chew’ such parts, nor to ‘see’ (compare) the meats. As in the last quote, after they decide to buy the chicken thigh, she reveals how he is good at comparing the pieces of meat in the supermarket shelf, further illustrating their differences in bodily skills.

Such differences in bodily skills were also an ongoing source of conflict. As time passed during the study, when I went to their house for a meal in their 5th month of cohabitation, this difference was again manifested now during the meal preparation. For example, Paul does more of the cooking and thus tasting of the dishes, because according to them he has a stronger competence to identify the missing ingredient from the dish. And like many of my couples, they also had different bodily competences to chop and ‘do things’ in the kitchen, for example Paul is faster in chopping while Jenny is slower. As can be seen from this field note excerpt:

[They were making stir-fry noodles with soup. He starts with making the broth for the soup [...] She follows him into the kitchen, and takes out the stir fry packet. [...] She chops the onions, while he is doing the soup. She tells me she’ll help in chopping while he does most of the cooking. But she will not chop the meat, because she does not like to touch raw meat, so he will do the part (see picture 8):]

Jenny: I help sometimes, like I’ll chop stuff, keep it ready and put it on the side for him, so that when he is doing stir fry, he’ll just you know.. so I’ll help with this. But I don’t like touching raw meat so much so he will do the chicken part [...] because I’m so used to buying minced meat like already done one. So if he is cooking, he will do the cutting [of the meat]. I just find it slimy [teases].

[He did not say anything, they changed the topic.] [Later]

Paul: I’m quite bad at prepping. I’ll just literally put the fire on, and then put this, put that. Like to do it quickly. Whereas this [prepping] is Jenny’s doing. Like she’ll take stuff out. I’m not that organized. I know in my head what I need to do, but I’ll do it whilst everything is cooking. Like with the stir-fry, I’ll put the wok on first, then take stuff out of the fridge, and then chop it quickly while I’m cooking. It’s just how I do things [...] I don’t follow a recipe, I just make it up on the spot. So I don’t know how the end product is going to come out exactly.



Picture 8: Paul handles the meat

Bodily skills and capabilities to use the senses (taste, touch, see, smell) as well as physical efficiencies to use the body for manoeuvring (being quick, slow), are embodied and engrained skills acquired through time during one's upbringing, and can be explained through Bourdieu's (1984; 1990) concept of *habitus*. According to Bourdieu (1990), "*the habitus [...] deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time*" (p.54). In describing the concept of *habitus*, Bourdieu illustrates how our way of consuming, thinking and acting is a result of our internalisation of class and cultural dispositions. He highlights how some people naturally prefer some ways over others, and knows how to consume in some ways over others, due to the fact that they have grown up in a particular context that conditioned their internal learning. For example, growing up in Thailand I have a very high tolerance for spice, and actually prefer extremely spicy food, but my Spanish partner know how to enjoy the taste of the meat rather than the condiments, more than me. I do not feel I can appreciate the taste of the meat on its own. We therefore have very different embodied skills and preferred tastes.

In Jenny and Paul's case too, their differences in bodily skills in knowing how to taste what is missing from the dish, knowing how to chop faster/slower, and as Paul demonstrates knowing how to cook without looking at a recipe ("I know in my head what I need to do, but I'll do it whilst everything is cooking... I just make it up on the spot"), are perhaps engrained skills acquired through their different cultural and family upbringing, which structured their internal knowledge and preferences as adults. For example, in the individual interview it was revealed that Jenny's family meals used to involve lots of sauces and spices with bite-sized meat in

curries and she has also never helped out in the kitchen in her family home. Perhaps because of this, she has weaker competence in differentiating the particular tastes of chicken breast and thighs, nor did she develop her bodily aptitude towards working in the kitchen (doing things fast, knowing how to compare the meats in the supermarket, etc.). Whereas Paul grew up in a family of chefs (his dad owns a catering service). He tells me in the individual interview how all of his siblings grew up experimenting in the kitchen. Thus, from a young age, he developed competencies around the practices of shopping and cooking, which structures how he behaves in the kitchen. He therefore knows more about how to compare the different taste of meats, as well as his body is trained to work fast in the kitchen.

5.4.2.3 Knowledge

Knowledge about and in practices can also be another source of conflict in competences. Couples revealed many instances of conflicting knowledge in almost all the interconnected practices of meal consumption. For example, knowledge on where to shop, where to hunt for bargains, which brand to use, what to cook, what to use leftovers for, so on. Take the example of Annie and Chris, who had conflicting knowledge on brands.

In the first interview, Annie and Chris tell me the story of how a brand “nearly costed them their relationship” (Annie) a few months ago:

Annie: What happened was Chris decided he would make chilli [con carne] that day. And it was the day he didn't go to the office, so he stayed at home all day, and he went shopping. And from all the chilli ingredients, he bought only meat. And then he texts me to buy the chilli sauce. There is a special brand [that we use]. I don't know if you have heard of 'Dolmio', they have an extra spicy chilli sauce. It has to be that one, because he always made it with that one. Because he tried it and it's the best [out of all]. And it's [really] the best. And also, what he didn't buy is beans, and beans also needs to be in this spicy sauce. Which is very difficult to find in shops, because... I don't know why. So what happened is he texted me, and I was like 'ok, fine I will get it', and I went to this little Sainsbury's next to my work, and they didn't have it. I was like 'ok, I will walk to Old Street'. And it's quite long, and you know after being at work for 7 and a half hours, you really don't want to do that. But then I sacrificed my time. And I spent like one hour of going to shop to find those 2 ingredients, and I couldn't find them. And then I called him, and I said 'I hate your chilli. You decided to make chilli and you didn't even have the main ingredients, I don't want it anymore' [...] and I came home all furious.

Chris: It was a critical point in our relationship [...] I think she didn't want to disappoint me [teases].

Annie: No because I really wanted this dish.. and he proposed it and I didn't want to change it.

Her newcomer run for his particularities about the brand (which is very difficult to find for some reason according to her) caused a conflict. They tell me how they now joke about it, but at that point in time it was very stressful as ‘the brand’ could not be replaced. Here, we see an intersection between conflict of meanings and knowledge which is materialized in the brand and the practices surrounding it. As they tell me, it has to be this brand because he is very specific about it, he has the ‘knowledge’, as he has tried many other brands but this one has the best taste for this dish. She even bought the ‘normal’ brand once from Sainsbury’s but it didn’t work because it just doesn’t taste the same:

Chris: We even tried with the normal beans once but it’s not the same

Annie: Yeah, I bought them without knowing

Chris: And I tried other brands too, but no. The Dolmio one is the best.



Picture 9: Annie searching for the Dolmio sauce

According to Warde (2005, p.138), “social practices do not present uniform planes upon which agents participate in identical ways but are instead internally differentiated on many dimensions”. He highlights how there may be varying levels of competence involved in a particular practice such as the “highly knowledgeable”, “the professional”, and “the amateur” (p.138). Such differences is because competences (like meanings) are acquired and learnt in different ways, as we have seen how it can be gained through different habituses (Bourdieu, 1990), or it might have developed through their engagement in other practices with other actors

throughout time and space (Maciel and Wallendorf, 2016). However, these different levels of competences in a practice may cause a problem for the collective practice to be performed smoothly. As Chris and Annie's conflict shows, difference in knowledge in consumption can be a source of conflict as actors attempt to co-join their knowledge, skills and meanings in the practice. Compared to his knowledge, her incompetence about the specific taste of the brand as well as where to look for it created an ongoing dispute.

Such differences in knowledge were also repeated over time. For example, when I went shopping with Annie in their 7th month of cohabitation, she tells me she does most of the shopping task for the household nowadays because of her work schedule and proximity of supermarkets by her workplace. But she would usually have to go to the big supermarket midway between her work and home, because there it would be more easier to find the *Dolmio* brand chilli sauce (see picture 9). However she still contends his 'way' as she doesn't share his specificities but is more competent in adapting the recipes and items when she cooks. As she tells me while we were buying a couple of jars of the branded chilli sauce:

Annie: Chris is very specific, if he has a recipe, that recipe needs to be followed, exactly by grams, exactly by the time it's supposed to be [high pitched tone], so it has to be like that, he doesn't change anything. I'm the one who is kind of flexible [...] I'll just use something else, it's fine.

Previous studies that analysed brand consumption mainly focused on the symbolic meanings that have been materialised in brands (e.g. Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998b; Fournier, 1998). However, here Annie and Chris's case show that conflicting knowledge can also manifest itself in brands and its surrounding practices. Unlike techniques and bodily skills though, such knowledge on brands, is most likely developed in adulthood through past experience, education or learning from others. Maciel and Wallendorf (2016) for example, showed how competences of taste in craft beer aficionados can be developed through self-experimentation techniques, the market and collaboration with others. In Chris's case, his knowledge about the taste (and the dish), which also helped inform his justification during the conflict, comes from his plentiful experience of trying out other brands, making the dish numerous times, which gives him the leverage of an 'expert' opinion to incorporate this materiality into their practice. Although Annie follows his expert knowledge (to reduce conflict), she doesn't share his specificities and still contends him through voicing out her opinions and competence about being flexible. Hence, here we can also see how these differences in knowledge were ongoing and repeated over time (as they are not resolved as yet).

Certainly when people move from an individual practice to a collective one, there is potential for meanings but also competences to interact, compete and conflict with each other. In this section, I showed how competences such as techniques, bodily skills and knowledge are equally important in a practice negotiation. Competences were embodied in human actors but embedded in the use of things (Watson and Shove, 2008). Although it is important to highlight the difference between the three types of competences are not as ‘clean cut’ and one example may fit the other two as well. But it was only through looking at the conflicting materiality of the practices during shopping, planning, cooking, storing the meal, that the often undiscussed and unreflected upon competences come to the forefront of consciousness to be revealed and justified. I will now turn to discuss how materials such as objects and material spaces can also cause a conflict.

5.4.3 Conflict in Materials

Materials involves “things, technologies, tangible physical entities, and the stuff of which objects are made” (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.14). It is the non-human part of the practice. And as many consumption studies have shown (see Hand and Shove, 2007; Epp and Price, 2009; Magaudda, 2011; Truninger, 2011; Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014), things are as important for the practice as any other element, and at times may constrain or hinder the practice as well. Such conflict due to materials were also revealed through all the inter-connected practices involved in the meal consumption of newly cohabited couples who took part in the study. There were two main aspects of conflict in materials that emerged in my study: 1. Material objects and 2. Material spaces. I will now unpack these two aspects below.

5.4.3.1 *Material Objects*

Objects itself can be a source of conflict during practice co-performance. Here, technologies such as digital apps, mobile phones, television, or even physical things like the freezer and dinner table were revealed to be a conflicting element that constrained co-performance of meal practices in my study. Due to space constrains I will limit myself to show one example of a technology that caused a conflict. Take the example of Pia and Max again. In section 5.4.1.2, I showed how they had conflict in norms of how to serve the meal.

A shared digital app was also a continuous source of conflict for Pia and Max. They were already having an ongoing conflict regarding the planning and shopping for the meal. As Max's previous flat was well-connected and had many supermarkets nearby, he was more accustomed to buying small quantities of food every day. His dinner plans were mostly spontaneous, depending on his time and mood, which reflected his shopping as well, spontaneously picking things from the supermarket downstairs or across the road. Whereas Pia has always lived with either family or sharing cooking and food responsibilities with other people, thus most of her meal acquisition was pre-planned, done well in advance and in bulk, for example in a weekly or fortnightly shop. She tells me in her family home, "the things we eat regularly never finishes", "there would always be some replacement" (Pia). Moreover, living in the city has reinforced this practice as "you can't get everything you need in one place" so "you have to be organized" (Pia). Hence, Pia had introduced a digital app for sharing their collective timetable and shopping list to make their practice more efficient and functional. Such that when either of them recall an item to buy from the supermarket, or when they get off work and go shopping individually or together, they would both have the list (in the app), which would then instantaneously send notifications to the other person when there is an update (see picture 10).

As they tell me about the list:

Max: So now we have a list. I never used to have any list before.

Pia: Well having a list is handy because if one of us is going to the supermarket, because we work in different places, [...] it's easier to have a shared list because then we can just get everything [we need]. Also around here it's not one big supermarket so we can't just go and find everything we need sometimes, so we have to try to go to one place or another to find one or two things that we use a lot [...] -

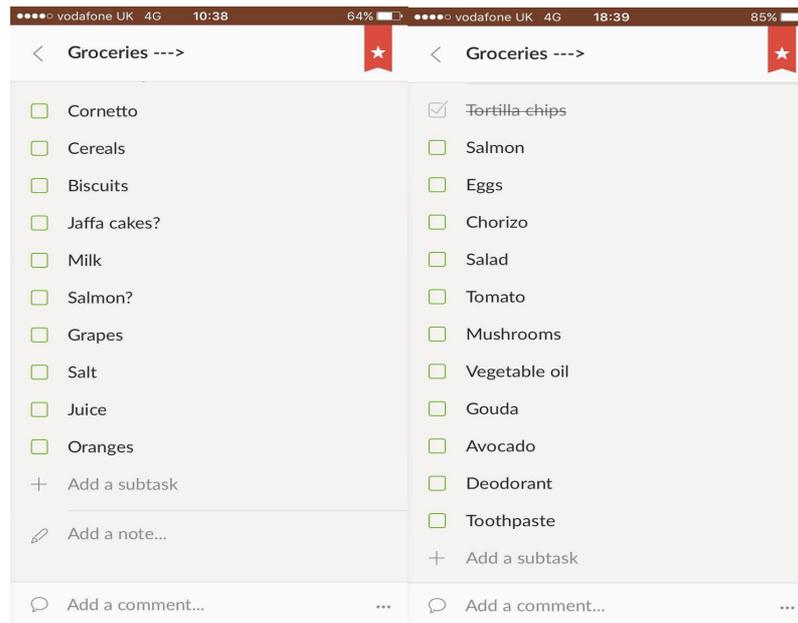
Max: We have an app

Pia: So it's like a shared one, called Wunderlist.

Max: So you get instantaneous updates [on modifications]

Pia: Yeah so when he says 'I'm going to go to the supermarket after work today', I will make sure at work I check the list just to see that everything I need is in there.

Max: Yes, and she says 'put that on the list', 'delete it from the list if you buy it'. Before I just had like a mental list, 'what do I need today', I say, and then I go and buy it, and then 2 minutes after, 'ah I need also this', and so I go back down again and buy it.



Picture 10: Pia and Max's shared list from Wunderlist

According to their website, *Wunderlist* is a cloud-based app that allows users to manage and share to-do tasks, as changes are instantaneously uploaded on cloud (Wunderlist.com). In Pia and Max's case, they use the app for sharing their grocery shopping list only. As Pia tells me having the list helps them reduce the times they need to go to the supermarket, and they can delegate small shopping tasks to each other if necessary. Therefore as Pia contends it will allow them to be more efficient and organised in shopping, so they know what they need when they go to the supermarket. It will also allow them to plan their weekend shop (where they shop in bulk). However, this incorporation of digital apps became major source of conflict when Max could not adopt such technology in his everyday life. As Max isn't accustomed to using lists in his planning and shopping practices, he "forgets" about it sometimes, and often "sneaks out" to revert back to his usual habit of buying small items from the supermarket (Max). The digital app – with its demand for time and shared use – thus became a continuous source of conflict. As they reveal to me during their 4th month of their cohabitation:

Pia: It happens many times, where Max is like 'it just ran out'. And I remember being like 'this has run out, why isn't it on the list?'

Max: Yeah, I have to actively think about it, it's not natural [...] I tend to forget about it.

Pia: Yeah, I have to like, when he is out of the house, be like 'put it on the list' and you are like 'okay'

Max: And then maybe I forget

Pia: And then half a day later I ask 'did you put that on the list?' You say 'yes' but you are putting it now

Max: I still sneak out. Like before coming home, I'm like 'I'm just going to Tesco to buy 2-3 things', like if we run out of grapes or cheese [things they eat often]

Pia: And I say this to you on the weekend when we are there [at the supermarket] and you are like ‘no, I have it now and it will last for 2-3 days’, and I’m like ‘you are going to go there again’ [laughs]. Interesting habit.

Max: I still need to adapt to plan for the whole week shopping..

Here, we can see how Max contends that it is very difficult for him to incorporate the new app into his existing practice. It is difficult for him to suddenly create the new habit of shopping with a list, and using the technology. He still sneaks out to revert to his existing habit of buying 2-3 things from the supermarket when it runs out, which caused a repeated conflict for them. There have been studies that analysed how new materials are incorporated into existing practices, and how these new materialities can lead to changing the practice or development of new practices altogether (Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Truninger, 2016). For example, Magaudda (2011) in their study of the digitalisation of music consumption looks at how new materiality such as iPods were incorporated into existing practices of music consumption and how this lead to development of new practices. However, they showed that in order to be incorporated, such new objects and ways of consuming with the object needs to be appropriated, for example through adopting symbolic meanings or new knowledge in usage. Here, I show that it is very difficult to adopt new materials in an existing practice especially if there are more than one actor involved in the co-performance. They both needed to develop a shared materiality in order for it to be adopted in their collective practice. But this is not always achievable. In Max’s case, he feels the new technology is being imposed upon his practice. Therefore, it wasn’t only a matter of wanting to change or adopt the new technology that Pia is proposing but he also needed to develop new meanings and competences of using the technology in order for it to be appropriated and integrated into his existing practice. And with the difficulty of appropriating new meanings and competences with using the technology, it became a continuous source of conflict through time which hindered their collective practice co-performance.

Moreover, I would like to highlight here that Pia’s attitudes towards domestic chores (of being quick and efficient) were similar to majority of the women who took part in my study. In DeVault’s (1991) classic study, she also shows how the work of organising and planning the meal is mostly done by women. As such care work is deeply rooted and embodied within our gendered and cultural history. It is also imposed upon us by our societal and cultural surroundings. Women are the ones who engage in the everyday invisible work of thinking, planning and organising the family meal. Although men are increasingly pledging to share the

house work, she argues that there is still an inequality as women are more concerned to the needs of the household, she thinks about it more, an aspect which makes us womanly (Devault, 1997).

However, unlike other studies that show how women perform housework as being embedded in their ethics of care (Stohs, 1994) or as an act of motherhood and love (Devault, 1991), majority of the women who took part in my study regarded such tasks as work that involved a lot of time, effort and energy. As most of the women in my study were working in full time jobs, domestic chores were a duty to do that needed to be efficient and quick. Pia actively conveys her meanings of chores as ‘work’ as there are other important things to do in life. However, as many men shared the meal tasks as well, they needed to merge their practices and habits together. In fact, Max’s attitudes towards domestic chores also reflected many of the men who took part in my study. As most of these men were already living alone prior to the cohabitation, they had their own preferred ways to do the housework. And similar to previous studies, shopping and cooking tasks for men were mainly regarded as fun and relaxing (Hollows, 2003; Cairns *et al.*, 2010; Szabo, 2013), but it posed a problem when the couple attempted to co-share their tasks, attitudes and meanings together (I discuss more about gender in Chapter VII). And these conflicts are again ongoing, repeated through time and very difficult to resolve, as Max says how he is still adapting to the list approach but tends to forget about it, “it’s not natural for me” he repeated says.

5.4.3.2 Material Space

Sometimes, the space and material set up can also be a source of conflict and hinders the new couples’ process of becoming a family. For example, when there are third persons sharing the space or when there is not enough space. I will give the example of two couples: Tom and Joanne, and Hannah and James, who had conflicts due to space restrictions on various fronts.

Take for example Tom and Joanne, who are graduate students. Although as the study progressed Joanne started a full-time job as a restaurant manager, while Tom was still completing his education. In this couple, the lack of material set up such as not having the space for a dining table as well as not having the object (dining table), were a continuous source of conflict. They were living in a shared 3-bedroom flat with 2 other flatmates. There was no

living room, but they had a shared communal kitchen. Thus, their only private space in the household was their bedroom. Here, not having a dining table nor the space for it became a problem during their eating practices. When I went to their house for a meal the first time, Tom sat on the study table in their room while having his dinner, whereas I sat with Joanne on the floor near their bed (see picture 11). They tell me their issues of not being able to eat ‘properly’ together because of the lack of space and dining table:

Me: Do you guys eat here mostly?

Tom: Yeah, I do [as he was eating from the study table]

Joanne: Yeah I suppose, we end up using these [the stools] as tables and hopefully next year -

Tom: The middle room [points to the other room] will turn to a living room

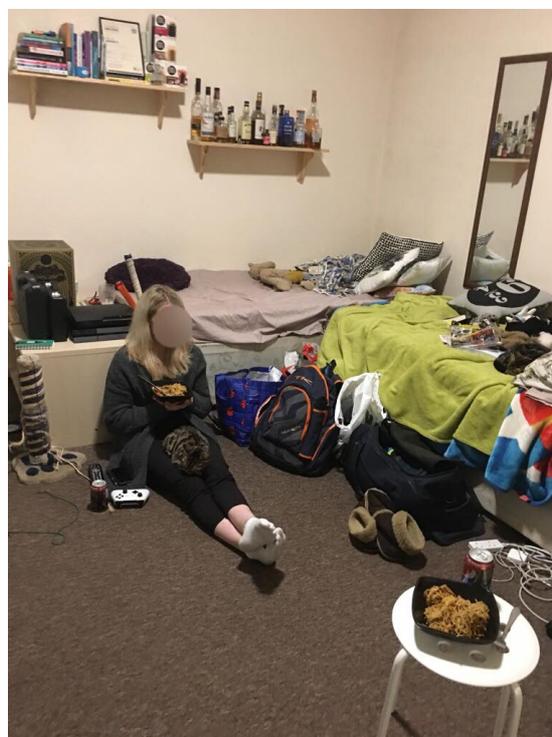
Joanne: Yeah so... we’ve got a table and stuff already, [pointing to the table, which is currently being used as a shelf, it has many things on top], so it’s just one of those things that if we do get another room, we can move everything sort of like -

Tom: We’ll probably take the desk and tv out, and then have the bedroom as a bedroom. And then the living room.

Joanne: And like have the table set up in there so we can actually eat properly [on a table]. Because I guess we both grew up eating on tables...I don’t like not eating on a table...

Tom: Yeah it’s just part of student experience. I don’t like not eating on a table too [...]

Joanne: I don’t know. I just think doing everything in one room is like, it’s getting blood draining.



Picture 11: Joanne sits on the floor to eat

In the individual interviews, both of them revealed to me how they miss eating on a dining table. They also reminisced on how their family practices were like while growing up. As Tom tells me, his mom would serve “veg and carbs on to the table and you can serve yourselves as much as you want”. However, not having space for a dining table in the house was a problem not only for them to eat properly, but also for them to eat together. As Tom tells me while he was eating from the study table:

Tom: It’s a shame we don’t have a table really because both Joanne and I do prefer, we would rather sit and talk but it’s kind of like this desk is useful to eat at but like Joanne doesn’t fit on the desk with me so... and that would be the most ridiculous thing as well, if we sat side by side eating from a desk. It’d be like... just imagine what that would be like... [laughs]

Previous studies analysed how material objects such as, the dining table (Epp and Price, 2009), and television (Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014) can create, influence and alter family relationships and family identity. However, here I show that lack of the material objects and space can also create a conflict and disrupt the couple’s process of becoming a family. As Tom demonstrates, not having space for the table was a problem for them to sit and talk and bond during the meal. Many a times, I’ve seen that they would also start eating at different times (e.g. before the other person sits down). Moreover, this conflict was also ongoing and repeated through time. For example, when I went to their house for the last dinner observation (their 11th month of cohabitation), a similar conflict manifested itself. Here, Joanne tried to use other material spaces to eat, for example on the bed, but it was also a source of conflict when she got “crumbs on his feet”. As can be seen from this fieldnote excerpt:

[They made chorizo sandwiches today [...] We leave the kitchen to go to their room. Tom carries his plate along with a can of coke to the study table. While Joanne and me make ourselves comfortable on the floor. She uses one of the stools as her table to keep the plate. While they were eating they again reminisced about not having a table. I ask if they change places sometimes:]

Tom: You sit on the bed [and eat] sometimes [to Joanne]

Joanne: Yeah, but I try not to eat on the bed, because I think it just makes things [she didn’t finish the sentence].... I feel like we are constantly eating on only one space.

Tom: And why don’t you eat on the bed? [teases her]

Joanne: I get crumbs in the bed [turns to tell me]

Tom: And it’s really comfortable, how many crumbs she gets in the bed [he teases sarcastically]

Joanne: I used to eat rice cakes for lunch and stuff and I eat them on the bed and then I stopped because he got it on his feet... because I won’t make the bed after [laughs]. I’m trying to be diplomatic.

Tom: You sit on my side of the bed and eat food and then leave food in the bed because you are ...

Joanne: Ice cream stains everywhere [laughs]

Tom: Doesn’t matter, you can sleep on the stain.

When people move in together, they have to negotiate the division of space and furniture within the home. However, space consumption can also be a source of conflict for couples during co-performing practices. Reimer and Leslie (2004) in their study of consumption within domestic spaces, showed how couples' unequal division of space for each partner, or creations of personal spaces within the home, can create an unequal distribution of power relations between the couple. Similarly, my findings also show that unequal usage of space and furniture during co-performing meal practices also created a tension and it is perhaps the start of the development of unequal distribution of power in the household. As Tom was using his study table as his personal dining table every time I met them, while Joanne sat on the floor every time - such creations of individual space bubbles within the shared space is perhaps creating an unequal power distribution. And as Reimer and Leslie (2004) notes, it is mainly the women who lacked their individual spaces within the home (although they are the ones responsible for it). In Joanne's attempts to find her individual space within the bedroom, and them striving to negotiate a collective space in the household – she used the bed as an oasis of comfort, but again it lead to conflict when she littered the bed, which further reinforced their pathway to unequal power relations within the household. Such ongoing tensions regarding space is very difficult to resolve perhaps because of the difficulty in changing or adopting new spaces, which require heavier financial investment and time. Thus throughout the study, this couple voiced their aspirations about using a table and moving to a bigger living space. As they tell me they want to rent out another room next year. Till then, this lack of space will still be an ongoing conflict.

Third persons sharing the space can also be a problem in co-performing practices together. Take for example Hannah and James, who I met in their first month of cohabitation. They moved into a flat-share with 3 other people when they moved in together. The kitchen and garden is shared, while the house has no living room. In their 3rd month of cohabitation, the sudden disappearance of their 'things' from the kitchen, the breaking of the dishwasher and microwave in the house, and the temper of the flatmate, created a tension for them to cook in the kitchen. Thus, as they tell me they haven't been cooking at home for the past 3 weeks, but only today they decided to "rekindle" their kitchen. But the presence of their flatmates again created a tension for them to cook together peacefully, as can be seen from this field note excerpt:

[James starts to cook but he doesn't speak much. The flatmates were home with some of their friends. They were all in the garden and making a lot of noise. I could hardly talk with James and Hannah. The oven was running, and there are pizzas in the oven. They tell me it's their flatmates'. James was making grilled halloumi wrap, which he wanted to use the oven for. But then he said 'it's fine, I'll do it on the pan'. Hannah helped with peeling the mushrooms. James was very quiet, and seemed like in a bad mood. I asked him a 'why do you do this' question once, and he swore 'Jesus Christ, I don't know why'. Hannah then whispers to me:]

Hannah: Recently we haven't really been using the kitchen much, we've been eating out a lot [...] It's because of [the flatmates], there are things that all of a sudden started breaking in the house –

Me: [making a gesture that I can't hear much so she takes me to their room]

Hannah: It started when things started breaking in the house, like the oven, and microwave and then the dishwasher. And James and I were quite unhappy about that. We were like 'guys can you please treat the things in the house with respect' because you know when the dishwasher is broken, we can't use it, when the oven is broken we can't use it, and so on. So a couple of things have been fixed but a lot of things have not been fixed because the landlord is pissed off. And so we had some tensions because of that. [One of our flatmates] she has a bit of a temper, and when she is in a bad mood she just slams things hard, and things get broken. So that is why James is a bit [off mood] when they are around. It's a bit difficult at the moment [...] But today we had decided that we will rekindle the kitchen, because this is no way to live. That's what James said earlier as well, 'I'm not leaving the kitchen, they can be here, but I'm not leaving the kitchen'.

The presence of the flatmates, and their co-sharing of the space and things caused a problem in cooking together peacefully. In this whole meal observation, he rarely talked much with Hannah nor me. He had a bit of a temper (which also affected me) as can be seen from how he replied my question. However, when I re-entered the kitchen with Hannah, he apologised for his bad temper, but re-confirms that it's because of the flatmates' presence and nothing to do with my presence (although in my reflexive notes I felt differently). "Yeah we've been avoiding the kitchen quite a lot, but some people need to realise that they don't own the flat", he asserts.

Such tensions due to space are also very difficult to resolve, and becomes an ongoing source of conflict through time. However, this couple tried to find their temporary oasis in other places in the weekends where they can use another space to bond in the kitchen. For example, they informed me that they have started living in their friend's house during the weekends as their friends were away almost every weekend. Thus they were asked if they wanted to have the empty space but were also obliged to look after the cats in the house. In taking up the opportunity during weekends, they had the chance to bond and relax using another space. The last time I met them, they had permanently moved to their friend's house (as they tell me the

friends were moving abroad for 3 months), which gave them the opportunity to live alone by themselves and the cats for an extended amount of time.

The above cases shows how space can obstruct and influence co-performance of collective practices over time. Space and material set up is as necessary as any other element in the practice for co-performance.

5.5 Discussion

In this chapter, I have shown the different aspects of conflicts that arise when two actors co-perform a practice together over time. When couples attempt to move from an individual practice to a shared collective practice, elements within the practice will interact, communicate, but most often also conflict and compete with each other through time in the co-performance. Borrowing from Shove *et al.*'s (2012, p.14) definition of practice, my study finds that conflicts were a result of mis-alignments between elements of "Meanings, Competences and Materials" at the collective level over time. As actors carry various symbolic meanings, competences and materiality into the practice, such elements may not be aligned with each other. Figure 3 below shows the various aspects of conflicts within symbolic meanings, competences and materials.

I showed how conflicting symbolic meanings involved conflicting values and norms in a practice. Conflicting values included conflicting gendered values and attitudes. For example I showed in Sara and Nick's case how they had constant gender debates about cooking and cleaning of the dishes, materialised during their eating of the meal together. Such conflicting values were in their eyes gained through their different cultural and family upbringing, but it can symbolise their political and moral ideologies about gender roles. Conflicting norms included conflicting rules and ways of doing the meal. For example I showed how Pia and Max's different norms in serving the meal which from their own eyes were gained through their cultural and familial upbringing caused a constant conflict.

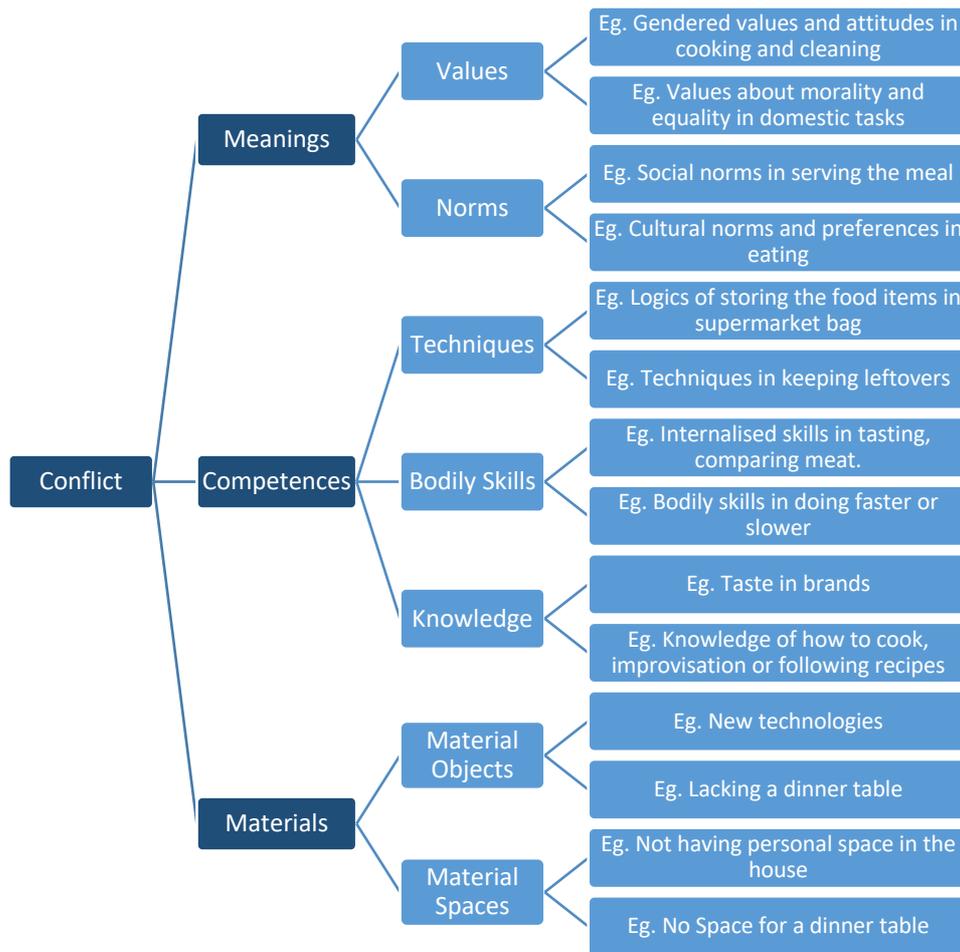


Figure 3: Conflicts during co-performance of practices

And as figure 3 further illustrates conflicting competences involved conflicting techniques, bodily skills and knowledge in co-performance, although as I mentioned such differentiations may not be so clear cut but may overlap. I showed how conflicting techniques can include different ways of doing the meal, such as storing the food items bought in the supermarket and at home, which can cause constant debates through time. Conflicting bodily skills involves conflict in engrained and embodied skills. For example I showed in the case of Jenny and Paul how their different bodily competences in tasting the flavour and texture of different parts of the meat, or knowing how to compare which piece of meat is good in the supermarket, or knowing how to do things faster/slower in the kitchen, caused a conflict in their co-performing the practices together. Conflicting knowledge included for example knowledge about brands, the taste of the brand and where to find the brand as I showed in Annie and Chris's case. Bodily competences were mostly gained through one's habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) through time as one learns how to appreciate taste and develop bodily capabilities from a young age, as I discussed in Jenny and Paul's case. However, competences could also be developed in adult life as one

learns through experimentation (such as Chris's experimentation with the taste of brands) and schooling system (such as Ted and Elias competing references to science).

Conflicting materials are the objects and space (or lack of these) that cause the conflict. I showed how material objects such as a new technology (the shared digital app) can be a source of conflict for the couple through time as one partner is not able to incorporate the new materiality into his existing practice. The technology that was dominant in one person's practice, when it cannot be integrated and appropriated into the other's practice performance, may cause a repeated conflict through time. Similarly, lack of material objects and material set up can also cause a conflict. I have shown how lack of old objects such as the dining table hindered the couple's process of becoming a family through time, as couples reminisced on old memories of consuming on the table and its symbolisation to family. Lack of the dining table thus obstructed their process of eating together and bonding during mealtimes. Similarly, lack of material spaces can also cause a conflict, as I showed in Hannah and James's case how the presence of flatmates and lack of personal kitchen space hindered their bonding as it created a stressful space for them to work in the kitchen together. As shown, these conflicts were also repeated through time as it is difficult to resolve.

Conflicts arise because actors carry their individual sets of symbolic meanings, competences and materials to the practice performance, which may not be aligned with each other. As Warde (2005) has highlighted, "*social practices do not present uniform planes upon which agents participate in identical ways but are instead internally differentiated on many dimensions*" (p.138). Actors acquire elements such as competence and meanings in different ways throughout their life time, therefore making each practice internally different (Warde, 2005). I have shown how competences and meanings in doing the meal can be intergenerationally acquired through one's family and cultural upbringing through time. For example, bodily skills in tasting flavour or norms in serving may have been gained through habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) or social conditioning through time. Similarly, values may have been acquired through parental influences and cultural upbringing, which as I showed can reveal a person's political and moral ideologies (Wilk, 2006). The anthropologist Margaret Visser (1993) discusses how food and its associated practices is an embodiment of our family and social upbringing, as our preference, taste, habits, manners, judgements are all learnt through socialization from our early childhood period. As she highlights "children learn and become accustomed to the food norms of its culture" through their parents and cultural surroundings (Visser, 1993, p.41). And

as adults, people normally continue to do the same habits they have learnt to do as a child. These values, norms and skills are therefore engrained and embedded within the social practice and carried within actors, and condition how people behave, think, prefer and act in the practice (Bourdieu, 1990). However, as I showed at times such techniques, knowledge and meanings (e.g. in consuming brands) can be gained in adulthood, through schooling system or self-experimentation techniques as well (Maciel and Wallendorf, 2016), but equally cause a conflict.

It is because of this differentiated nature of each practice (Warde, 2005), that conflicts about and in practices emerge. As couples enter the relationship with their own sets of values, norms, techniques, bodily skills, knowledge and materiality in doing a practice, there may be a mis-alignment between these elements of practice at the collective level, that practices could not be performed smoothly together. And as newly cohabiting couples are in a transitional phase of doing their practice in collectivity – such mis-alignments may be heightened and magnified. During instances of conflict co-performance though, I showed how elements confront each other. I showed how embodied, tacit and often un-reflected upon competences and meanings come to the forefront of consciousness to be communicated, evaluated and compared to the other person during interaction, an aspect I will discuss below.

Practice theorists have highlighted the routinized aspects of practices (O'Dell, 2009; Southerton, 2009; Shove *et al.*, 2012). However, as studies on routine disruption have shown, elements in a practice need to be in sync during a practice performance, as disturbances in any one element may disrupt the whole practice altogether (Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017). Going beyond past studies, I looked at the mis-alignment between the set of elements at the collective level which hinders the practice co-performance. Elements of meanings, competences and materials can equally interact and compete with each other at the collective level as actors attempt to do a practice together. Being inspired by Ehn and Löfgren's (2009) theoretical discussion on routine disruption, I empirically showed what happens when “my normal routine encounter your strange habits” (p.105). Existing routines that were unconscious and mostly un-reflected upon suddenly comes to the forefront of consciousness to be evaluated judged and compared to the other person. Here I showed how unarticulated and tacit meanings and knowledge were forced to become explicit and articulated in *justifications* as people were forced to think about the way they do things and how is it different to the other person. For example, I showed how tacit meanings of serving the meal and practical

understandings of storing come to the forefront of consciousness during debates. Implicit elements were thus forced to become explicit and justifiable during interactions in a conflict. And most often, couples used discourses on scientific knowledge and references to personal meanings to justify their particular ways of doing.

As elements confront and interact with each other though, new meanings start to emerge for the couple. New meanings of for example, having gender debates (for Nick) and a stand for equality (for Sara). Or new meanings of tolerance, for example when Simon tries to ignore Vanna's techniques of using the fire. One also learns new cultural and social norms as one gains exposure to each other's traditions and family history (for Pia and Max) (Cross and Gilly, 2013). Similarly, new competences of learning about the taste of different parts of the meat (for Jenny). Or new competences of learning about other people's science (for Ted and Elias). Thus, in communicating and exchanging knowledge and meanings at the collective level, there can also be new meanings that emerge from the process. But it was only during co-performance in and co-articulations about the practice that the manifestations and materialisations of internalised knowledge and meanings revealed itself.

Moreover, conflicts repeated through time, and were not only materialised during the practice of eating. But I showed how conflicts in symbolic meanings and competences can materialise throughout the meal process. As I analysed the meal as a set of practices involving planning, shopping, cooking, serving, eating, and disposing (Cappellini *et al.*, 2016), I was able to analyse conflicts manifested across these various practices through time. At times, a conflicting element in one practice may also 'flow' and have consequences for other interconnected practices as well, resulting in a chain of conflicts. For example, I showed in Pia and Max's case how they had a conflict about attitudes to shopping (Pia preferred to be organised), which also influenced their planning (the list) and storing of the meal (buying in bulk). Their conflict in norms were also repeated during breakfast and dinner through time and space (as they tell me they had a similar conflict in Pia's old house before the cohabitation). Similarly, Tom and Joanne's conflict due to lack of a dining table, not only affected their eating practice, but they also had to adapt their planning and cooking practices to accommodate for the lack of eating on a dining table (e.g. they made chorizo sandwich during the observation). However, these conflicts and flows of elements across the practices do not necessarily follow a linear circular model but conflict itself is a messy and ongoing process that occurs through time and space.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the themes of conflict that emerged during observing the everyday meal consumption practices of newly cohabited couples that took part in the study. When two people move in together, their normal routines gets disrupted as they attempt to share practices with their cohabiting partner. In encountering the foreign habits of the other person, many a times conflicts will occur. Especially in the area of the everyday food consumption, where we all have our engrained and habitual ways of consuming, eating, shopping and cooking, conflicts are inevitable. Using a practice theoretical approach and an ethnographic method, I discussed how conflicts were a result of mis-alignments between the various elements of practice during co-performance of practices at the collective level, and how these conflicts can be carried through time and space and generations. In doing so, I showed how elements interacted and competed with each other. I also showed how tacit elements that most often were un-reflected upon (Phipps and Ozanne, 2017) could become explicit and articulated in justifications during the conflict co-performance. Arguments are sites where negotiation takes place. In co-performing and co-articulating conflicting aspects of practices, the process of collective practice starts to develop. The next chapter will now turn to analyse how synergies (alignments) between the elements in a shared practice can be achieved and performed.

Chapter VI

Synergies

6.1 Introduction

In chapter V, we have seen how elements within a practice can interact and conflict with each other at the collective level over time when the practice is co-performed. In this chapter, I will discuss how elements can cooperate and synergize together over time. I will discuss the themes of synergy that emerged in my study as actors co-perform the practice together.

Previous studies that analyzed the merging of meal practices in newly cohabited couples have mainly focused on convergence of food choice (Bove *et al.*, 2003; Hasford *et al.*, 2017) and eating habits (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Lupton, 2000), and mainly on the understanding of how food purchase decisions are divided (Marshall and Anderson, 2000; Cross and Gilly, 2014b), through uni-laterally interviewing the couples separately. With the exception of Bove and Sobal (2006), who interviewed some couples together to understand how meal work was negotiated, there is no study that analyzed how collective meal practices and routines are created from a *collective perspective over time*. In adopting a practice theoretical approach (Schatzki, 2001; Shove *et al.*, 2012) and an ethnographic method, in this chapter I will show how the collective meal – as a set of inter-connected practice (shopping, planning, cooking, eating to disposing) – is the result of cooperation between the different sets of elements in the collective practice over time. I will show how *synergies* (alignments) are created between the various set of elements, and how this then leads to development of a new collective practice through time.

The chapter will be structured as follows. I will first discuss previous literature on merging of family meals in newly cohabited couples. I will then briefly recap my theoretical position of using practice analytical approach to understand how synergies are created, through looking at previous empirical studies in the field. I will then illustrate three processes through which collective meal synergies are created in the context of newly cohabited couples that took part in my study. I labeled these processes as: blending, combining and domineering elements. The discussion will focus on how elements aid each other, especially how addition of new materialities from the marketplace can aid in creation of such synergies.

6.2 Synergies in Family Meals

When couples move in together, their main attempt will be to converge their individual consumption habits to form a collective consumption routine, especially in the area of everyday food consumption (Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Marshall, 2005). Research has shown how eating together, temporally (at the same time), spatially (at the same space) as well as materially (eating the same things) holds important values and meanings for the new family as they transition from singlehood to coupledness (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Sobal *et al.*, 2002; Bove *et al.*, 2003; Marshall, 2005; Bove and Sobal, 2006).

Kemmer and colleagues (1998) for example discussed how converging eating habits can aid the couple's transition into a collective unit. They highlight how couples would change their dinner eating practices such as the content and format of the meal, the increased frequency of the event, as well as increased time and effort into its preparation. As dinner is becoming an important event for the new couple, they try to create a shared consensus around what they could both enjoy together (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998). Similarly Marshall and Anderson (2000) analyzed how shopping together was becoming a regularized event after marriage, as couples wanted to include both partner's preferences and food choice in the purchase decisions. Bove and colleagues (2003) too analyzed how newly married couples merged their food choice, suggesting that they would either adopt "symmetrical" (both make adaptations to reach a neutral ground) or "asymmetrical" (one partner feels they gave up more of their individual food preference) strategies for convergence (Bove *et al.*, 2003, p.31).

Majority of these papers on married couples suggest that women still held the overall responsibility of the cooking and shopping decisions, although she incorporates input from her partner (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Marshall and Anderson, 2000). Women therefore often did not entirely give up their individual food preference for their spouse, but at times may try to change their partner's food choice as well (Bove *et al.*, 2003; Bove and Sobal, 2006). Marriage therefore mainly improved men's diet and health (Craig and Truswell, 1994), as women take up health based projects to influence their partner's diet preferences (Bove *et al.*, 2003; Bove and Sobal, 2006; Beagan *et al.*, 2008).

In all of these studies, consuming the shared meal was seen as an important project for the new couple. However, as mentioned they mainly focused on the merging of food choices and

purchase decisions, and mostly using interview methods that focused on uni-laterally interviewing the partners separately. With the exception of Bove and Sobal (2006), whose study analyzed how meal work was negotiated taking into account both partners perspective, we know very little about how collective meal routines are created from a collective perspective over time. Moreover, previous studies have mainly focused on the symbolic aspects of consumption and mainly during the process of eating the meal (apart from Marshall and Anderson, 2000 who analyzed shopping), there is scarce studies that analyze competences and materiality in consumption in the context of newly cohabited couples. In adopting a practice theoretical perspective and an ethnographic method, I was able to analyze all the various elements and their interactions across the various practices involved in the consumption of the meal, in order to understand how collective synergies were created over time. In doing so, I was able to get a more dynamic perspective, such as taking into account the role of material objects, competences and meanings as well as their interaction in creation of such synergies. I will now briefly turn to recap theories of practice and routines, an approach that has informed my theoretical position.

6.3 Practice Alignments and Routines

As can be recalled from Chapter III, theories of practice emerged as an alternative philosophy of understanding human behavior (Schatzki, 2001). The central tenet of this theory is that it allows one to analyze practice performances or ‘ways of doing’ as units of analysis (Warde, 2005; Halkier and Jensen, 2011; Shove *et al.*, 2012). As discussed there are many versions of practice theory, but I’m influenced by Shove and colleagues’ (2012) tri-elemental definition of practice as comprising of symbolic meanings, materiality and competences. According to Shove, practices can only be performed smoothly (and exist) when these elements come together, and when there is successful links between them. In other words, there needs to be some form of alignment and collaboration between the elements in order for a practice to be performed, exist and thrive (Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Shove, 2003). In analyzing new linkages and de-linkages between the elements, Shove and colleagues contend that one can see how practices are created, abandoned, developed or changed over time (Shove *et al.*, 2012).

Such focus on alignments and fit between elements is because one of the key characteristics of practice is that it is routinised (Warde, 2005; Southerton, 2013). Warde (2014) highlights how practices are regularly repeated performances, routinised activities, arising from “embodied

and embedded” competences which have been acquired through time and experience (p.292). Practices require regular repeated performances carried out by agents (Reckwitz, 2002a). I had adopted Barnes (2001) definition of routines as “*things people learn by repetition so that they can do them smoothly, easily and competently*” (p.24). They are therefore “*performances of stable practices*” (Southerton, 2013, p.337) through time. And as Ehn and Löfgren (2009) highlights, routines allows practices to be performed without much conscious thought. Many practice theorists have therefore argued that routines are meaningful, as it gives order, security and a sense of stability in one’s lives (O’Dell, 2009; Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). It helps people achieve normality, especially during transitional periods of their lives (Marshall, 2005; Wilk, 2009).

In the previous chapter, I discussed Phipps and Ozanne’s (2017) study on natural droughts, that they discuss how mundane routines can get disrupted when there is change in any one element of practice. However, Phipps and Ozanne (2017) also illustrate how consumers can re-adjust and re-align their practices through the aid of these elements in order to re-establish their routines. They discussed consumers used strategies of changing, adjusting, adding or removing one or more elements to align the practice performance. For example, they showed how consumers adopted and appropriated new meanings and competences in regards to cleanliness and hygiene in various practices, such as using less soap during dishwashing, decreasing flushing frequency, taking quicker showers, etc. to help re-align these practices. Similarly, adding new materials like buckets and bricks to collect water can also aid to re-align practices as it gets appropriated with new meanings and competences of saving water in the practice. Thus, they showed how practice re-alignment is a result of successful creation of new links between the elements of practice, and how this then lead to re-establishment of routines in mundane consumption.

Similarly, Shove and Pantzar (2005) in their study on Nordic walking analyzed how new practices emerge when there is a synthesis of new meanings, competences and/or materials. For example, they show how the skills and materials of “walking with sticks” (p.47), and the meanings of Nordic walking as a fun, healthy activity led to the synthesis of a particular practice of Nordic walking in Finland. However, they argue the practice needs new appropriations of meanings, competences and materials and new links between them, if it was to be adopted in new contexts. For example, they discuss that new meanings of Nordic walking as a “serious form of preserving health and well-being” (p.56) (not so much for fun) need to be

promoted and disseminated through the government and brands in the UK, if it was to be adopted in this country (looking from the historical convention of health and fitness in the UK).

Although these studies have been influential in my understanding of the synergistic flows within practices (Scheurenbrand *et al.*, 2018), such as how elements in a practice influence each other, how linkages between elements are broken, altered and synthesized, and how it can lead to change in the practice over time - most of these studies have focused mainly on the internal dynamics of an already established practice and mainly on the experience of single practitioners performing a practice (see also Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Gram-Hanssen, 2011; Hand *et al.*, 2005). However, we know very little about the interactions between elements of practice when a particular practice is performed by more than one actor, especially when two people *newly* attempt to do a practice together.

6.4 Synergies in Co-performing Meal Practices in New Couples

In a new couple household, when two people attempt to merge their individual practices (and routines) into one shared practice, how do these elements interact with each other during co-performance? In the previous chapter, we have seen how mis-aligned elements conflict and compete with each other over time. However, how do elements integrate, collaborate and align together, in order to create new links and synergistic flows between them? As prior research has shown most couples would attempt to converge their individual consumption habits to form one collective consumption routine, especially in the area of mundane food consumption (Marshall, 2005). However, how is this process of a new collective routine established, taking into account all the elements involved in the practice co-performance?

As I will show in this chapter, new collective routines were established through establishing new synergistic approaches within shared practices of the meal. Through observing the shared meal practices of newly cohabited couples over time, my findings revealed three processes through which synergies between elements in the practice were created at the collective level. The approaches are, what I call: 1. Blending, 2. Combining, and 3. Domineering elements. I will now turn to demonstrate these three synergistic processes, how they are different, but how they all allow for a collective practice co-performance over time. These processes will be

illustrated through two couples each. I chose these couples as they epitomize the process of synergies that I found in majority of the couples.

6.4.1 Blending

At the start of cohabitation, many couples experienced conflict due to differences in meanings and competences about doing meal practices as I showed in the previous chapter. One key approach to create a synergy was to blend their existing meanings and competences to form a shared common approach over time. In doing so, what was initially a conflict got resolved as the blended elements aided to align the whole practice co-performance.

As an outline, I describe **blending** as a process whereby the two sets of existing elements *mix together and transform each other* over time, creating a synergy in co-performing the whole practice. A hypothetical imagination would be like mixing milk and chocolate, the elements would mix to create a new form of liquid comprising both elements. Let me give the example of two couples to show how blending of elements were achieved over time. In the following section, I will first illustrate in the case of Milena and Bernard how their attitudes, standards and skills blended through learning and teaching approaches through time. I will then show in the case of Pia and Max how their knowledge, time and taste were blended through merging with each other through time. As mentioned, these couples' process of blended reflected majority of the couples who took part in my study.

6.4.1.1 Learning and Teaching Standards, Attitudes and Skills

Milena and Bernard met through a dating app in central London. I met them during their 1st month of cohabitation, when they have just moved into a very spacious and elegant 2-bedroom flat in Paddington. They both work in finance companies, therefore are able to afford that extra bedroom and kitchen space in the house. As Bernard says, "It's an investment [...] because when I have more space [in the house] I have more mental space so I feel that when I come back home, I'm really resting". According to him, he invests a lot in his health – both physical and mental. Therefore, when they started living together, they had quite different attitudes to health, which manifested in their shopping and cooking practices. Bernard is very particular about buying organic and specific foods for his health, and would often spend time hunting for specific items, visiting 2-3 grocery stores in one shopping trip to get his items. He tells me he

is very picky about his groceries and the supermarket he chooses, as he has his standards to live up to. Whereas Milena would simply visit one big supermarket to get all the things she needs for the week, as it's more about practicality and convenience for her. Unlike Bernard, she doesn't care much about organic or healthy foods but appreciates his health tips and new ideas as "the next thing I know, I've been eating healthy" (Milena). However, over the period of the study, both their attitudes about health and convenience influenced each other, changing each other, as Bernard became more practical and less strict with his organic diet, while Milena became more health focused.

According to them, because Bernard has a higher competence in cooking and is more concerned about organic and healthy foods, he took up the main responsibility for the food tasks in the household as soon as they moved in together. As when I initially went to their house in their 2nd month of cohabitation, I observed how Bernard was cooking a healthy brunch [steamed vegetables, rice, followed by fruits] for them, while Milena does the rest of the tasks like washing up and setting the table. They tell me how Bernard is a 'control freak' when it comes to food, and therefore is responsible for most of their cooking and shopping:

Milena: We usually go your way because it's more healthy. Babe I think you wear the pants when it comes to cooking. Remember? You once told me as well you like to control everything when it comes to cooking [..]

Bernard: Yeah... I don't know, it's very strange but when I cook, it's hard for me... I like to feel that I control every step. So I think that's why it's hard for me if we cook together. If she cooks, I want her to do everything. Otherwise if I start doing something, I will want to... I don't know, I will be scared of something which will be too burnt or... it's not that I don't trust her. It's just that I -

Milena: You are more experienced maybe -

Being more experienced in the kitchen and the need to control the cooking for his health made Bernard "wear the pants" when it comes to the kitchen, as they tell me. He has more skills, but also higher standards in shopping and cooking as he prefers to buy only organic and healthy foods, and cooks in a more experienced manner [as he tells me he knows when a fillet is done, he doesn't want it to be too burnt]. Standards are therefore approached here as the quality of doing the meal, which Bernard seems to feel he has more of in shopping and cooking. Recent studies have suggested how men are increasing more concerned with health and diet when they are single (Sellaeg and Chapman, 2008) and how men are becoming more actively involved in the kitchen (Bove and Sobal, 2006; Aarseth and Olsen, 2008). For example, Bove and Sobal

(2006) in their study found that couples negotiated meal work also based on who is more experienced and who prefers to cook but argued that this is more gender neutral. However, as Cairns and colleagues (2010) argues such passion for food or concerns about healthy cooking for men are seen more as a leisure or hobby and mainly done on an individual level, as men do not have the same nurturing discourse about food when compared to their female counterparts and are more concerned about displaying their knowledge and expertise rather than care. Similar to other men who took part in my study, Bernard's discourse and practice of doing healthy food seems similar to the male foodies interviewed in Cairns *et al.*'s (2010) study. He often talks about nutrition and health benefits of certain foods, but mostly on an individual level (e.g. kefir - It's my new yogurt, it's more probiotic), although such individual discourses became more subtle during the course of the study. Upon moving in with Milena though, it's interesting to note how Bernard's standards, skills and attitudes about health was quite strong that he took it upon himself to do and control majority of meal tasks, as they tell me he handles the shopping and cooking for both of them.

However, over the time I met them, Milena started to take up more responsibility of the whole evening meal from planning, cooking, to washing up (washing up was always her chore as 'she is quicker to get to the sink first') as she gained the skills, standards and trust in the kitchen to do healthy food. They tell me in their 3rd month of cohabitation how these days Milena cooks more:

Bernard: These days you do [cook] more than me..

Milena: Yeah.. because work has been better this week, so I wanted to.. take care of him. Because in the past few weeks it has been crazy, so he has been taking care of me... you have cooked a lot [...] [So] now I'm more active in finding new ingredients and new menus [...] I look a lot at like superfoods recipes [...] And I'll just google recipes based on keywords, like ingredients [...] I think he likes that I bring new things into his diet, like I would use kale and sweet potato. There was one menu we both really liked, like baked sweet potato, hummus and crispy kale [...] I think he trusts me a lot in the kitchen now [...] I think when I started making successful dishes, maybe that's when [he started]

Although she attributes her interest in doing the family meal to a desire to take care of him and return the care work that he has been doing, it might also be related to a feeling of duty towards others, a notion women have normally been associated with (Devault, 1991). However, what is interesting is that in her desire to take care of him she needed to match up to his standards of the meal. She had to learn the necessary skills (competences) and standards (meanings) in the kitchen before being able to do her care work, as when she started making successful healthy

dishes - that's when they started to share the role more equally. As according to her, "he is very careful with what he eats" (Milena). In Bove and Sobal's (2006) study, they also found that although meal tasks tends to be negotiated based on such differences in knowledge, experience and mood of the day, couples strived to create a more evenly shared task role. As when the less experienced gets more experience and confidence in the kitchen – that's when they are able to divide the task role more equally. Here too, we see how Milena strived to take more part in the family meal, however in order to do so, she not only had to have the experience but also needed to learn her partner's existing standards of doing healthy food, which she does through adding new elements in her existing practice.

For example, one of the ways she learns how to do healthy food which can compare to his standards is through adding new competences in her existing practice through the aid of new market objects and online tools. As she mentioned using Google to find superfood recipes and new healthy ingredients and menus such as the recipe with kale and sweet potato (which she introduced to their shared meal). When I went to observe their dinner preparation in their 4th month, I also saw how Milena handled the main cooking tasks through the aid of material resources. She made salmon with mushroom cream sauce that night (whether it was healthy or not is another matter). But she tells me how she searched for a recipe online and will follow it exactly as she isn't comfortable with improvising, and it was also the first time she is trying this new recipe. She keeps her phone next to her while cooking to follow the recipe (Picture 12). However, at times she also asks Bernard for his opinions and for him to taste the food which allowed him to teach and validate her new competence/recipe, and also furthered her confidence in the kitchen (picture 13). For example, at one point she wasn't sure about the recipe's instruction and asks him for his opinion, which allowed him to relay his competence:

Milena: The recipe I looked at is really funny, because it says for me to put the salmon in for 5 minutes on one side and do the same thing on the other side. You think it's weird?

Bernard: No. It will cook through.

Milena: Then should we follow it?

Bernard: Yeah, but I will never do that, I always listen to my instinct.



Picture 12: Milena uses the phone as a competence tool (left);

Picture 13: Bernard tastes the meal (right)

In Denegri-Knott and Jenkins's (2016) study, they showed how Digital Virtual Devices (DV devices) such as Google and Youtube can be a source of competence in practices and also aid in altering competences in human actors (see also Truninger, 2011). Milena too uses these DV devices to enhance her skills and knowledge in doing healthy food, as she often searches for healthy recipes online, as well as follows it during cooking. However, in using online recipes and in validating it through him and understanding his competences, she was able to gain his trust and therefore take more control of the kitchen. However, in doing so, new materialities

(the phone, DV devices) and new competences had to be added into her existing practice, aiding her in learning her partner's standards and skills about healthy food.

However, as Milena gained the standards and skills of doing healthy food in the kitchen, she was also able to alter and transform Bernard's attitudes in organic and healthy food in the shared practice. For example, as she said she brings in "new ideas" into their shared diet (e.g. the kale), which Bernard says he would never have thought of before: "She taught me some recipes like kale in the oven. I would never had think of it before, but it's amazing". Sometimes she would "add a new mystery [healthy] ingredient" and "surprise him" intentionally (Melina). She would also inform him on any food news she has read, and at times influence him as well, for example, they now prefer to buy *Duchy Organic* brand of meat from Waitrose, which she read from the news that it's owned by Charles, Prince of Wales as Bernard tried it and says "it tastes better". She would also challenge him sometimes about his standards for 'Waitrose only' and organic produce, as can be seen from this fieldnote excerpt in their dinner observation.

[As we finished eating the dinner on the couch in the living room, they started discussing how much they liked the fish they made. Milena was in charge of the meal and therefore she had bought the fish from Tesco [supermarket] which was across her workplace:]

Bernard: I don't believe it's a Tesco one [fish]

Milena: It's from Tesco [...] As I was leaving [work] I just bought it. We never actually buy anything from Tesco. Only today [turns to tell me].

Bernard: Yeah, I normally only buy from Waitrose. So this is like Wow [...]

Milena: But honestly you have to see the price of cod in Tesco, it will change your mind. Because there is no free range cod. Cod is the same [everywhere]. Unless they do the line fishing, or industrial farming differently, then ok, I get it. But otherwise cod is cod, they catch it the same way.

Bernard: Oh yeah, you think so?

Milena: Yeah, I think so.. There is usually [limited] an option of how they catch the fish, the one that is line cod [caught by line] or the one that is grown to be killed [industrial fishing].

Bernard: Ah so they write it?

Milena: Yeah. There is line cod, have you ever seen it?

Bernard: No, I didn't know line cod was a thing. So it's not electric net?

Milena: I don't know [laughs]

Such discussions about what is free range and how is it labelled in the supermarket, allowed them to exchange and challenge each other's attitudes, standards and skills about shopping for organic produce. In Askegaard *et al.*'s (2016) study, they found that the "quest for authenticity" (p.17) and accuracy about branding is increasing as consumers want to know more about how their foods are produced. They found that consumers nowadays are more mistrustful of big brands in the supermarket. Here, however, I show how one person is more mistrustful of the

labelling and integrity of the supermarket brand and tries to influence the other person's standards during interaction, through drawing on what they know and their own beliefs. As Milena says "cod is cod, they catch it the same way". In doing so, her existing attitudes of shopping for practicality and convenience were brought to the forefront to challenge Bernard's standards for organic and free-range produce, as she shows him how Tesco's [more convenient] cod is no different than the organic Waitrose's one. Similar to the previous chapter, here we see how embodied and often un-reflected competences of knowing how meat is caught and how to identify the meat labels in the supermarket were brought to the forefront of consciousness to be communicated and discussed. Through these discussions over time, they were able to create a common standard in shopping, as in the 6th month, they reveal how she too has transformed and influenced him to be more practical and more relaxed in shopping:

Milena: Nowadays he has become more relaxed in terms of having organic food [...] So I think that's why also he lets me do the grocery and stuff like that more. Otherwise he needs to be really picky with what he eats [...] Nowadays, we still go to Waitrose, but we don't have to go the organic shop anymore. He has become much more practical, I would say.

[Individual interview]

Bernard: Nowadays, it doesn't have to be organic [...] I'm feeling so happy naturally, that now I'm allowing myself to be a little less strict on myself [...] Milena changed this in me. She made me realize that maybe it was too silly always trying to be organic, it's good to let go. Yeah, if you don't find organic one day it's ok, just buy another one and later on, we can buy the organic one. And sometimes you don't even know if the organic stuff you buy, is actually organic or not. You don't know how they have been produced or.. so it's just sometimes you become too silly if you start to be too.. if you stick too much to organic.

Relaxation in shopping also influenced how they behaved during cooking the meal together. As can be seen from picture 14 (a, b) taken during their 5th and 6th month of observation, Bernard is now more 'relaxed' as Milena is more confident in the kitchen.



Picture 14 (a, b): Bernard relaxing while Milena handles the meal

As can be seen, over time, both their meanings (attitudes and standards) of health and practicality influenced each other and were in a way, transferred to each other through relational interactions and during co-performance in shopping and cooking. These meanings were re-evaluated and adjusted to each other as time passed in order to create a common shared meaning in the collective practice. For example, Bernard re-evaluated his standards for organic consumption and was influenced by Milena's attitudes of convenience and practicality as he says "now if there isn't an organic one, then it's ok to buy another one". Perhaps this also stems from their discussions about what is actually organic or not in the supermarket. Milena too re-evaluated her attitudes of convenience and laziness as she tells me these days she is more active to find new healthy menus and she wants to be more involved. Previous studies that looked at how newly cohabited couples converged their food habits showed how one partner (usually the

woman) worked to influence their partner's meal preferences to change the other person (Craig and Truswell, 1994; Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Bove *et al.*, 2003; Bove and Sobal, 2006; Beagan *et al.*, 2008). However, here I show that change can occur in both directions. As each partner carry their own meanings (attitudes and standards) into the practice, these existing elements are exchanged and are transferred to the other person. In doing so, elements can blend together to create one new common meaning in the collective practice through time. I showed how other elements such as addition of 'new' materials and skills, such as those from DV devices, recipe websites, online search engines, mobile phone, as well as new health/mystery ingredients can be integrated to help blend these different set of elements together.

Over the time I met them, this couple was able to blend their attitudes and standards of health and convenience together. In blending such elements, they were able to create a synergistic flow in co-performing all of the integrated practices involved in the consumption of their shared meal.

6.4.1.2 Merging Knowledge, Time and Taste

In the previous section I showed how the couple primarily blended their meanings (standards and attitudes) in cooking and shopping. However, primarily blending two sets of competences together will also aid in creating a synergy in the collective practice performance. Here many couples mixed their existing knowledges and skills in the practice through co-performance over time. Addition of new elements such as new materials (e.g. food plans, marketplace resources), also aided in the synergy process. Take the example of Pia and Max, who represent majority of my couples' process of blending competences in a practice.

I met Pia and Max in their 3rd month of cohabitation. They moved into a 1-bedroom flat in the Barbican, Central London. If we remember from Chapter V, this couple still had an ongoing conflict about a shared grocery shopping app as Max preferred to shop on a daily basis, while Pia preferred to shop in bulk. However, as I will show they were able to blend their overall competences around the shared scheduling and timing of the meal as it is a joint effort benefitting both of them. They are both professionals, where Max works in finance, and Pia works in mental health clinics. Hence like the majority of my couples, they continuously narrated feelings of being busy every time I met them. E.g. "It feels like time is generally

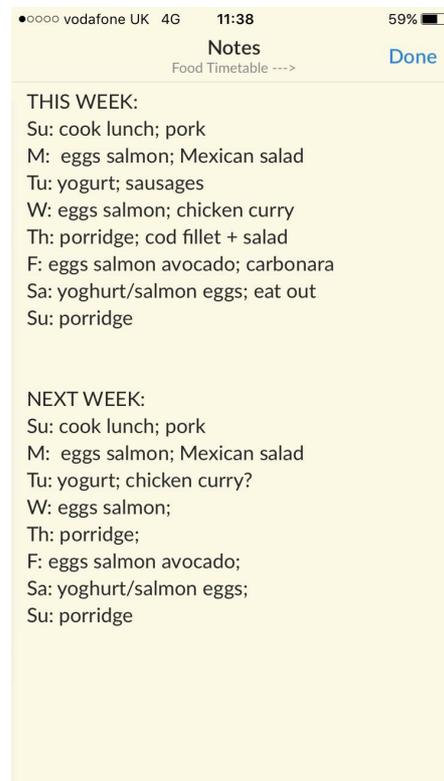
difficult for me...I think my life is dictated by my calendar” (Pia), “We have very busy lives. Like work for me, and sometimes I’m doing certification courses outside for my work too” (Max). They often reported things to do outside the house on a daily basis. For example, Pia was working, doing her part-time PhD, regularly plays in a band, and has a lot of social events to attend. Max, on the other hand, often have to stay back late from work and study for certification exams, although his social life is much lesser than Pia’s (according to her). Moreover, they both also attend salsa classes together every week (this was also where they met). Thus, as soon as they moved in together, food time tables/food plans were created in order to synchronise their daily schedules and allow planning of shared dinners in their busy lives. Pia tells me in the first interview how they realised they needed to ‘fit’ food in their scheduling as soon as they moved in together:

Pia: I think we both realized very quickly when we moved in together that we need to make something quick, we needed to fit food in our scheduling. We realized very quickly that ‘oh no, that is very difficult’, like it took an active effort to [talk], we actually had to talk, say like ‘how do we [do this]... let’s find this...’ it took us... very quickly we realized.

Since both of them are working in full-time jobs and also indulge in other leisure activities outside the home (social events, salsa, Pia is also in a band), it almost seemed like they very reflexively aspired to negotiate their time to spend together through actively discussing how to ‘fit’ food in their schedules as soon as they moved in together. In Southerton’s (2009) study, he compared how people in the 1930’s and in the 2000’s allocate their time to everyday practices. He argued that people in the new millennium have more personal responsibility for allocation of time to practices compared to the older generation, where schedules were more fixed and institutionally informed (e.g. Sunday is family day, fixed work schedules, etc.). Thus, he contends that families in the new millennium need to deliberately negotiate, plan and coordinate their time and schedules with other family members in order to spend time together - a challenge which wasn’t there in the older generation. According to him, this is because of the changing structure of the family, as there are increasingly more dual earner couples, and people increasingly feel they need to “maximize temporal efficiency” in various practices (Southerton, 2009, p.50). As Pia and Max indulge in many practices in and out of home, perhaps like in Southerton’s millennial families they felt they needed to rationalize their time and temporal organization of practices to be able to efficiently do work, study, leisure activities, food, so on. They therefore reflexively talked to each other as they moved in together that they needed to create a food timetable in order to coordinate and allocate time to the shared meal.

A food timetable was therefore deliberately discussed in order to actively plan to synchronize and co-ordinate their multiple schedules of work and non-work activities, so that they could eat together. It allowed them to ‘fit’ food in their lives, and allocate time to their relationship (similar to Southerton’s (2009) millennial families) which is also in line with Brannen *et al.*’s (2013) study of how synchronicity of family schedules dictate or constrain family meals. When I met them, their food plans were still in the “trial phase” as they tell me, thus weren’t consistently constructed every week. However, over the time I met them, their work and life schedules became more hectic, and thus, there was a more active effort to make and plan joint food timetables in everyday life. The food timetable also allowed them to plan, predict and negotiate how much time they can afford for the shared dinner. As they tell me while showing their newly constructed food plan (picture 15):

Pia: So this [food timetable] is this current week’s [...] normally we’ll look like on a Saturday or Sunday, to see how many nights we’re home in the week. Because often we have work things or together we are going to a [dance] class or something. So we see how much time we are going to have, whether we can cook something quickly or whether we need to prepare it before.. so we try and work it out with our schedules [...]



Picture 15: Pia and Max’s food timetable

From the picture, we can see how their food plans are still un-updated from one week to the next, as it is still in the trial phase. Some of the items are also being repeated as they are newly coordinating their time affordances and thoughts of what to make every week. They tell me they both sit down together and do the food plan together on a weekend, but it's still not consistent. The selection of the dish is based on what each person knows how to make, how much time it takes to make, and how much time they have for the meal. Also, we can see how they plan not only for dinner but also for breakfast, which tended to be more repeated than dinner [repetition of breakfasts is a common approach for many of the couples but analysis of such is not in the scope of this chapter]. According to Shove (2009), timing is an important feature of competence. As knowing the sequence of order of things, knowing how to coordinate, knowing how to save time, but also how to make time, are all important aspects of competence. As according to her, this is because practices can be understood as one that consumes time. And since we all have various practices to perform in everyday life (e.g. work, travelling, domestic practices), we can allocate only limited number of time for only certain practices. Pia and Max's creation of the shared food timetable perhaps then is a materialization of their shared competence in terms of timing.

Rationalization of time was very evident when they tell me what they usually make for dinner and how new dinner ideas were being founded. As food plans were instruments through which shared competences could be materialized, especially in this new phase of the relationship many couples who employed food plans used it to blend competences around the overall meal. For example, food plans aided in their merging of knowledge about what each person knows how to make, what they can both enjoy together but also how long will such preparation take. As Pia and Max tell me they actively need to find dishes that is 'quick and easy' - They have to actively sit down for a couple of minutes each week to discuss new ideas and/or knowledge on what to make and how 'quick and easy' it is:

Max: I don't like spending so much time on cooking, I'd rather do other things.

Pia: Same yeah

Max: We are like 'let's do something quick and easy'

Pia: So sometimes [...] the food timetable [helps] cut away the time we [...] spend thinking about 'what shall we eat today?'

Max: We can spend half an hour and be like 'what can we [make]?..Let's look in the fridge and' –

Pia: Oh yeah, 'we have this in the fridge.. let's make'.. So we try to cut that off because it's such a waste of time for both of us [...] it doesn't come naturally to us. We can't look at stuff and say let's put this together. We'll spend like 10-15 minutes going like 'ah' [what do we make].

Max: Yes our moms they can just open the fridge and see 5 random ingredients and say 'ah I can make this' [...] When we plan, we just say 'ok let's sit for a moment, let's take 5 minutes and decide 'ok what are we having on Monday, Tuesday, and so on'.

Pia: We are trying to give perhaps some room for maneuver, in case we change our mind or want to try some exciting stuff, we can. It's been a while since we had chorizo [turns to tell him].

Studies have shown how the condition of our society is such that we feel harried and time-pressed more than ever (Rosa, 2003; Southerton, 2003). And we see how consumers are employing convenience strategies and time-saving technologies to maximize their use of time in everyday life (Warde, 1999; Southerton, 2003; Carrigan *et al.*, 2006). However, in a time where personal relationships and doing family need to have allocated time slots (see previous discussion, Southerton, 2009), new convenience strategies can be added into the shared practice to help manage such joint time allocations. As discussed, one convenience strategy is making of the shared food timetable itself. Planning of what to buy/cook beforehand through making the food timetable is done in order to make the shared meal more efficient and easy, saving overall time. As they tell me how they were able to save 10 minutes of looking in the fridge everyday through spending 5 minutes in making the weekly food timetable. In doing so, the shared food timetable also acted as a new tool to blend the two sets of ideas/competences together during their discussions.

The second convenience strategy however, is making the format of the meals also quick and easy. As Pia says, 'we plan for quick and easy meals', 'we don't want to waste time'. If one of them already know a quick and easy meal, they add it in the shared food timetable; but if it's something new they want to try in their joint meals, they would look for such convenient meals as well from the marketplace. As they tell me later how new meals are added from searching online or through supermarket offers: "[new meal ideas] also depends on what you can find in the supermarket, like if there is some offer we say let's try something new, we can make something out of this" (Max). New materials such as ready-made ingredients would often surface in their discourses about the shared meal:

Max: I'm a bit lazy as an Italian. Usually, some Italians spend longer making [pasta], preparing their own tomato sauce, whereas I just buy ready-made tomato sauce.. we usually just buy ready-made burger from the supermarket

Pia: We're not interesting cooks

Here we can see how new materials and competences of using marketplace resources aid in their making of the shared [quick and easy] meal. These new elements added to their shared

meal aid in saving overall time and resources. In doing so, existing competences and meanings of cooking complicated and elaborate meals need to be re-evaluated and re-adjusted, while new competences such as knowledge of how to make time-efficient meals were added in the shared practice. Although both Max and Pia says they don't like spending too much time on cooking, they still make an effort to plan, cook and eat together every evening. In the next chapter, I will discuss why doing the meal together is an important event for the new couple, but here I showed how merging and coordinating their ideas on what, when and how to shop, cook, and eat the meal, aided their doing of the shared meal - in an efficient manner.

Moreover, over the period of time that I met them, Pia and Max's food plans evolved more into a way for them to blend their competences around reducing waste and saving overall money and resources. There were two techniques of how leftovers were utilized through the food timetable. One is when they synchronize their in and out days that allows them to manage the temporal flow of the leftovers (Evans, 2012). For example, they tell me how sometimes they plan for using leftovers during individual dinners: "I was coming back late on Monday. So dinner we had planned so that Max can eat earlier, like something smaller, like one of the frozen soups" (Pia). Here we can see how leftovers were "moved along" from collective dinners to individual dinners as the latter is seen as less important (it's ok to have something smaller) (Cappellini, 2009, p.371). We can also see how the bundle of the meal (Cappellini *et al.*, 2016) is connected, as individual dinners were linked to leftovers from previous times. At times they tell me they also plan for next day lunches by deliberately making leftover dinners which allows them to further maximize their time and resources. The second way how leftovers were utilized through the food timetable is when they deliberately plan to finish raw ingredients from the fridge. As they tell me in their 6th month of cohabitation how new meal ideas were synthesized using leftover ingredients in the fridge:

Pia: I will say [to him] we have that one ingredient we need to use, find something to do with it.

Max: And then I google

Pia: And if he looks up the recipe and it says we need something else to add to it, we'll add it to our shopping list [...] We never, rarely look for a recipe for which we do not have at least one ingredient. I do that, I don't know if you are different [mumbles to him]. So it always starts with something that we already have, and then what do we need to make that into.

Here, both sets of competences and ideas were blended in order to also manage the temporal flow of leftovers (Evans, 2012). Knowledge in regards to knowing the shelf life of ingredients, knowing what to make with them, as well as knowing how to synchronize their timetables,

were blended together in order to make efficient use of leftovers in the fridge. Such approaches to ‘googling’ ingredients from leftovers to think of new meal ideas was an approach shared by many couples in my study. In Cappellini’s (2009) article she discusses how consuming leftovers should not be regarded as a disconnected or terminal practice, but it has implications for the whole practice of the meal. Here too, we see how finding new meal ideas from leftover ingredients requires updating the shopping, planning and cooking, and therefore has consequences for their whole meal practice. We also see the use of Digital Virtual devices (Denegri-Knott and Jenkins, 2016) as sources of new competences that is added in the shared practice as they reveal how they Google keywords from leftover ingredients to find new meals. In adding such new materials and competences into their shared food plan, they were able to further structure the flow of leftovers and reduce waste.

Over the time I met them, this couple was able to blend their overall competences around coordinating and timing of the meal and leftovers. New competences and materials such as making food timetables, making convenient (quick and easy) meals as well as making use of leftovers aided in coordinating such competences together. In doing so, they were able to create joint time allocations and common structuring procedures for using leftovers in the collective practice. Similar to Pia and Max, many other couples also employed food timetables and new technology to coordinate their schedules, their meal plans and use of leftovers in the fridge which resulted in a new shared competent system of planning. Although analyzing from one practitioner’s (the woman’s) perspective, Mylan and Southerton (2018) discusses how personal relationships are crucial for the coordination and ordering of laundry performances. They discussed how the flow and structure of laundry is shaped by fulfilling other’s needs within a personal relationship. Here, we see how the flow of the meal and leftovers need to be mutually coordinated and aligned as it is co-performed. Food plans resulted in creation of new meals for which they both could contribute to and eat together. In blending such competences, they were able to create a synergistic flow in co-performing all of the integrated practices involved in the consumption of their shared meal.

6.4.2 Combining

When couples carry two different sets of meanings and competences in a practice, at times, these elements can also combine together in order to create a synergy in the collective performance. **Combining** emerged as a process whereby the two set of elements in a collective

practice *unite and cooperate with each other* over time, creating a synergy in co-performing the whole practice. As I will show, combination is different to blending as the elements do not mix, but remain separate in the collective practice through co-performance. A hypothetical imagination of this process would be like combining oil and water, the elements would not mix but would consolidate into different layers. Let me give the example of two couples to show how combining elements were achieved over time. I will first illustrate in the case of Tom and Joanne, who initially had very conflicting preferences, values and lifestyles in regards to health and self-care - how over time, they were able to combine their eating practice through *sustaining* these existing elements in the shared meal. Second, I will show in the case of Vanna and Simon, who initially had very conflicting norms and techniques in buying meat - but over time were able to combine these existing elements to make them cooperate together.

6.4.2.1 *Sustaining Preferences, Values and Lifestyles*

I met Tom and Joanne in their 6th month of cohabitation. They tell me how it took them a very long time to start eating together as a couple when they first started dating, because of their difference in schedules and eating preferences. As they tell me how Tom is a sports enthusiast, where he plays three different kinds of sports with training for one almost every day: “I play Golf, Hockey and Cricket... not trying to make myself sound amazing, but I’m in the first team of every sport” (Tom). Thus he would mostly focus on consuming protein and meat in his daily diet to build up muscles and for energy. Whereas Joanne prefers a more vegetarian diet as she tells me she does not feel meat is integral to her diet. Because of this, they have had extremely different diets which made them eat separately for a long time before the cohabitation, as they tell me:

Joanne: In the beginning [of our relationship], Tom was bulking

Tom: Yeah I was trying to put on a lot of weight for a sports coach

Joanne: So like we never ate together for ages, it was a good 6-7 months that we didn’t eat together, I’d eat my food, and he’d eat his food.

Tom: I’d say we both had very extreme diets in the opposite ways [...]

Joanne: My mom generally eats vegetarian. And umm, so I’d kind of grown up not really thinking that meat is like massively integral to my diet. I think for you it has been, like you know your mom has got 2 boys.

Tom: Yeah [...] I’m half Belgian and there is a lot of meat and cheese. [...] [Also] I do three different kinds of sport in one day. And if you don’t manage your diet correctly when you are trying to be healthy,

your body can't keep up. [...] We focus on different things in our food. Because I'm one of those people obsessed with protein.

Studies have shown how meat can be one of the most disputed food in marriages, as couples often need to negotiate food choice according to the amount, the type and the frequency of meat in the shared meal (Sobal, 2005; Bove *et al.*, 2003). According to Sobal (2005, p.136), this conflict can be because of various factors including class (eg: the price), ethnicity (eg: the religion or culture), ethics (eg: morality/one partner is activist), health (eg: different health values) and gender (eg: masculine/feminine foods). Previous studies have mostly focused on how meat is associated with gender as studies have shown how men preferred more meat whereas women preferred less meat (Kubberød *et al.*, 2002; Beardsworth and Bryman, 2004; Prättälä *et al.*, 2006; Rozin *et al.*, 2012). However, Sobal (2005) argues that we must see the other discourses that structure men's consumption of meat as well, for example it may be related to health, to gain muscles (protein), so on. Thus, there are often multiple and changing scripts to which men (and women) draw upon to do food in a relationship and Sobal (2005) argues that understanding these will provide a basis for couples to negotiate their preferences more "flexibly" (p.135), allowing them to justify their consumption more appropriately. Here, we see how Tom and Joanne draws on their difference in upbringing, values and lifestyles in order to justify their different preferences in meat and vegetarian consumption. As Joanne tells me, her family generally eat vegetarian at home, whereas Tom's family is half-Belgian (and also have many boys) and so they have generally grown up eating a lot of meat. Therefore, similar to the previous chapter, couples often used family values and references to culture as sources of justifications for their preferences. Moreover, as Tom is very much into gym and fitness - his meal intake would mainly focus on meat and protein for energy, muscle building and muscle repair. As he tells me he 'knows' how much protein his body needs in order to keep up the active demands of his lifestyle. Thus, meat consumption becomes associated with meanings of health and self-care techniques.

Therefore, in order to start sharing meals together, they needed to find a middle ground for what they can both consume and enjoy together. There were two ways they were able to share meals together. Firstly, this couple too created food plans, but did so right *before* moving in together in order to synchronize their mealtimes and planning of the meal. Similar to Pia and Max, food plans were created in order to share/blend their ideas on what they could eat together. They too had to sit down for a couple of minutes each week to plan which days they

were in/out as well as what they were going to eat. However, by the time I met them, they have been doing the food plans for 6 months and therefore it was already in a routinized stage, constructed on a weekly basis. I will not discuss about their food plans further as it is similar to Pia and Max's blending of competences, which was discussed in the previous section.

The second way they were able to share food is through combining their preferences during dinnertime. As Joanne tells me how she would make vegan meals for herself, and then add chicken or some form of meat to his portion of the meal, so that they both can have what they prefer in the same meal:

Joanne: I watch YouTube videos and stuff like that so that I tend to cook sort of more vegan meals. And then I'll add chicken, which sounds really weird. But I'll add chicken to his portion, because obviously I think Tom just prefers the taste of meat and stuff.

Contrary to other studies that show how women sacrifice their food preference for their partner (e.g. Devault, 1991), here we see how Joanne cooks her preference food as the base for the shared meal. But when it is her turn to cook, she would incorporate Tom's preference through cooking meat for him to be added to the shared dish. In doing so, she is able to combine both their individual preferences in the same meal. Here, I relate consumption preferences to meanings in a practice, as such food choice stem from meanings of health, self-care and family values, from their perspective. In managing the materiality of the food through allowing for variations and customizations for individual preferences in the shared dinner meal, many couples were able to combine their preferences, which aided in aligning their collective eating practice.

Moreover, it was not only Joanne who incorporates both preferences in the collective practice during preparation of the shared meal, but it's a mutual process. Tom as well does the same for her, as he tells me casually in their 7th month of cohabitation:

Tom: For instance Joanne doesn't like dairy. So when I'm making her scrambled eggs, I made hers separate scramble eggs with soya milk in it. And that's fine. I don't try to change her. And the same. So for instance, Joanne knows that I really like meat. So if she makes a vegan thing, which I've not got any aversion to. She'll just shred some chicken and put it on top. You know something like a daal, which personally I really enjoy the taste of daal. But I just really like meat. We'll boil a chicken and shred it and put it in the daal for my portion. So that I've got some meat.

In Bove *et al.*'s (2003) study, they found that at times couples adopt food individualism in order to resolve food conflicts. According to them, food individualism is “*when partners ate identical foods at shared meals but individualized their eating to cater to their own specific tastes*” (p.34). For example, when couples modified one portion of the food such as adding more or less spices and condiments for one portion, or cooking for more or less time in the oven [which some couples in my study did]. In Tom and Joanne's case, we can see a level of individualism according to dietary preferences as they both have the same base components of the meal, but then have add-ons which are different. They were therefore able to do their multiple individual projects (Valentine, 1999) in the collective dinner without any person sacrificing their individual preferences. But in my view, from a practice perspective, the process involves combining existing preferences and values such as those involving health and self-care, and ‘sustaining’ it through materialization in the shared meal practice. In doing so, both their existing lifestyles, values and preferences cooperated and united with each other, keeping it alive in the collective.

Thus, this process is where both meanings are kept and sustained through time. There was no adjustment or removal of old meanings, nor does the meanings influence or change each other. However, new elements are added to aid the process of combination. For example, as mentioned they used new material resources such as writing food plans to aid their synergy process. They also used online recipes and Youtube videos as mentioned, to find recipes that can integrate their preferences. Similarly, new meanings of sharing and mutual respect were also appropriated in meal practices, which aided in the combination process. As Tom tells me:

Tom: I would never, umm, prepare a meal that I knew Joanne wasn't comfortable eating, and then try and convince her to eat it. And she wouldn't do the same for me [...] I don't think it's a food thing. I think it's just a good relationship thing you know. We been together for 2 years and it's important to be supportive of people's choices.

Previous studies showed that eating together is an important ritual for new couples as eating the same things at the same time symbolizes their commitment to each other (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Marshall and Anderson, 2002). However, here although they could share the time to eat together, being able to eat foods they are both comfortable with also symbolizes their relationship and commitment to each other. As Tom says such a strategy is “good relationship thing”, one ought respect and support each other's health choices and not try to change or influence the other person. I will discuss more about why sharing the meal is an important

ritual for the new family in Chapter VII, but here I show how new meanings of sharing and mutual respect were invented and appropriated to aid in the combination process of sharing the meal.

However, at times, such processes of combining meanings in the shared meal can also be deviated. This may be because existing meanings are sustained and the meanings do not influence each other, therefore there is a potential for the synergy to be disrupted and revert back to two individual practices. For example, at one of their shopping trips during their 10th month of cohabitation, they were on completely different diets, to break from what they call, their “discipline” of planning and sharing the combined meal. As can be seen from this field note excerpt:

[As we entered the supermarket, they each picked up their own shopping baskets (see picture 16). They tell me they have just come out of an intense Ketogenic diet last week. And so this week, there is no list and no plan. They both wanted to treat themselves to eating whatever they wanted]:

Me: So how come this time you guys don't have a list?

Tom: A plan? I think it's because we've been so so busy. We've been so so disciplined for about 2-3 months [...] Sometimes you got to give yourself a break and just you know - [relax?]

Me: So what will you guys do then for this week?

Tom: I imagine we are probably just going to take care of ourselves [...] because Joanne is working quite a lot this week, so I'm probably just going to make whatever I fancy really [...] because the intensity of the amount I'm going to be exercising [...] It sounds silly but because we are coming out of this kind of three month period of super discipline [...] I truly believe the only way you maintain good discipline is by giving yourself chances to release that

Joanne: I'm going to try the paleo diet [this week]. So like no processed foods. A lot nuts, a lot of salad. I'll be getting a lot of on-the-go nutrients [they add items in different baskets]



Picture 16: Individualised diets

Similar to how parents use the meal and meal related rituals as a tool to discipline their children (Grieshaber, 1997), here we see how the shared meal is used as a tool for self-discipline to eat healthy and together for this couple. As they tell me how making the food plan together is a discipline as they have to organise and structure their thoughts, time and schedule as a way to eat together, which they have been doing consistently for the past months. However, just as children often resist the discipline and how parents give occasional treats to further discipline their children (Grieshaber, 1997; Gram, 2016), here too we see how the couple deliberately break from the collective routine in order to treat themselves. As they tell me how treating themselves involve taking care of themselves, and being able to try new things on their own (whatever they fancy), such as the paleo diet Joanne will try this week. They have to purposely plan not only for the shared meal but also for the break from it. In Warde's (1994b) analysis of the changing representations of food across two time periods (1960s and 1990s), he highlights that one of the changes around food discourse is related to "health and indulgence" (p.23). In today's time, health and discipline to the body is rarely seen as pleasure but more as a matter of efficiency, calculation and concern for the self. Here, too we can see how both Tom and Joanne relates healthy eating to a matter of discipline, whereas breaking from it as pleasure-inducing. The shared meal becomes a tool for them to manage the discipline, but it also becomes a treat when it is individualised.

Over the period of the study, this couple was able to combine their preferences and in turn their health values and existing habits in the shared eating practice, which aided in creating a synergy in their whole collective practice performance. However, as this couple shows, when meanings are combined like oil and water, they do not mix, thus there can be tendencies where this combination strategy and synergistic flow is broken apart, reverting it back to individual practices.

6.4.2.2 Assembling Techniques and Norms

The previous section showed how meanings in a practice were primarily combined to aid in creating a synergy in the whole practice co-performance. But many a times, competences such as techniques could also be combined to create a synergy. Take the example of Vanna and Simon, who had very conflicting norms of meat provisioning practices at the start of their cohabitation, but was able to create a synergy in their shared meal practices through combining their techniques of buying and storing meat.

I met Simon and Vanna in their 4th month of cohabitation. Similar to many of the couples who took part in my study, Simon and Vanna too exercise in the gym together after work before coming home to prepare dinner. Both of them consider themselves foodies, where they often use phrases like ‘we are always thinking about food, me and Simon’ or ‘we both really enjoy cooking and having nice food’. Even during the courtship period, when they were starting to temporarily live for small stretches of time at each other’s places, they had already started cooking at each other’s places, and gauged each other’s cooking abilities and food tastes before the cohabitation commenced. Thus, they rarely had conflicts in regards to food tastes or preferences. However, as soon as they cohabited they realized they had very different norms in regards to buying and storing meat. Similar to Tom, Simon too is very much into fitness and sports, thus meat is very integral to his diet. Therefore, he would buy a lot of meat to freeze, from which he will slowly consume on a daily basis. However, Vanna tells me “frozen meat is not the same as fresh meat”, as she prefers to buy meat fresh on the day whenever is needed. Thus for this couple, ‘the meat’ became the starting point of their conflict and their synergy in creating meal plans. As Vanna tells me in the initial interview:

Vanna: Because he is very much into fitness [...] meat is his protein, so we’ll buy quite a lot of meat, different kinds of protein [...] and we’ll freeze a lot of meat. So we buy in bulk for a week or two, and it will just stay there [...] He is ok with freezing meat [...] I never liked freezing meat and then thawing it, I

would buy fresh and eat [...] So I would buy meat only if I was at a butcher, so buy small portions but fresh and eat it [...] For me freezing has always been for the idea of 'oh you freeze for convenience then you freeze cooked food'.

Simon: I freeze because it lasts longer. Like for example, there are offers, buy 3 for 10. If I buy 3 for 10 and then I don't finish it in a week, and it will go to waste. So I freeze it.

Vanna: Frozen meat is not the same as fresh meat [turns to tell him]

In the previous section, we have seen how meat consumption can be a source of conflict but it can be resolved through the process of combining individual preferences in the collective meal without any one person giving up their preferred taste. But here, conflict about meat consumption is not only in eating but also in shopping and storing practices. As one person is averse to freezing bulk of meat and prefers to buy from the butcher shop, we see how conflict in meat consumption during cohabitation is not only about negotiating food choice, amount and frequency like in previous studies (Sobal, 2005) but also about 'how to' consume. What is interesting here is how their differences is a result of their different ways of using the material infrastructures within the home (the freezer). In Hand and Shove's (2007) study, they highlight how the freezer has become a 'normalised' and almost necessary appliance in most contemporary households today, as people become so used to it that they find and appropriate new meanings and competences in the practice of freezing as our society evolves (see also Shove and Southerton, 2000). For example, they showed how some people use it for saving money, some for saving time, some for managing care for their children, and some also use it as a tool for planning and improvisation. Here we see how Vanna and Simon's conflict of meat consumption resulted from their different norms about using the freezer in everyday life as for Simon, the freezer is a tool to save money and preserve/prolong meat bought in bulk from the supermarket. It allows him to plan and structure meat in his daily diet in an efficient manner. Whereas for Vanna, the freezer is associated with meanings of convenience or freezing of previously fresh cooked food. Thus, people assign and appropriate different meanings and competences to the freezer and this could be a source of conflict when they move in together.

However, over the time I met them, this couple was able to resolve their differences and create a synergy in their meat consumption through combining their competences in using the fridge and freezer space. Firstly, Vanna's techniques of efficiently buying and storing the meat in the fridge were incorporated into the shared practice. For example, Vanna highlight how they (mainly her) have developed the habit of buying different kinds of meat in the supermarket to be able to strategically store them in different manners. When I went to their house after the

shopping trip to see how they store their food, she shows me how the reduced price chicken (ones that are going off soon) from the fresh butcher counter will go in the fridge and will be eaten the same day or the next; the chicken thighs will be frozen; I see her divide the pork into two parts, some for the fridge and some for freezing; and the lamb goes in the freezer. In doing such strategies, she tells me “at least they have three meals of fresh meat” (Vanna):

Vanna: So now we have developed this habit where we buy meat, and usually we buy chicken that has to be eaten the same day or the next, and the pork which has a little bit longer shelf life....We got the chicken day before yesterday, and we ate it the first day, so it's still fresh in the fridge. The same chicken we will eat again tonight, because it still has the shelf life. Pork we will eat tomorrow, and the remaining [meat] will be frozen. So at least you have three meals of fresh meat [..]

Here we can see how she uses the temporalities of the food and its decay timeframe to plan and structure their meals. Using basic knowledge of science as well as the expiry date labelled from the supermarket, she understands that pork can last longer than chicken in the fridge, and discounted chicken will get spoiled first, and therefore she will organise and plan the fridge and freezer according to which type of meat will be used first. In Evan's (2012) study, he also highlight how food stuff has its own demands as it has its own timeframe and effort needed in preparing it. Here, we see how the different types of meat, with its own timeframe and preparation demand allows Vanna to optimise the flow of the meat in the fridge more efficiently. In doing so, they do not have to freeze everything, but only a portion of the meat and therefore is able to have more fresh meats in the fridge. As in their 8th month of cohabitation, she tells me how she 'wins' because of her techniques of prolonging the meat in the fridge and keeping it fresh. She had introduced another strategy to keep the chicken even longer in the fridge without having to freeze it.

Simon: One kind of conversation we had recently because she was suggesting is that we try to marinade the chicken and leave it [in the fridge], and then we roast it. And since we marinade the chicken, it can stay longer, don't need to freeze it [..]

Vanna: It's really easy, so I buy some sauce, put it on the chicken, and then oven. And I do everything a day before. As soon as we come back from Sainsbury's, we take out the chicken from the packet, lay the whole tray with chicken, put hoisin sauce, ginger, garlic, then next day, oven. This is where I'm eating fresh meat, so I win.

Through techniques of marinating the meat before putting it in the fridge, allows them to prolong the shelf life of the meat in the fridge. This technique was also observed in their last cooking observation, when they made chicken fajitas after coming back from the gym. They tell me they had marinated the chicken the day before and then right before heading for the

gym, they simply put the [chicken] tray in the oven and timed it to be done for when they get back. However, although such techniques of prolonging shelf life in the fridge and reducing the amount of meat to be frozen was incorporated in the collective through Vanna, Simon would not adopt it. As according to him, the meat becomes “too dry” (Simon). As he tells me, “the meat was not too good” (after marinating in the fridge), and he would still revert back to freezing all the meats bought from the supermarket if he could. But, “She is not ok with the idea of freezing anything” (Simon). Therefore, such an approach is not transferred to him nor do they influence his meat consumption practice, but they are still adopted for the collective practice.

However, Simon too was able to incorporate his own technique of labelling the meat before freezing in order to further resolve their conflict of freezing meat. As he prefers to freeze the meat in bulk, he would assume the responsibility of managing the flow of frozen meat in order to reduce any blunders. For example, in the after-shopping observation, I see how he labels the meat before putting it in the freezer (picture 17). He first takes out the meat from the supermarket pack and adds his preferred amount in freezer bags, making his own batches to freeze. While doing so, he also labels the type of meat, the date purchased, date being frozen and the actual expiry date of the meat. As he tells me:

Simon: I started doing this [...] It's because so I know.. what date I put in [the freezer], which is the oldest. [It's] just convenient. Before I used to freeze without taking out [from the supermarket pack] but that's actually bad. For example, once she defrosted the pork chops rather than the chicken. So we ended up having that.

Vanna: I didn't do it

Simon: Yeah, it was you. I remember! [...] 3 per each [freezer bag]? [turns to ask her]

Vanna: Do 2 [pieces]



Picture 17: Simon labelling the meat

Labelling the meat before freezing allows Simon to efficiently manage and organize the flow of meat in the freezer. The technique also helps resolve their conflict as they now know how long the meat stays in the freezer, what date it was frozen and what type of meat is frozen. This technique helps them to reduce blunders of for example, defrosting the wrong meat. Here we can see how the fridge and freezer thus acted as tools to co-ordinate their competences and resolve their conflicts about meat consumption. In Hand and Shove's (2007) study, they analysed the evolution of the freezer's role in society and argued that with new meanings and competences appropriated into the practice, the role of the appliance also changes. Here we see how the fridge and freezer assumed very different meanings in the couple's individual practices at the start of cohabitation. However, through appropriating new competences from both actors into using the fridge and freezer space, the couple was able to resolve their conflict about meat consumption. In doing so, the couple was also able to co-ordinate and assemble their individual techniques in the shared practice. As can be seen, they don't necessarily agree on each other's methods, but they still adopt it for creating a synergy in the collective meal practice over time. As Vanna tells me she still wouldn't freeze if had the choice (even though it's labelled). Similarly, Simon would not adopt her technique to prolong the shelf life of the meat in the fridge and prefers to freeze everything. But they still unify and cooperate with each other's approach.

Over the time I met them, this couple sought new ways of managing the fridge and freezer in order to strategically organise their meat consumption. Here both their techniques and norms

cooperated with one another in the shared practice, but they are kept separate as they do not influence or change each other.

6.4.3 Domineering elements

At times, only one meaning or competence will dominate, forcing the other to be given up, in order to create a synergy in co-performing the practice. Thus, the third approach is what I call domineering elements. **Domineering** emerged as a process whereby only one of the two set of elements in the collective practice will strive to exist over time, causing the other set of element to be dissolved. A hypothetical imagination would be like adding sugar and water together, one element would dominate and dissolve the other. Take the example of two couples: Olivia and Alex, and Ted and Elias. In the following section, I will first show in the case of Olivia and Alex how Olivia's more stronger meaning of consuming healthy and vegetarian foods took over and wins in the collective. Second, I will show in the case of Ted and Elias how Ted gave up his competences in doing the meal to follow Elias's more professional competence.

6.4.3.1 Giving Up One Lifestyle For The Other

I met Olivia and Alex in their 2nd month of cohabitation. They met through a dating app in London (similar to Milena and Bernard, and Pia and Max), and have been together for 1 year before moving in together in an apartment in North London. They both work in professional jobs, and therefore dinner was a shared task co-performed by both. Their shopping and planning of the meal went through various phases over time. In the first month I met them, they would plan and shop on a daily basis, where they would synchronize their timings to meet at the supermarket after work. They would then discuss the meal based on their mood for the day, buy the specific ingredients and cook at home. Over the time I met them however, Olivia was transitioning into a full vegan as she was more concerned about her health. Therefore, she aided to 'train' Alex to adopt her lifestyle and values through using various material resources and strategies in cooking (e.g. using the Acti-fry) and shopping (e.g. through ordering veggie boxes). In doing so over time, her stronger meanings of health and self-care took over for the collective dinner practice, leading to the start of an unequal power relationship within the household, as I will explain.

When they met, Olivia was still occasionally eating fish. However, as soon as they cohabited, she decided to remove meat from her diet completely, as she tells me “I just want to improve my well-being, and I found that by removing meat and fish I was feeling so much better, just a lot healthier” (Olivia). Therefore, she prefers to eat more vegetables in her daily diet. This initially caused a conflict, as Alex tells me he does not ‘like’ vegetables, he doesn’t have a taste for it. As he tells me “I did not grow up eating vegetables. My mother did not make me eat them” (Alex), “I look at something and if it’s only vegetables, I’m like I don’t like this” (Alex). Therefore, according to him he prefers to eat more tasty food and would often order pizzas/burgers or takeaways when he was living alone (and during lunch nowadays). As in one of their initial observations, I witnessed one of their conflicts while planning the meal:

Alex: You are difficult. I would propose burgers and you would say no, what do you want me to do? [as they were deciding on their meal] [..]

Olivia: We can make some pasta.

Alex: We had pasta yesterday and today.

Olivia: What! We had rice!

Alex: I don’t know, what do you want to do then

Olivia: Because we have courgette in-

Alex: [lets out a huge sigh]

Olivia: [small laugh]

Alex: I don’t want that [..]

Olivia: We have cauliflower in the fridge

Alex: I don’t want cauliflower, definitely not –

Olivia: And we have courgettes

Alex: You can have them if you want, and then I have something else

Olivia: Ok.... No pasta? We could make something nice [small pause] C’mon... it’s cheaper and it’s good for you

Alex: Pasta with what?

Such conflicts about meat vs vegetarian consumption further reinforces discourses on how health may be a key source of difference in couples consumption during initial cohabitation (Sobal, 2005). As Olivia often associates vegetarian foods with health and well-being, which is in line with previous studies that show how health and self-care is one of the key motivations for vegetarian consumption (Fox and Ward, 2008). Whereas Alex attributes his meat consumption and those of pizzas/burgers, to pleasure and taste, which is also in line with previous studies that show the characteristics of the meat (the smell, taste, texture, so on) as one of the main motivations for meat consumption (Kubberød *et al.*, 2002; Kenyon and Barker,

1998). He often justifies vegetables and vegetarian consumption as bland, tasteless, and not what he was brought up with, as he says he wasn't forced to eat vegetables in family meals.

However, over the time I met them, Olivia tries to 'train' Alex in various ways to develop his taste for vegetables, which she does through the aid of new materialities added in their shared practice. As when I went to their house the first time for a meal, they showed me how they have just bought a new kitchen appliance called *Acti-fry*, which is a machine that dehydrates and cooks vegetables similar to an oven (picture 18). As they tell me they simply add chopped vegetables into the machine with a spoon of olive oil, and it will produce tasty "chips of vegetables" as Alex calls it. As they were preparing the dinner using the acti-fry:

Alex: The actifry is a machine that basically fries whatever you put in there with only one spoon of olive oil.

Olivia: It cooks like an oven does

Alex: It's a mix of an oven and a deep fryer [...] because the things that come out are crispy like it would happen if you deep fry them. But it's healthier.

Olivia: So we make sides of veggies with it. With sweet potatoes or carrots or parsnip. We just dump any vegetable that we got in there and it makes really lovely crisps.

Alex: Chips of vegetables

Here, we see how a new technological appliance is slowly being integrated and appropriated into their shared practice in order to resolve their differences of consuming healthy vs tasty food. In Truninger's (2016) study, she shows how a new technological appliance, such as the *Bimby* can be used as a tool to interact meanings and competences in family meals. Using analysis of online forum discussions of *Bimby* users, she discusses how the appliance can help families create new sets of meanings and expectations about what is a proper family meal and how should it be done. For example, a member of the family might initially be averse to the food cooked using the *Bimby*, but after trying it and liking it, they start to accept it, facilitating its integration into the shared family meal. Here, I show how adoption of a new technological device such as the *Acti-fry* allows the couple to resolve their conflicts in appreciating the taste of the meal. This is because of the functionality of the *Acti-fry* itself which allows foods to be cooked in ways they both can accept and like (it's healthy and tasty). Thus, in using the new appliance in their everyday lives, the couple assigns and appropriates new symbolic meanings of sharing and eating together to the appliance, which further facilitates its integration into their shared practice. As in one of their planning observations, I saw how Alex negotiated with eating the courgettes as long as it's *Acti-fried*. And Olivia informs me how the *Acti-fry* is "a safe

option” for them because it works for both of them. Although she prefers him to have a little more variety and flexibility in terms of meal choices, she tells me she is also becoming laid-back as it’s just easier to go with this safe option because it allows them to eat together. The *Acti-fry* thus aids to develop their enjoyment of eating together and sharing the food. It allows them to share the meal together safely – i.e. without much conflicts.

Alex: Almost every meal we use acti-fry now

Olivia: Yeah, I’d say 60% of the time we do use it [..] It’s a safe option [..] He is comfortable with very little variety [..] And sometimes I’m just like, ‘ok let’s just make the same recipe that we’ve made 2 days ago’. I’m a little bit more comfortable now just sticking with what’s easy. So you know, if there is a recipe that works for both of us, I don’t need to think about it too much, I just make that. So that kind of laid back approach. So our rice, spinach, tomato, and acti-fry potatoes combination, we know that we both like that, so yesterday for example he cooked it.



Picture 18: Using the *Acti-fry* to make ‘chips of vegetables’

However, over the time I met them, Olivia’s values of health and variety starts to take over and dominate more in the collective practice. As she informs me she wants to slowly introduce him to different kinds of vegetables and different recipes (not only Acti-fried) to increase his taste repertoire. Such care work to influence her partner’s healthy eating and nurturance could also be seen as gendered work (Devault, 1991). She tries to ‘train’ him to eat more vegetables not only through the *Acti-fry* but also through other market resources, for example via ordering veggie boxes and nudging him to try various forms of vegetables in restaurants. In the individual interview, Alex tells me how “Olivia really likes aubergines, and so she has been trying to feed me aubergine in every kind” (Alex). For example she ordered some fried ones in Wagamama’s, and then some mashed ones in a Middle-Eastern Ganoush form. She also initiated weekly veggie boxes for them to receive new and “exciting” vegetables every week

(Olivia). As they tell me in their 5th month how they have started ordering delivery of veggie boxes from *Riverford*, which is an online organic farmers deliveries in London. The veggie box is a subscription based service that will send them seasonal organic vegetables from local farmers around the city (see picture 19 (a, b, c) for picture of the box and box contents). However, because it's seasonal, they cannot choose the vegetables that will come in the box. Hence, they will get some new exciting random vegetables, which they can plan their meals on:

Olivia: We have started a veggie box delivery that comes in every Tuesday. So we know that we're going to get some exciting vegetables. [mumbles to me] That's debatable from Alex's perspective. But we've got some exciting options to choose from and make meals from. So you know, thinking about what's in the box, we'll try to come up with recipes that can use those ingredients.

Alex: Usually it always has potatoes and either carrots or onions. And then the other veggies.

Olivia: Also the stuff tends to be fresher and local and organic [...] Also they typically give you stuff that's in season. So sometimes they might give you stuff that you wouldn't necessarily get in the grocery store. And then it gets there and you are like 'ok let's try a new recipe.' So it's cool in that way. [...] [The veggie box] is so easy and it's a lot of variety [of vegetables].



- Box contents for week beginning 5th June 2017
- New potatoes UK
 - Bunched carrots UK
 - Summer greens UK
 - Cos lettuce UK
 - Onions NL
 - Butternut squash AR
 - Courgettes ES/IT
 - Romano peppers ES

Picture 19 (a, b, c): The veggie box

Here, we see how Olivia is committed to changing Alex's consumption and have 'projects' in attempts to change his eating practices. She takes an active effort to take care of her partner's health and diet by making him eat less junk and more variety of vegetables. In Bove *et al.*'s (2003) study, they also found that some partners (usually the women) took on the role of the food "director" to influence the other person's healthy eating (p.35). And such care work to plan, think, and feed proper food to their family has normally been associated with women (Devault, 1991; 1997). But what is interesting is that in her attempts to control and oversee the food project for her partner, Olivia uses the aid of marketplace resources, objects and services to do so. For example, using various restaurant recipes in order to make him appreciate aubergines or introducing the veggie box service in their collective meals. As according to them, the veggie box allows them to eat healthy, organic and a variety of vegetables, which aid in her domineering of existing meanings of health, self-care, variety and novelty in consumption. Olivia thus uses marketplace resources as an aid to dissolve her partner's previous practices and dominate hers in the collective. In doing so, the new market resource becomes an instrument through which one meaning can be transferred to the other person co-performing the practice.

As Olivia's pre-existing meanings took over for the collective, we can see how such a process leads to an understanding of how gender and power relations are played out within the household. As she tells me how 'proud' she is of him eating more vegetables nowadays:

Olivia: I'm very pleased that he is open to it now [trying new vegetables]. I'm actually quite proud of how far he has come. He used to have meat pretty much every single meal. Like meat and rice, that's what he used to have. So zero veggies. So it was not the healthiest, and loads of dessert too. So imagine that. [...] But I know that he thinks it's a bit difficult, because naturally he feels that his options are a bit limited. For example, when we go to eat out, he might crave some dirty burger and I'm like 'hmm, can we have something else instead, where I can eat too.' So he feels like there is always a certain degree of compromise. I don't force him to eat vegetarian [...] but I know he wants to share the same thing. And he has said to me, that he feels proud of himself to having stepped up his game with the veggies.

Alex: In the beginning it was a bit more difficult, because it's out of my comfort zone, but now I'm fine with at least trying. Like I have to at least try to make sure that I don't like it. Maybe I actually do.

Here we see how Alex has given up his aversion to vegetables and started to adopt her preferences. However, her comments about being proud of him, or making sure he eats healthy food reveals tacit gendered work of care, nurturance and feeding proper food for the family (Devault, 1997; Beagan *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, we can also see how this process is leading to

unequal distribution of power in the household. Just like the “director” who proved successful in influencing the project’s dietary habits (Bove *et al.*, 2003, p.35), here we see how Olivia feels like she has accomplished and advanced the project she set out to do. Although she says she doesn’t force him into eating vegetarian and adopting her meanings about health, in reality she does. In order for them to share meals together, he had to adopt her health values and remove his own food preference. As can be seen from the quote how he has to give up his “cravings” for what she calls a “dirty” burger when they are together, in order for them to share their meals. In giving up one meaning for the other to dominate in the collective practice, the process of how power is distributed within couples is being revealed.

Previous studies that looked at power distributions within couples mainly focused on who controls the family decision making in the house and who has more power, and there is lesser studies on the ‘how’ – how this process is achieved? (Commuri and Gentry, 2000; Cross and Gilly, 2014b). Moreover, studies that showed how one partner gives up their food preference for the other rarely analyzed the process from a collective perspective over time (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Bove *et al.*, 2003). Here I showed the process through which one meaning (health values, lifestyle, preferences) dominate the collective practice, and how this is achieved over time through the aid of new materialities appropriated in the practice. Although I have to highlight here that this does not mean that the couple has unequal power for all their practices, but maybe simply for this particular domestic practice.

Over the time I met them, Olivia taught, transferred and dominated her meaning in the collective practice, while Alex gave up his preferred meals when they are together (during dinner). Such domineering practices were done through the aid of market objects and services which were added and appropriated in their collective practice. Inspired from Phipps and Ozanne’s (2017) study who looked at how removal of one element of practice also aids in re-aligning practices, here too we see how removal of one meaning for the other to take over allows synergy to form in practices. This couple was then able to co-perform their eating and cooking practices.

6.4.3.2 The Professional Competence Takes Over

At times, one competence (usually the more skilled one) may take over, which will aid in creating a synergy in the whole practice co-performance as well. Take the example of Ted and Elias.

Ted and Elias are a homosexual couple. I met them at their 5th month of cohabitation. Ted was doing his PhD in Drama, while Elias works as a freelance writer and journalist, therefore most of his work is from home. However, Elias was also a professional chef back in Israel before moving to London. Thus, as soon as they moved in together, Elias took over the whole responsibility of organizing the food work in the house. As he tells me, from shopping, planning, to cooking and cleaning, he took over the whole meal task (Elias). He attributes this arrangement to the fact that he worked from home, as well as that he was a chef prior to coming to London. Thus, cooking and preparing meals is an activity he enjoys and has more competence in, therefore he prefers to do it. My study had another couple who was also a professional chef prior to moving in with their partner, and their process of collective synergy too followed the trajectory of Ted and Elias, such that the professional chef took over to handle the whole meal practice. I will focus only on Ted and Elias's case to give a more deeper analysis on how the process of synergy was created over time. As highlighted, when Elias moved in with Ted, he took it upon himself to prepare meals for them before Ted gets home. As he tells me in the first interview:

Elias: I think I'm the one who mainly deal with most of the shopping I guess and like the planning of the meal. [...] Because I work from home, so that's why [...] And he is out of the house almost every day, which made me need to cook for both of us [...] When I cook, I usually enjoy it. I usually cook stuff I like. Always will be something that I wanted to make, not because I had to. So it doesn't bother me [...] [Because] I'm home a lot, I'm [also] really aware of what we have in the kitchen, like what we have in the cupboard. So I think naturally that makes me the one to think about dinner, lunch [...] I always think about it, because that's just the way I am.

As can be seen from the quote above, Elias tells me he “naturally” thinks about the meals and what to do for dinner because he spends more time at home and also because he thinks of such things. Previous studies have tended to focus on how heterosexual couples divide their house work (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Bove *et al.*, 2003; Marshall, 2005) and there has been less consideration of food work in homosexual couples. Here, I show firstly how a homosexual couple also negotiated their food work in a similar manner to heterosexual couples, as the handling of food tasks emerged from who enjoys the task and has more knowledge, experience and time in cooking and shopping practices (see Bove and Sobal, 2006).

Elias tells me confidently in the first interview how he can cook anything I can think of. Many a times during the study, Elias would also flaunt his competence. As in one of their cooking observation, Elias displayed his competence through using substitutes and improvisation techniques, while he explains to me how schnitzel ‘should’ be done (Picture 20):

Elias: The first thing is to flatten the chicken [...] The thinner the better [he then takes out the leftover breadcrumbs they had in the cupboard] Oh we have only a little bit of breadcrumbs left. I’m going to improvise bread crumbs for the schnitzel [as he combines crackers with breadcrumbs and oats and coats the chicken in it] [...] you can even mix cornflakes and crush it or like any savoury snack [...] I’m also adding salt and pepper to the flour, and mustard and soy into the eggs just to make it bit more interesting, but you can just use really basic eggs without anything [...]



Picture 20: Elias cooking the schnitzel

However, this taking over of food work in the household initially caused a conflict. As when asked Ted about his feelings in not contributing to the housework (and if he wants to), the ongoing tension about working together was revealed. As they tell me, Elias prefers to work alone in the kitchen, as his level of competence in preparing the meal is higher than Ted:

Elias: Umm, we both cook, but not together. Because I don’t really like cooking together.

Ted: [teasingly] It’s a little bit of a charged point [...] I think it’s because Elias, he was a professional cook, and his cooking is different. I think we are at a different level.

Elias: I think the reason is mostly because as a child, I used to cook by myself. Maybe I’m kind of just used to it.

In a practice, there may be varying levels of competences involved, as actors carry different knowledge and skills, which may have been acquired differently throughout their lives. As we have seen in the previous chapter, and as Warde (2005) highlighted, there may be internal

variations within a practice, as actors embody slightly different understandings and competences which makes every performance slightly different. Such as there can be the “highly knowledgeable”, “the professional”, and “the amateur” in a practice (Warde, 2005, p.138). Hence, in a collective practice, when both actors attempt to co-perform such variations of competences, it may cause a problem for the practice to be performed smoothly together. Thus, in many cases, the professional competence takes over.

Although such competence in domestic practices may be attributed to leisure or hobby for the ‘foodie’ (Cairns *et al.*, 2010), it can also be used as a nurturing project for the other. As Elias tells me he would not buy and cook things that Ted doesn’t like or cannot have (as Ted is celiac and therefore cannot have gluten). He would often try new gluten free meals using improvisation techniques (as he tell me how he makes gluten free bread sometimes so that Ted can have it too). He would also try to include more vegetables in their diet as he wants them to have a more healthy diet, which he does through also ordering a weekly veggie box, as he tells me: “It [the veggie box] just makes us eat more vegetables and makes us eat in everyday” (Elias). He thus prefers to cook healthy for them and handle the whole nurturing project by himself. In Klasson and Ulver’s (2015, p.1654) study, they showed how men can enact their “feminized masculinity” when they are concerned about nurturing others and how men can also create a collective sense of identity with each other through cooking and sharing food practices. I will discuss about collective identity in the next chapter, but it’s interesting to see here how Elias too develops this care for the other and his sense of feminine care work through doing family food for the other. Thus, care is not only a women’s role and not only in heterosexual relationships, but here I show how men and homosexual couples may as well express care and love through doing family food.

Over time, however, we see how letting go of one competence for the other to dominate also leads to a process of unequal distribution of power in deciding family meals. As over the time I met them, Ted began to accept that food work is more Elias’s domain in the house. Although he reminisces on how he used to cook, and it’s different compared to his other partners and how Elias is more particular in following his own style and recipe during cooking. But Ted appreciates the effort, skills and leadership that Elias brings into their meals. As in shopping as well, he would just be presented with questions once in a while and he would simply comply, because he follows Elias’s lead on such practices. As he tells me in their 7th month of cohabitation:

Ted: I'm usually the one who cooks [with my previous partners] but living with Elias is like accepting that it's more his domain in our house and umm, maybe it's to do with him not really liking the food I made him the first time [...] Elias would usually tell me that that's what is going to happen and I will just comply.. so it's very much kind of following his lead on that [...] But I do have some good ideas, like 'oh but you can also use that or you can add this.' But like my exposure to it is just every once in a while being presented with questions. And I'm just saying yes, no, maybe. This process I'm completely abusing.

Here, we can see that Ted slowly gives up his existing skills and competences of health and professionalism to follow Elias's more professional competence during their shopping and planning of the meal. It is interesting to see how he gave up his responsibility of his own health (as mentioned Ted is celiac) to let Elias take care of him through dictating the family meal. He attributes this to the fact that perhaps he isn't skilled enough for the collective (as when Elias didn't like the food he made), and that Elias's style in cooking is different. Therefore since they cannot co-perform in the kitchen together, the weaker competence has to be given up for the more competent one. Here we also see how he gives up his power in deciding on the meals, which he says is a process he is "completely abusing" (Ted). In Cross and Gilly's (2014b) study, they showed how bi-national (American and non-American) couples negotiated their food purchase and preparation in the household, and found that "cultural competence" - defined as knowledge of the norms and customs of a particular culture - was a key source of power which influenced how meal negotiations were performed (p.122). According to them, when one spouse moved into the country of the other, the dominant culture's competence of "how things work here in my country" can be a form of power and control decision-making within the family (p.130). Here however, I show how different levels of competence in a practice can also lead to unequal distribution of power in a household. As one competence is given up and dissolved, it allows for the other higher level of competence to take over and be the deciding power in the meal process. In doing so, only one practice will thrive to exist in the collective.

In this section, I've shown how one competence can take over causing the other to be given up during co-performance of shared meal practices. At times the competence that took over can also be delegated and relayed to teach the other weaker competence how to do things in an efficient manner. I've also shown how professional competence is displayed through substitutions of material objects (when there were no breadcrumbs), and through various practice performances. In doing and displaying such competences through the aid of material

objects and meanings of enjoyment in cooking, Elias was able to dominate his competence in the collective practice, causing them to synergistically align their whole meal performance.

6.5 Discussion

In this chapter, I have shown how elements within practices can interact and synergize when two actors co-perform the same practice together over time. Shove and colleagues (2012) highlight how elements within a practice need to be aligned and in collaboration with each other in order for the practice to be performed, exist and thrive. However, as highlighted in the beginning of the chapter, previous studies that analysed practices mainly focused on already established practices (that may have been disrupted) or mainly from the perspectives of single practitioners. But in this chapter, I have shown how synergies and collaborations are created between the set of elements at the collective level over time when practices are co-performed. I used the context of newly cohabited couples' meals consumption practices to show how synergies between practice elements are formed, as during transitional periods, elements can be re-arranged in new ways (Paddock, 2017). I have shown three processes through which such synergies are created, through what I call, processes of: 1. Blending, 2. Combining and 3. Domineering. Figure 4 (next page) illustrates these three processes.

As shown in figure 4, at the start of cohabitation, each person carry their existing elements into the practice. The triangles at the top of the figure represents the embodied elements [E₁ and E₂] carried within actors. As I used Shove's definition of practice, the elements [E] consist of symbolic meanings, competences and materiality. The arrows between the elements represents the interactions that is going on as actors interact with each other through time. As we have seen in this chapter, there are three processes through which synergies are created as actors interact with one another in co-performance over time. Thus, as represented in the figure, the three processes are what I called: Blending, Combining and Domineering. I will now go through these in turn.

At the start of cohabitation:			
Synergy process:			
	Blending	Combining	Domineering
The approach (Definition):	Elements mix and transform together over time	Elements unite and cooperate with each other over time	One element takes over and dissolve the other over time
Imagine:	Milk and chocolate	Oil and water	Sugar and water
Old elements in the existing practice gets:	<i>Re-evaluated</i> and <i>altered</i> as the set of elements change one another	<i>Kept</i> and <i>sustained</i> as the set of elements do not change one another	<i>Dominated</i> or <i>removed</i> as one set of element take over the other
New elements added in the practice:	Addition of new elements aid in the synergy process		
Formation of a new collective practice:	Our way	My way Your way	Only my way

Figure 4: Synergistic processes during meal co-performance

The first column in figure 4 represents the process of blending. *Blending* is defined as a process whereby the different sets of elements mix, transform and change each other over time. A hypothetical imagination would be like mixing milk and chocolate, the elements would mix to create a new form of liquid comprising both elements. Here, the old elements carried within actors would get re-evaluated and altered as they interact with one another, but new elements can be added to aid in the synergy process. As I showed in the case of Milena and Bernard and

Pia and Max, how their existing elements changed one another during co-performance through learning and teaching approaches (in the case of Milena and Bernard) and merging together (in the case of Pia and Max). Milena and Bernard taught and learnt each other the various attitudes, standards and skills of shopping and cooking a meal, and these aided to transform their existing attitudes and skills in the practice over time, as they relayed such elements to each other. I showed how their blending process then lead to creation of one common standard through time. I also showed in the case of Pia and Max how they merged their various competences in relation to knowledge, timing and preferences for the meal. I showed how they both co-ordinated their multiple schedules (Southerton, 2009) and knowledge of efficient meals, as well as blended their competences regarding using leftovers, all of which aided to align their planning co-performance. In both these cases, I showed how new elements such as new market resources and competences can be added to aid in the synergy process. For example, the use of digital devices (such as the mobile phone, online recipes, the timetable app) as well as supermarket ingredients, superfood ingredients (Milena), ready-made ingredients (Pia), helped in the blending process. The bottom of the columns in figure 4 therefore represents new elements added in the practice [the arrows represent addition of elements]. I will explain how the process resulted in creation of new links between practice elements in a subsequent section.

The second column in figure 4 represents the process of combining. *Combining* is defined as a process whereby the two set of elements unite and cooperate with each other over time. Combining is different to blending as the elements do not mix and alter each other, but remain separate and sustain themselves in the collective practice co-performance. A hypothetical imagination of this process would be like combining oil and water, the elements would not mix but would consolidate into different layers. Here, the old existing elements carried within actors are kept and sustained, while new elements can also be added to aid in the synergy process. For example, I showed in the case of Tom and Joanne, and Vanna and Simon how existing meanings and competences were sustained and managed in the shared practice co-performance. Tom and Joanne sustained their different food preferences, and in turn values and lifestyles through managing the materiality of the food during eating (e.g. adding meat on top of a vegan meal), but also through combining their planning. I also showed in the case of Vanna and Simon how existing techniques and norms of buying and storing meat in the household were strategically managed to combine both their approaches, through the aid of material resources in the household (fridge and freezer space) and new resources in the supermarket (marinades, buying different types of meat). These elements were kept and sustained over time, they did

not change one another, but new elements aided in the synergy process. I also showed how such combining processes could result in deviations, reverting back to two individual practices as the practices were not merged.

The third column in figure 4 represents domineering. I defined *domineering* as a process through which one set of element takes over and dissolve the other through time. A hypothetical imagination would be like adding sugar and water together, water would dominate and dissolve the sugar and we cannot see the sugar anymore. Here one set of old existing elements will strive to exist over time, as the other gets removed or dissolved. I showed in the case of Olivia and Alex how Olivia's stronger meaning of health values and self-care took over for the collective. Here actors carrying the domineering element also tried to change the other person's practices. I also showed in the case of Ted and Elias how one set of competence such as a more professional competence can equally take over, resulting in the other weaker competence's practice to be given up. In both these cases I showed how this process was leading to the start of an unequal distribution of power in the household especially in deciding the meals. In Olivia and Alex's case we can also see how gender work is being performed as Olivia strives to do care work for her partner. I also showed how new market resources such as the *Acti-fry* appliance and ordering of veggie boxes aided to develop this synergy process. As Olivia tries to train Alex to eat vegetables through various market resources and services at home and out of home (e.g. ordering the aubergines in restaurants).

Inspired from Phipps and Ozanne's (2017) study who analysed how consumers worked to re-align their practices in a disastrous event such as a natural drought, I too showed what happens when two routines get disrupted and how couples worked to align their practices but without any disastrous event as such. I showed how two actors when they attempt to align their practices, would also use processes of changing, altering, removing or adding one or more elements – however at the collective level over time. I termed these processes of synergies as Blending, Combining and Domineering elements which were occurring at the collective level over time. As I have shown synergies were achieved through addition of new elements in the shared practice co-performance. In doing so, new links between existing set of elements were being created through the aid of new meanings, competences and materiality added in the practice [see figure 4 second to bottom row]. For example, I showed how blending involved addition of new technologies such as a shared mobile device or shared app that allowed the couple to create new links between their existing practices. The old pool of elements were then interacting not only with each other, but also with the new elements that were being

appropriated and integrated in the new practice. In such new settings, alignments and links between old and new elements lead to development of new shared practices altogether. It resulted in a new way of doing that did not exist before the cohabitation, but were a result of the old and new elements blended, combined or taken over. As the last row in figure 4 illustrates, these three synergistic processes led to three forms of new collective practices that could be co-performed. I called these: our way (for blending), my way| your way (for combining) and only my way (for domineering).

And it was only through looking at the materiality of the meal practices and the couple's co-performances over time that such synergistic approaches and new practice formations were able to manifest itself. Shove *et al.* (2012) had similarly highlighted how it is only during "*moments of doing, when the elements of practice come together, are when such elements are potentially reconfigured (or reconfigure each other) in ways that subtly, but sometimes significantly change all subsequent formulations*" (p.13). What this means is that successful alignments and links between these elements can only come about during moments of doing, in my case during co-performance of the practices over time. As synergies between these sets of elements starts to develop, it allows for successful repeated co-performances of the newly shaped practice. Through repeated co-performances over time, we can then understand how new collective routines are being formed and reproduced (Warde, 2005). As practice theorists have argued how routines are "*performances of stable practices*" (Southerton, 2013, p.337) through time, and that routines are meaningful (O'Dell, 2009; Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). I will discuss how routines are being developed and established through repeated co-performances of the new synergistic approaches over time in the discussion chapter. However, for now I turn to show how successful co-performances of practices also lead to an emergence of various levels of identities in the household.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed how elements within a practice can cooperate and synergize together when it is co-performed by two actors. I highlighted three processes through which synergies are formed over time, what I called Blending, Combining and Domineering. In doing so, I discussed how synergies are formed when elements interact with each other at the collective level over time, and how old and new elements interact with each other, shaping how a new shared practice is born.

Synergies are not a linear process, but a continuous process that needs constant workings and re-alignments for the shared practice to continue to thrive. Synergies may as well be disrupted and result in conflicts again, such as when a change occurs in the routine during going on holiday, moving houses or starting a new job. Although I have not been able to illustrate such disruptions in this chapter, I would like to note how synergies were not shown to be a straightforward process that is irreversible, but many a times couples had to constantly re-adjust and re-work their synergies to continue their shared engagements in the practices. It is thus a messy and complex process requiring constant effort and time from both actors.

In the next chapter, I will now turn to discuss why doing the meal together is important for the new couple. I will now turn to show how various levels of identities emerge through such co-performance of practices over time.

Chapter VII

Identity

7.1 Introduction

Identity is a complex and diverse concept. As can be recalled from my literature review, there are two main theoretical streams of identity that are popular within consumer research, what I called: 1. identity as a project and 2. identity from practice. In chapter two, I have discussed extensively the identity project stream fashioned by individualization theorists Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, Giddens and Bauman, who mainly regard identity as a self-reflexive project that individuals can construct through consumption. However, many theorists have argued that such a view of analyzing identity and consumption is inadequate as it over rationalizes the consumer and as such most of what is do is practical, routinised and un-reflected upon (Gronow and Warde, 2001; Warde, 2005; Atkinson, 2007; Bottero, 2010; Mylan and Southerton, 2018). On the other extreme, the practice stream practically disregards identity as it focuses on the routinised and practical nature of activity (Schatzki, 2001; Warde, 2016). Identity is not a concern for most practice theorists; they argue that actors function through a pre-conscious, unintentional and “embodied sense of how to behave” (Bottero, 2010, p.4). However, being inspired from Miller’s (1987; 1998) and Bottero’s (2015) works on how identity can emerge through doing practices, especially those that are “intersubjective” in nature (Bottero, 2010, p.3), this chapter will show how various aspects of collective and individual identity work can emerge through doing the shared meal.

Thus, this chapter will contribute to identity literature in two folds: first, I try to bridge the gap between the two streams of identity by showing that identity emerges from doing practices but it can also be a project when it’s “situated in intersubjectivity” (Bottero, 2010, p.3) with others. Second, I show how collective identity work as well as individual identity work emerges through doing the practice of everyday meal. As I argued in my literature review, previous studies have mainly only focused on identity from an individual perspective (e.g. mother’s perspectives). Here, I will bridge this second gap by showing how collective identity is done from a collective perspective over time.

The chapter will be structured in the following format. I will first briefly recap my literature review on identity. I will then present my findings, which consists of two parts: 1. From ‘me’ to ‘we’: doing the meal as a collective project and practice, and 2. Doing the ‘me’ in the ‘we’. The first part consists of three aspects of doing collective identity-work: Symbolization, Aspiration and Embodiment. The second part consists of two aspects of doing individual identity-work that were emerging from the findings, both of which were in relation to constructions of gendered identity: 1. Men’s identity and love and 2. Women’s invisible labor. I will now briefly recap literature on identity.

7.2 Identity as a Project or a Practice

Giddens (1991, p.53) defines self-identity as “*not something that is just given, [...], but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual.*” According to him and other sociologists like Beck and Bauman, with the loss of traditional social constraints in modern societies, individuals are now faced with the task to develop themselves for personal self-growth (Giddens, 1991). Identity is seen as a reflexive project that people can construct through their own efforts and choice (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000; Bauman, 2001a; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Consumption is seen as playing a key role in allowing individuals to construct their desired identity goals (Bauman, 2001b; Giddens, 1991). All the three theorists argue how such individualisation is not only affecting the individual but also relationships. As people now have the power to choose their romantic partners, every relationship entered into will be maintained as long as it can offer rewards for the individual (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). As Giddens (1991) says that in order to have a fulfilling relationship with others, individuals first and foremost need to have fulfilling relationship with themselves. Therefore, each person needs to be able to act out their individual agency, their autonomy and identity within the collective in order for it to last (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bauman, 2003).

Although the identity as a project school of thought has been very influential in understanding consumption, many have argued that such a view of analysing identity is inadequate as most of what we do is routinised, and one cannot give reflexive accounts for all of one’s actions (Gronow and Warde, 2001; Warde, 2005; Bottero, 2010). Therefore, during the turn of the 20th century, there came a more practical version of understanding consumption and identity which

takes practices as its center of analysis (Schatzki, 2001). I discussed in chapter three that most practice theorists are not concerned with identity but focus more on the performative and mundane nature of everyday life (Watson and Shove, 2008; Halkier and Jensen, 2011). However, Bottero (2015) was one of the first scholars who applied practice theory to understand identity of practitioners. Analysing the practice of doing family history research, she suggests how one's identity can emerge through the conduct and organisation of such practices. According to her, it is the engagement in a practice that shapes the desires, values and goals for the practitioner performing the practice. Through doing a practice, the practitioner adopts the norms, competences and meanings inherent to that practice. "*Identity is [thus] carried within and steered by social practices*" (Bottero, 2015, p.535). She shows how people who engage in practices of tracing family history are engaging in the process of making themselves through performing particular tasks and using particular resources of the practice.

Miller (1987; 1998; 2001; 2005; 2010) similarly gains insight into understanding human subjectivity through his in-depth ethnographic studies and using Hegel's theory of dialectics. Although I will expand on Miller's theory in the next chapter, as it forms the basis of my discussion chapter, I will briefly recap it here. Inspired from Hegel's dialectical theory, Miller (1987) discusses that subjects can only come to understand themselves and form their identity through their engagements with the material world. Through his observations of mothers' shopping in North London, he gives the example of how mothers can understand themselves and form their identity as a loving, devotional mother through shopping for others (Miller, 1998). This is because in shopping for others, mothers are able to materialize new meanings of love and devotion for their loved ones, producing themselves as subjects of that love. According to Miller, engaging in processes of consumption and materiality can thus allow mothers to know and become who they are (Miller, 2005). However, he contends that this process is dialectical in the sense that both the subjects' identity and objects' meanings emerge in this process of interaction. And at times consumption may constitute the mother's love altogether (Miller, 1998).

Albeit his theory has been very influential for me to understand how identity emerges from engagement in practices, I have highlighted in my literature review that it is still based on an individual level of analysing identity. As Miller (1998) focused mainly on mothers consumption practices, and the pre-dominant view of mothers love and care emerging from the practice of shopping for others. Similarly, Bottero (2015) has also focused on the experience

of single practitioners conducting family history research and how the practitioners' identity emerges. I argued how these studies do not take into account how collective identity can emerge when two or more people co-perform a practice together. In the following sections, I will show how collective identity emerges from a collective perspective over time as actors co-engage in meal practices together. I will show though that identity is both a practice and a reflexive project, as actors also have to consciously negotiate their collective identity during interactions, especially during this transitional period.

7.3 From 'Me' to 'We': Doing the Meal as a Collective Project and Practice

For majority of the couples, doing the dinner together is becoming an important practice in their everyday lives, but it is also a project that requires time, effort and conscious decisions. Especially cooking and eating together in the evening provides them with an opportunity to interact and spend time together, but also as I will show below, allows meanings, values and aspirations of their communal unit to emerge, which plays into emergence of collective identity. The findings reveal three aspects of collective identity-work that emerged during doing the meal together, what I call: 1. Symbolisation of doing together 2. Aspiration of the couple 3. Embodiment of collective routines.

7.3.1 Symbolisation of Doing Together

Almost all of the couples tell me they are eating dinner together every day unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as one of them has to stay back late after work or one of them is out of town. Although many of them also do other practices together, such as going to the gym (4 of the couples have told me exercise together), watching TV before bedtime (almost all of the couples report they binge watch series together before sleeping) or having breakfast together in the morning - eating dinner together is one of the only time in the day they have to talk and interact about their day. Thus, as these couples tell me, dinner is becoming an important practice for them:

Harry: We've always tried to sit down and eat dinner together. I think that's probably quite important. Especially because we both are working 9 to 6, so then after that time, you have time in the evening just to dedicate to like sit down together.

Emily: Yeah, and like eating together is the only time we are actually talking to each other. Because the

rest of the time he is actually just doing work. In the day time we'd both be working. And then he'd work in the evenings. So like having that meal is the only time you are actually talking to each other. And then we go to bed. We usually cook with the radio on, and then the radio goes off when we eat.

Pia: I think it's important for me now because we are eating a proper meal together. Because even breakfast when we have together, is like 5 minutes, because one of us has to shower first and then we –

Max: yeah we have to get ready and...

Pia: and then depending on who is showering first will prepare the food. It's very quick like 5 minutes, 10 minutes max.

Max: yeah maybe I already finish my breakfast.... So yeah just not much time to [eat together]

Pia: so dinner is nearly the only time where we are sitting down and be like 'so how was your day' and...

Max: yes, and breakfast is even standing or coming quickly and saying 'oh I have 5 minutes left to eat'

Pia: exactly. So yeah, dinner is I think important for us, less so the food or the meal, but more of the sharing of the meal we have together.

Like Pia and Max, and Harry and Emily, couples often compare dinner to the breakfast, which is more fast, stressful and often eaten in turns as it is synchronised with other competing practices such as showering and travelling to work (Veeck *et al.*, 2016). Many of the couples tell me breakfast is also easy (many of them simply consume toast, porridge or cornflakes), repetitive (similar every day), individualised (many couples do not eat the same things for breakfast) and as Kemmer *et al.* (1998) also shows, just as a 'fuel' keep you through the day. However, dinner is more creative, more thoughts and effort go into preparing it and as Pia says it is also a "proper meal", which is in line with Marshall and Anderson's (2002) study on how couples report having more "proper meals" (p.198) after cohabitation, which involves sitting down and eating together at a table. Dinner is also the only time they have to talk and interact with each other. As Emily and Harry tell me they would both be working the rest of the day, and cooking is done with the radio on, thus dinner is the time they can relax and engage with each other.

In Marshall's (2005) paper, he discusses how the everyday dinner has symbolic connotations as it allows materialisation and manifestation of shared meanings within a family. Symbolic meanings such as that of shared values, beliefs, traditions, norms and unity can be developed, communicated and reproduced during sharing the dinner together (Cappellini *et al.*, 2016). Especially during transitional periods, new couples can create new symbolic meanings of sharing and eating together, which aids in their transition from singlehood to coupledness (Marshall, 2005; Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Bove *et al.*, 2003). In my study too, as shown

dinner is becoming an important practice in the couples' everyday lives, as it allowed them to interact, develop and materialise new meanings of sharing and eating together. But as shown in the previous chapter, couples were also creating new shared meanings and common competences in shopping, planning, cooking and keeping leftovers. For example, I showed how common standards of shopping, and shared competences in planning were created in the blending process, which aided to align their practice and help them transition to a "commensal unit" (Sobal *et al.*, 2002, p.379). Within the practice of eating, new meanings of love, care and conviviality were especially prominent in the narratives of the couples. As Joanne tells me:

Joanne: I think it's not really about just the eating...I don't know, I think you think about it a lot more.. because when it's just me to look after myself or something.. it's very much, food is just something that you have to do... whereas I think now I look forward to cooking for Tom, you know. And if he gets really excited about something he's cooking for me or he has put in a lot of time and effort into it.. I want to sit down and enjoy it with him.. So I think it's changed because you'd become a lot more.. interested in food... It's not just about putting food in your body anymore, it's something you can share with the other person... I think that's probably changed my attitude to food, being with Tom. Yeah.

Here we can see that Joanne assigns symbolic meanings to the activity of eating together as dinner is now something that can be enjoyed together. They are able to spend time, talk, and appreciate the meal they prepared for each other. The meal has become a form of gift-giving that expresses their "agapic love" to each other (Belk and Coon, 1993, p.393). As now eating is now "not just about eating" (Joanne), it is also a practice where you can show love, care and appreciation for the other person in material form. The dinner therefore becomes a practice where they can materialize their new shared meanings to each other, and show their appreciation of the labour of love (Miller, 1998). As Joanne tells me she wants to sit down and eat with Tom if he has put that time and effort into preparing it. Her partner Tom also tells me he loves to prepare food for them as "I just love making her things. For me I get a lot of satisfaction making her a meal, and seeing her enjoy it" (Tom). They tell me how nowadays that he is handling the meal (as she has just started her new job), he would wait for her to 'take the first bite' and gauge her reaction, which further reveals how his gift is being appreciated. Previous studies have also shown how cooking and preparing food can be a form of expressing devotional love and care towards family members, however, they have mainly focused on women's role in such practices (Devault, 1991; Moisio *et al.*, 2004; Cappellini and Parsons, 2013; Cappellini *et al.*, 2014). In my study, since both men and women take part in the meal practice, both do communicate love to each other through cooking and doing for each other. However, in section 7.5, I will discuss more about how such gift-giving and love through food

is indeed layered with gendered forms of identity-making, as men's role in the meal is more put on display while women's labour involved in the meal is more concealed.

In appropriating symbolic meanings of love and care to the shared dinner, both their attitudes to cooking and preparing food has changed from when they were single. As we have seen how Joanne articulates before cohabitation (food was something you just have to do), and after cohabitation (she looks forward to doing it). Similarly, her partner Tom tells me before cohabitation he used to eat only functional food for his fitness lifestyle whereas now he wants to prepare tasty meals for them to enjoy it together. Like Joanne and Tom, many couples tell me nowadays they are a lot more interested in food and cooking, since it can be shared. Attitudes towards meal related activities have changed from before cohabitation to after. Take for example Milena and Bernard:

Milena: Before this, I would be really impatient about cooking. And I would always be very practical. [...] Whereas he sees it as an important activity in his life. You know the way he grew up, French people, you really have to spend time eating on the table with each other. And it's where you get to talk and stuff like that. So I like it that he introduced that to me because it became a really healthy activity that we do together, instead of just cooking very quickly and spending most of the time in front of the TV. We spend more time in the kitchen together and it teaches us how to work together, as a team. And now I'm so happy because when we cook together, we are such a good team. Like we would know exactly one person does this, the other person do that, and we can get 2 things done at the same amount of time. Like we would know exactly who is good at what, like yesterday he did the steak and gravy and I did the dessert.

Bernard: Now I'm more inclined to look at recipes and trying new things. When I see her motivated, I really feel this sense of sharing and building something together. Something we didn't know we could do, and we are able to do it together. So this is what I appreciate. For me, food is one of the greatest ways of bonding with someone.

In the above quote, Milena highlights how doing the meal together is a place where she feels their compatibility is being played out. New meanings of sharing time, effort and resources is being materialised in doing cooking and eating together. In doing so, she reveals her attitudes towards cooking has changed from when she was single as cooking is now an activity she enjoys and looks forward to doing. She instilled such changes also due to her partner's influence of meanings in the activity. Similarly, Bernard materialises meanings of sharing and bonding to the shared meal. Cooking together is an activity they could enjoy and 'build' something together, which represents how new meanings are being materialised to the shared meal. Although we have seen from the previous chapter how Bernard prefers to control the

whole meal by himself when it is his turn to cook, here Milena says they work together through him doing the main meal and her the dessert. (This couple often ‘displayed’ (Finch, 2007) and talked about doing dessert along with mundane dinners). However, in working together for the shared meal and in sharing the effort in the kitchen, they attribute meanings of coupledness, compatibility and bonding to the practice. Here in both their accounts, they move between I and we. For example, Milena’s narrative of “I would be really impatient... We spend more time in the kitchen together now”, shows that their perception of the development of meanings is not as an individual but as a collective. Talking, interacting and reflecting on such changes during the study perhaps also helped them transition (an aspect I’m not able to cover in this chapter).

In Marshall and Anderson’s (2002) study, they discuss how doing the everyday meal is “part of the normalisation” of a couple identity (p.203). Studies have stressed the importance of eating the same foods (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Bove *et al.*, 2003; Cross and Gilly, 2014a) and also at the same time. Although these studies have shown how collective identity is constructed through everyday dinner, they have mainly focused on the practice of eating together. Here I show how it was not only in sharing the eating, but that in doing the cooking and other meal related activities together such as planning also allowed shared meanings and values to emerge. I stress the importance of *doing together*. It was only in co-performing the meal tasks together that they were able to develop their shared meanings and expressions of love, compatibility at the collective level. Thus, practices that are “intersubjective” in nature (Bottero, 2010, p.3) and co-enacted together are sites where collective identity work is being performed. As “identity emerges from consequences of engaging in the practice” (Bottero, 2015, p.552), here I show how collective identity is emerging from consequences of co-engaging in practices together.

But the meal was also constructed as a collective project. As couples made conscious efforts to allocate time and resources to the shared dinner (as shown in Pia and Max’s, and Harry and Emily’s case), they were in a sense creating new meanings for themselves as well. As shown in the previous chapter how some couples deliberately allocate time to the shared meal through creating a food timetable (Pia and Max, Tom and Joanne). Other couples discuss over at breakfast or text each other during lunch break at work about their schedules, their planned activities for the day (gym, social events, staying back after work), what time they will be home and thus what to prepare for dinner that night. Thus, conscious effort was made in planning the meal together in order to eat together on a regular basis. Even if they don’t necessarily eat the

same things, the sharing of the time together is important for many of the couples as Tom tells me: “Well sometimes, we don’t eat the same foods, but we do eat together... we eat together every day”. Therefore, such assignments of meanings and deliberate allocation of time and resources to the shared dinner can be understood as an active creation of their collective identity project (Giddens, 1991; 1993). They are creating their collective identity as a task to be worked upon through conscious efforts, allocation of time and meanings to this practice. Thus, the weekday dinner together is becoming an important regularised practice (Marshall, 2005) but also a project they actively construct together and it is a place where they are doing their collective identity-work.

7.3.2 Collective Aspirations

Through doing the meal together, aspirations and goals of the couple are also shaped and constructed relationally, which contributes to their collective identity-work. Aspirations are the future goals (Dittmar *et al.*, 2014) of the couple. They are the symbolic and material ideals (Holttinen, 2014) that couples construct together for their future. Take the example of Roberto and Barbara, who tell me in their first interview that they had just bought a steamer and used it together for the first time that day for lunch. When asked to elaborate on why they bought the steamer and how did they decide on it, they tell me that it’s an aspiration for them to consume healthier together:

Barbara: I usually never eat so much vegetables [...] Because he likes eating vegetables, and I really want to start eating more [...] as I want to feel healthier. And so that is why we always try to cook something with a side of vegetables. [...] Since we want to have vegetables every dinner, it’s a convenient way to mix things up, so one day stir fry, one day raw, one day steam. So every day we change, so it tastes different...and with a steamer it was like healthier and even easier to cook, since you just put it in there and they cook without you staying there all the time

Roberto: Yeah, she proposed it and I thought it was a viable idea. Well, I eat a lot of vegetables on my own anyways so one more way, why not? [...]

Although as Roberto says he normally consumes vegetables in the form of stir-frys, but this new way of making (steaming) adds to their repertoire of knowing more dishes to do with the vegetables. Since Barbara suggested the new gadget, his perception is that they can have more variety in their diet, suggesting that the change is for the collective. Barbara however aspires to actively change to consume more vegetables as she wants to be more healthy herself. However, in describing her transition of consuming healthy, she moves between I and we (“I

really want to start eating more vegetables...we want to have vegetables every dinner”), suggesting that it’s not only her that wants to consume healthy, but it’s a collective endeavour. Here, because they are both in the transitional phase of doing their collective meal, they constantly reflect on and discuss what they want to do and what each person wants to achieve. And in reflecting on the collective aspiration, they try to assert their individual projects, as they need to see the benefits of such for their individual self as well, as the individualisation theorists discussed (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Fischler, 1988). However, here we can also see how the steamer acted as an investment for their future aspirations. They had bought the steamer as a tool to allow for new meal ideas in doing their healthy project. The object became embodiment of their collective future selves (Belk, 1988) as they could materialise their collective aspirations during co-performances with the object (Miller, 1987).

However, the collective aspiration may also be idealised and filled with compromises. As during the shopping observation, they reveal how the healthy project is indeed idealised and doing healthy might mean making compromises on other aspects such as taste and convenience. For example, in one of their shopping trips, I observe Roberto asks her if she wants fish pie to have with the steamed vegetables, then reflecting on his choice - turns to tell me actually they don’t always consume healthy:

Roberto: [to Barbara] you want more fish cakes? Want to try a new one? [then turns to tell me] Since we tried the [ready-made] fish pie, we’ve been getting them fairly regularly. We have them with steamed vegetables. It’s fairly easy to make, you just put them in the oven and put on the steamer, you forget about everything for half an hour and it’s tasty to be honest.. even though that might not be too healthy.

Here ready-made fish pies were attributed to be unhealthy, as they reveal their ideal project is not always achievable. But compromise is acceptable if it allows them to save overall time in the practice to move on to other things (Southerton, 2003), as Roberto says you can just leave the fish pie in the oven to synchronise it with the steamer and come back later. In Holttinen’s (2014) study, they also show how consumers materialise their “cultural ideals” in everyday dinner consumption (p.573). They show how the dinner can be a place where consumers enact their ideals of being good parents (such as through making home-made and healthy food) and thus, aiding in construction of their desired identity project. However, at times ideals may also be re-created by consumers, such as when the ideal is compromised or broken (e.g. by making ready-made meals) (Holttinen, 2014). Here too, we see how collective aspirations are materialised in doing the shared dinner and in a shared object (the steamer). Through doing the

shared dinner and through using the object, the couple is able to enact their goals and thus their collective identity project together. However, the project can be compromised when needed. As they themselves reflect on their own behaviours, Roberto and Barbara show how deviating from the project is acceptable if it allows them to engage in other practices and meanings that are more important. For example, spending time with each other and relaxing while the fish cake is in the oven and the vegetables are in the steamer. In doing so, their collective aspirations and goals are constantly being ‘re-created’ in everyday meal practices.

Similar to Roberto and Barbara, nearly all of the couples who took part in my study tell me they aspire to eat healthy together in doing the dinner (as we have seen last chapter some have started ordering veggie boxes), but there are *always* contradictions and compromises. Take the example of Sara and Nick, who are also planning to consume more healthily but reveal contradictions on various fronts, as I capture their thoughts while they are shopping for vegetables in the supermarket:

Sara: Basically we are planning to eat healthily... so like right now are we only boiling potatoes and vegetables, and then have it with fish in a can -

Nick: tuna

Sara: yeah, because he forces me to eat healthy

Nick: Because she has been buying ready meals for the past 6 months, and that’s not really healthy

Sara: We are doing good as you can see, we are eating healthy, really healthy. Like he has lost weight, I have lost weight. And it’s also cheaper, much cheaper. So with tuna, it’s like £3 maximum £5 for like 3-4 day portion. And sweet corn is really cheap and broccoli is not expensive at all. So you see? And then the main thing is... oh Nick I don’t think we have enough mayonnaise! [she shouts out to him as he has walked off].

Here although Sara perceives that ‘they’ are planning to eat healthily, in the next sentence she reveals that indeed ‘he’ is forcing her to do so. We have seen in the conflict chapter, how this couple is still grappling with their differences in gendered attitudes towards housework, as she feels the burden of housework is being imposed upon her (as Nick does not help with his share). Here too we can see how she is still struggling with the power hierarchy in her relationship, as she uses phrases like ‘he forces me’, but then immediately jumps back to idealise their collective endeavour, and attribute the ‘we’ in a healthy project – when she says ‘we are doing good as you can see’, ‘we both have lost weight’. Hence, her narration of their collective aspiration suggests that perhaps she is grappled with contradictions, as she wants to see the benefit of consuming healthy for herself, but at the same time she knows it’s not truly a

collective endeavour. Moreover, when I went to have the 'healthy meal' of vegetables, potatoes and canned tuna topped with mayonnaise with them at their house, they told me they have been eating this same dish (changing the vegetables and the meat) for the past 2 weeks as they assert their health project with me. Here Sara changes to assert that indeed 'she' wants to consume healthy: "at the moment, I prefer to buy something healthy, simple and delicious at the same time" (Sara). Hence, suggesting how the collective project is not a static approach but is indeed fluid (Bauman, 2000) and dynamic that construes going back and forth between the I and we. This dish also allows her to do less work as "it's just boiling vegetables and taking tuna out of the can" (Sara), again suggesting that doing the project is great as long as it has benefits for her too. However, their topping of the mayonnaise suggests another contradiction as when we sit down to have dinner, they show how their aspired project is indeed idealized:

Nick: Sara, don't we have more mayonnaise?

Sara: no we forgot to buy mayonnaise yesterday

Nick: no, we bought a jar like 4 days ago! Did you use it all?

Sara: yeah. It's not too much!

Nick: no no no

Sara: it's actually so little

Nick: no no no Sara, a jar of mayonnaise in 4 days. No matter how you spin it, it's not little. That's half a kilo of mayonnaise! That's 100 g of mayonnaise a day!

Sara: but I really like mayonnaise

[conversation drops to a quiet as they continue eating]

In fighting about who finished the mayonnaise, Sara and Nick show how negotiation of discrepancies in aspirations is being done at the collective level, but also how meanings in their collective endeavour are constantly being re-evaluated and re-created (Holttinen, 2014) relationally as they co-perform the practice. Such contradictions and compromises in materializing a healthy project together can perhaps be linked to the idea of the 'treat'. Miller (1998) discusses that in partaking everyday shopping and doing their labour of love, mothers would buy treats for the family as a reward for herself and her children. Here too, such contradictions of having the mayonnaise with what they call their healthy dinner, can perhaps be a manifestation of their reward for themselves. As Sara justifies "but I really like mayonnaise". In her efforts to do the collective healthy project, she is affording herself to such treats. However, in her justification we can also see the negotiation of the 'me' - the individual identity - taking place. As I showed in the last chapter how people carry their own food preferences (and thus identities) into the relationship (Wilk, 2010), in doing their collective

projects couples also constantly try to negotiate to persist their existing individual identity in the collective. Last chapter I also showed how couples at times break from their collective plans in order to treat themselves to individual projects, as I showed how Tom and Joanne treated themselves by deviating from the collective healthy discipline.

In co-enacting collective aspirations and ideals, collective identity work is being performed on various fronts. First, we see that co-engagement in the dinner practice itself shapes and influence collective aspirations. Taking inspiration from Miller (1987; 1998) and Holttinen (2014), I showed how collective aspirations are being materialised through the practice co-performance and in material objects (e.g. the steamer, shopping for vegetables). In co-engagements in practice, couples' aspirations and ideals are constructed and shaped relationally, which allowed them to 're-appropriate' themselves in Miller's (1987) terms. However the object itself (e.g. the veggies, steamer, mayonnaise) also guides and restricts the aspirations and identity of the couple. As I showed how the steamer restrict and influences how the dinner is performed and what to buy in the supermarket. I will unpack this aspect more in my discussion chapter, but here I show how collective identity is emerging from co-engagement in the consumption practice together as couples materialise their collective aspirations. However, there is also a level of reflexivity involved.

I showed how doing the collective aspiration also involved consciously aligning their individual projects, as both partners constantly reflect on what they want to achieve in the collective endeavour - one wants to see the benefits of the healthy project for oneself as well (Giddens, 1991). As we saw how Sara switches between I and we from one visit to another, as she realises the healthy project allowed her to do less work in the kitchen just boil vegetables and use canned tuna. Similarly, Barbara envisions the healthy project as her own individual self-project as well when she suggested the steamer. Like a reflexive project (Giddens, 1991), collective aspirations are also constructed reflexively and relationally through time. I will also unpack this aspect more in my discussion chapter. For now, I turn to show another aspect through which collective identity can emerge through practices of doing the meal together.

7.3.3 Embodiment of Collective Routines

Doing the meal together not only allows symbolic connotations to emerge, but it is also a collective practice that involves co-ordination of bodies that are positioned inter-relationally in

time and space. In being able to have “collective accomplishments of practices” (Barnes, 2001, p.24), it is also a process that allows embodied collective identities to emerge. Here I emphasize on practice theories’ and Bottero’s (2010) understanding of practices as having an internalised and embodied nature of performance, such that one has a sense of knowledge on how to do and how to behave – “*a type of knowledge that is unarticulated and tied to the senses, movement skills, physical experience, intuition or implicit rules of thumb*” (Molander, 2016, p.152). Co-performing such embodied practices in “intersubjectivity” (Bottero, 2010, p.3) has implications for collective identity-work.

Take the example of Emily and Harry, who have mastered their bodily co-ordination in terms of doing the meal together. In their dinner observation, I notice how they synchronically coordinate and co-perform their bodies in accordance to each other, the environment and the meal in-progress. In doing so, they do not need to discuss with each other what they are doing, unless it is a critical moment of doing something new or different (picture 21). As can be seen from this field note excerpt, written while listening to the speech-in-action recordings:

[They both have different roles. Harry was in charge of everything that goes on the hobs, whereas Emily was in charge of the prep work. They were making squid with peas, for which they were following an online recipe. The laptop was kept in the middle of the kitchen counter which blends into the living room. Emily was also in charge of looking at the laptop before and after every step and they had to make sure they were following the amount and procedure correctly. They talked to me about many ‘other’ things such as what they like and don’t like, how they are different, what did they do today, while at the same time doing all these steps of cooking the meal together. Sometimes one of them would interrupt the other who is talking to me, in order to turn their attention back to each other and the meal in progress. This would usually be during a critical step such as when they need to help each other on the hob or when one is not sure about the amount or the next step. At one point, Harry called Emily as he was about to add the tomato sauce in the pan. She almost instantaneously knows what to do and went over to the hob to help pour it, while he simultaneously stirs the pan (see also picture 21). They then tell me they need to add this bit by bit to not let it clump up together. There was silence as their attention focus on pouring the sauce right and getting the consistency. It almost seems like they both know what they were doing, and what each person had to do, what is coming next and when to stop.]



Picture 21: Reflexive interactions



Picture 22: Embodied co-performances

Here, we can see that they both have internalised and embodied the collective competence of how to do the meal together in harmony. Picture 22 is a representation of their collective co-ordination of the practice from another visit as they do the meal while talking to me. According to Giddens (1984) whose work has also been associated with practice theory, “the body is the

locus of the [active] self” (p.41). He makes a point that whenever we come into co-presence with others, we try to establish predictable encounters by “positioning” the body in relation to others and the environment (p.74). For example, in a time-space interaction with others, we try to coordinate each other’s bodies through bodily movements and synchronizing talks with each other. In doing so, we try to establish “predictable routines” in order to create trust and security with each other in day to day life (Giddens, 1984, p.50). In Molander’s (2016) study, she also shows how mothering can involve various bodily performances which are in accordance to their “body schema” (p.154). For example, she shows how sometimes mothers can operate in a “pragmatic [body] schema” that is in line with the environment and her life schedule (p.155). In doing so, the mother’s skills of doing the meal in an organised and efficient manner becomes embodied, routinised and forgotten about, but structures how she behaves in everyday life.

Inspired from these studies, here I show that bodily ‘sync’ between agents in shared practices can also emerge. As Emily and Harry’s performance shows, both try to position their body in relation to each other and the material environment they live in (Giddens, 1984). They try to coordinate their bodies to be in timely ‘tune’ with each other. In doing so, it almost seemed like they weren’t thinking what they were doing, their competences in knowing what to do together became embodied, internalized and forgotten as they each performed their tasks relationally. For example, they talk through ‘other’ things with me and themselves, while doing their collective tasks together. However, since they are still in the new phase of the relationship, sometimes these embodied competences come to the forefront of consciousness especially when they need to communicate (e.g. when they are not sure what to do next) or when they need each other’s bodies in critical moments (e.g. when both need to be there to coordinate the pouring and stirring of the meal). Thus, in such moments they need to reflexively control their bodily movements to be in sync with each other as I showed in picture above. As how they pause their talk in order to control their bodies in close proximity to each other and the hob. When these critical moments pass, they come back to routinised embodied co-performances.

Such routinised co-performances may result from having done this dish together couple of times before and knowing each other’s position in the performance. But it also relates to how their bodies seems to have a relational internalised knowledge (Bourdieu, 1990) of how to do and what to do in terms of the meal preparation and co-ordination of timing. In syncing the co-performance, they may also be trying to establish predictable encounters in order to create a sense of security and trust in their interactions (Giddens, 1984). Such efficient manner of bodily

co-performance may also be because they want to finish the meal preparation quickly. They have both just arrived from work when I reached their house, and thus they communicate to each other in an internalised manner. Similar to Emily and Harry, I've seen many instances where couples co-perform together harmoniously through various meal practices involving in shopping, cooking, eating, so on. But of course, as we saw in chapter five, routines may be disrupted time and again which required them to reflexively work on re-aligning their practices.

Thus, in doing the relational 'tuning' of bodies and co-performance between agents, I argue that collective identity-work can also emerge. Here I take Bottero's (2010, 2015) definition of identity as having an internalised and embodied aspect that emerge from the process of doing. Doing together not only allows symbolic meanings to emerge, but also collective embodied identity, which includes the tacit knowledge or a "sense of how to behave" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 in Bottero, 2010, p.13) – in this case relationally.

7.4 Doing the 'Me' in the 'We'

Doing the meal and construction of collective identity also have repercussions for self-identity on an individual level. As we have seen from the previous sections that couples constantly negotiate to do their individual identity while doing the collective project as well. In this section, I will show that doing the 'we' also produces and reproduces the 'me' in action. But I will focus on gender, as gender emerged as a strong aspect of doing personal identity.

Thus in this section, I will show how - in doing the collective meal together - many of the couples who took part in my study were also "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and constructions of their own versions of identity based on being a man and a woman. Here I take West and Zimmerman's (1987) definition of gender as an aspect which is "embedded in the routine accomplishment of everyday interactions" (p.130). According to them, gender is not within the person, it is not a conscious choice, but it results from arrangements of social practices. In other words, gender results through the doings of everyday practices, such as practices of doing the meal. This coincides with Miller's (1987; 1998; 2005; 2010; 2012) and Bottero's (2010; 2015) understandings of identity emerging through practices. There were two aspects of gendered identity work that emerged strongly from my findings. One is in relation to how men construct their masculine identity and versions of it through displaying their care

and love for their partner. The second is in relation to how women's identity as a woman is still being reproduced, even in such supposedly gender progressive couples. In doing so, I argue that both men and women are constructing and enacting their gendered identity through doing the collective household meal.

7.4.1 Division of Labour and Memories of Food Work

Before I advance to show how gender is being done, I first need to demonstrate how majority of the couples, especially the women who took part in my study generally feel that their household division of labour is quite gender neutral (similar to Bove and Sobal's (2006) study). Many have used words like 'it's quite shared', 'it's equal', 'we both do it'. In fact many women explicitly tell me they feel quite fortunate to have 'men who can cook' in their lives as Barbara tells me: "I'm not the kind of person who likes to stay in the kitchen and cook every day. Like there are some days that I don't want to cook [...] so this [arrangement of cooking on different days] is good". Some have also reflected on traditional gender norms in their society and the way they have been brought up to understand the shaping of their attitudes towards gender and family life, as these women tell me:

Annie: We both enjoy cooking [she and her partner], I think it's one of the main reasons why we are together, because first of all, it kind of surprised me positively when I met him that he cooks. For example for lunch for himself to take to work. Because before this I didn't really have a chance to meet this kind of men. So it's made him, in my eyes, stick out from the crowd. I can see my colleagues, they are family people, but they still bring a sandwich....Where I come from, you would rarely see men cooking, it's very much a job for women. Which I don't agree with, because if you want to eat, why shouldn't you cook as well.

Hannah: Well because my dad was the one who cooked at home so I thought.. Dads cook, that's how it is! That's what I thought when I was a child... So somewhere at the back of my mind, cooking was always a man's job... I mean he doesn't have to be a master chef or something like that but you know, if a man can't cook, what good of a man is he?

Here firstly we can see how these women draw upon memories of previous family practices to define their attitudes towards gender and social norms (Lupton, 1994; Knight *et al.*, 2014). Annie was from a working class Serbian family. When she came to London to work as an au pair many years ago, she was surprised to see how the man in the family she was employed for took care of the majority food tasks for the children. In her own family upbringing, her grandma

used to cook and prepare food for the whole household. She told me stories of how her grandmother used to ration during the civil war. There were many dishes she learnt from her grandma, but she also often defined herself in differentiation/opposition from her grandma and cultural upbringing. In Knight *et al.*'s (2014) study on intergenerational influences in mothers' food practices for their children, they discuss that at times there may be negative memories from childhood that mothers make a conscious effort to avoid in their own childrearing practice. Here however, we see that Annie reflects on making conscious effort to not follow her grandma's footsteps in enacting traditional gendered division of labour. As she tells me where she comes from, you hardly see men in the kitchen, but she doesn't agree with it because "if you want to eat, why shouldn't you cook as well?".

Hannah on the other hand, is from an upper middle class family in Germany. She tells me how her Dad used to handle all the everyday foodstuff at home. He cooked a large portion everyday as they were a big family (she had 4 siblings) but sometimes would involve all the kids in the kitchen as well. Thus, she had always felt that 'Dads cook' and that's how it is, and all the men she has previously dated were always competent cooks. As in the quote above she tells me she feels a man has to know how to cook and it's important for her to be in a relationship with a man who can cook, otherwise "what good of a man is he?" (Hannah). These women show how parents and grandparents can play a strong role in shaping gendered memories and attitudes towards food work (Lupton, 1994). Previous studies that showed how women gave stories about family food mostly regard their mothers in the caring work of the family (Cairns *et al.*, 2010; Lupton, 1994; Knight *et al.*, 2014), however, now we are seeing how fathers are also being included in memories about family food and care work. Although like Annie, many women spoke of being different to what their family upbringing was and being in opposition to traditional gender norms, some women like Hannah merely accepted that their partners do the cooking. Other women have told me that men do the cooking because they were more competent and again relate to their own cultural upbringing. For example, Julia (who dropped out due to food allergy) tells me she cooks like her Mom, who is the "queen of convenience". Thus, when she moved in with William, who loves to cook, he took over the whole food work in the household.

Although there were some women who did the cooking for the household and enjoyed it, many of the women who took part in my study said that their partners handle majority of the cooking task. In fact, during the observations, I see how majority of the men indeed did do this task, but

the other tasks were mostly shared or done by women. Table 6 shows the summary of the division of labour for all the couples in my study. For ease of convenience to analyse division of labour, I have colour coded the table to show how tasks were divided along the spectrum of the practices of the meal. The colour green indicates they take turns or do the task together. Orange indicates the woman handles the tasks, and Blue indicates the man took the responsibility of this task. I first have to point out that this table is from both the interviews and observational data *over time*. Although this division of task was in no way static, as some months the roles reversed - but it was derived from observing the repeat patterns over time.

Couple	Planning	Shopping	Preparing	Cooking	Cleaning
Tom and Joanne	Food plans done together	Together weekly	In turns, but in 5 th month Tom (M) took over	In turns, but in 5 th month Tom (M) took over	Joanne (W)
Pia and Max	Food plans done together	Together weekly	Together	Together	Pia (W)
Ted and Elias (homosexual couple)	Together as Elias takes the lead but asks Ted for input	Elias (M)	Elias (M)	Elias (M)	Elias (M)
Vanna and Simon	Together Message each other during lunch	Together weekly	Together	Simon (M)	Dishwasher But also Vanna (W)
Alex and Olivia	Together Message each other during lunch	Together daily	Together	Olivia (W)	Dishwasher But also Alex (M)
Sara and Nick	Sara (W)	Together fortnightly	Sara (W)	Sara (W)	Sara (W)
Roberto and Barbara	Together Talk over breakfast	Roberto (M) No set plan	Together	Roberto (M)	Dishwasher But also in turns
Julia and William	William (M)	William (M) No set plan	William (M)	William (M)	William (M)
Hannah and James	James (M)	Together or in turns	James (M)	James (M)	Hannah (W)
Milena and Bernard	In turns	In turns Daily	In turns	In turns	Milena (W)
Jenny and Paul	Paul (M)	Together weekly	Together	Paul (M)	Jenny (W)
Annie and Chris	Together Message each other during lunch	Annie (W) Twice a week	Annie (W)	Chris (M)	Annie (W)
Harry and Emily	Together	Together weekly	Together	Emily (W)	Harry (M)

	Message each other during the day				
Interpretation	Mostly together, or otherwise by the men who handle the cooking task	Mostly done together or by who gets off work first	Mostly done together or by whoever is in charge of the cooking that day	Mostly by men	Mostly by women

Together or in turns = 

Men = 

Women = 

Table 6: Division of labour

As can be seen from the table, majority of the men who took part in my study did the cooking, whereas planning and shopping were mostly done together, and majority of the cleaning was done by women, and perhaps this is why many of the women feel that their housework is gender neutral (Devault, 1991) as they divide the tasks more equally. Sara was the only woman that did all the house work by herself and as I showed in chapter five, their conflict on gender is still unresolved. William was the only man who did all the food work by himself. The rest of the couples had a more shared task especially in planning of the meals. Most planning were done either at breakfast or through messaging each other during the day or writing food plans each week. As I showed in the beginning of this chapter, most couples felt that doing the meal together was important (Marshall and Anderson, 2002), as they felt that planning, shopping, cooking and eating together contributed to developing their bond and love for each other.

Perhaps such shared division of task is due to the fact that they have newly cohabitated, and whether this will change as their family expands, is not known. However, it can also be due to the context of my study itself, as being in London, which is an expensive city, all of the couples are involved in paid employment out of the house. Women were also educated the same as men and in professional jobs, which may contribute to them recognising that it's a joint project (Aarseth and Olsen, 2008). Although I have not been able to address the historicity of gender relations, as it wasn't in the scope of my thesis, I acknowledge that my studying of young couples living in a multi-cultural city may have an influence on how they divide their roles. However, what was evident in my study is that the collective project was shaped by each partner's individual history and existing identity. I've shown how women's attitudes towards food work is shaped through their family practices and cultural upbringing. I will now turn to

show how men's attitudes towards taking part in the food work is also shaped through their upbringing and personal projects.

7.4.2 Men's Identity and Love

It was through understanding their history in the individual interviews that allowed me to understand how men were more involved in cooking and other meal tasks. Firstly, many of the men who took part in my study cooked and prepared food for themselves when they were single. Similar to Sellaeg and Chapman's (2008) self-adequate bachelors, men in my study too knew how to prepare meals for themselves before the cohabitation. Some men have told me they started by helping out their parents such as through shopping or cooking for the family. This was more typical in the men that left home late. For example, William, Paul and James who were in their late 30s told me they left home in their late 20s, but they would help around their parent's house and spend a lot of time in the kitchen growing up. Interestingly, these three men are the ones handling majority of the food tasks in their relationship (as can be seen from table 6). However, since most of the men moved out of their parent's house at 18 to go to University, they started learning about food and cooking for themselves around their University years. Many men tell me they started by cooking basic meals like pasta or steaks, but eventually became more competent as they became more interested in learning about food and cooking. Some learnt by themselves through cookbooks, or from flatmates, others through calling their Moms for advice. Take the example of Chris and Bernard, who tell me they started learning about food when they left home for University. Chris tells me his parents were divorced and so he went to live with his father during his University years. At first his dad took care of his food, but then:

Chris: Then it came to a time that because he was always cooking the same things [laughs]...I started to sometimes do dinner for myself...and then even for him. I tried to learn...I was even asking my Mom some suggestions. And I think that's when I started to cook. I started with very basic stuff, like steaks and pasta. I ate a lot of repetitive things. There is this dish like grilled burger with pasta, I still remember I had that so much.

Bernard: When I left home, I went to Brittany, the west part of France. Back then I was so excited to leave home, to have my own life. I got interested in every grown up thing [...] I wanted to be totally independent [...] I got interested in really taking care of myself, like buying proper clothes, and then doing proper cooking. So I got interested in cooking material. Like when I was shopping at a supermarket in Brittany, I was so happy to spend money on baking trays, stuff that like. It was just exciting for me,

it's like a new world. [...] I was doing a lot of sport, so I wanted to find the best food to get protein, to develop muscles. So I was buying horse meat, lentils and stuff.

Bernard and Chris describe learning about food as a way of growing up, becoming an adult and being independent. Learning about “doing proper cooking” (as Bernard says) as well as buying new cooking materials, utensils, ingredients (e.g. horsemeat, lentils) allowed him to feel independent and learn how to “take care of himself”. Thus, when he left home for University, like many men, he describes how he became interested in food work. These men often narrate a process of learning, such as repeating meals or cooking basic meals in the beginning, then gaining competence through time and experience. This aligns with Sellaeg and Chapman’s (2008) study on single men in Canada, who found that competence in cooking and eating healthy food allowed bachelor men to feel self-sufficient and independent. In learning to be competent cooks and knowing how to do food for themselves, these men were constructing their self-care attitudes, and it plays a role in their personal identity construction (Fischler, 1988; Fox and Ward, 2008). It is interesting to see these men narrate memories of doing food for themselves as a transition to being an adult. In their study on University students’ out of home transition, Gram *et al.* (2015) also reveals how food can be a way for young adults to re-construct themselves and that parental influences and memories from home played a role in aiding their transition. Here too we see how parents were included in discourses but more so was marketplace resources such as cook books, supermarket offers, so on, which paved the way for their personal identity development. As they were able to consume what is good for them, what they like, what they don’t like and what they would like to achieve, as Bernard describes the proteins for his muscles. Thus, cooking became a way for them to advance their identity project (Giddens, 1991; Bugge, 2003) for self-development goals, which mirrors other studies that show how men’s cooking is seen more as an entertainment, pride and pleasure (Cairns *et al.*, 2010; Hollows, 2003).

However, what is interesting in my study is that I show how these men – when they re-enter into the family consumption scape – continue to sustain their notions of identity through doing food work. As we saw in the previous chapter how Bernard took over the whole meal task as soon as he and his partner moved in together. At times some men even re-construct their understandings of being a man through cooking for their partners and caring for the family. Although notions of masculinity was not the focus of my study, I was able to glean how some men too develop a discourse and practice about care and love through doing food for their partner. For example, we have seen how Tom describes cooking as a way of showing love to

his partner Joanne. Similarly, William who is the man who does all the housework (as I showed in table 6) tells me how his partner Julia didn't really cook when they met and how he had to take control of all the kitchen and turn it into a 'family kitchen'.

William: Basically like she didn't really cook much [when we met] [...] Her fridge was bare, like I was terrified. I looked into the fridge and saw like leftover bits of takeaway food, ketchup, mayonnaise that was about six months old. Uh.. So, it was horrific, and it was dirty as well. I had to clean it. I was like I cannot take this, like, so I defrosted the fridge and the freezer, I cleaned them, and then I bought real food. It was really horrific, if I'm going to be honest.

Julia: He reorganized everything.

William: Yeah, now it's like a family kitchen.

Although he voices alarm about her food habits when they first met, since he was the more competent and passionate cook, he took over for the whole household through reorganising the kitchen, buying 'real' food, and making it into a family kitchen. In doing so, like Tom, he reconstructed his notion of care and love through doing food and food management for the household. However, he also reflects on his identity and almost portray a sense of anxiety over his condition. As in their couple interview, he reveals "Basically, I'm like a house husband, let's be honest". William's comments about turning the kitchen into a family kitchen and himself into a house husband shows how he is re-creating his notions of (masculine) identity through doing food for the family. He firstly is able to express and display his care and love through doing cooking and planning for the family, but also he re-constructs his identity through expressing how he takes care of the cleaning and all the tasks in the house. Previous studies have argued that although men are becoming more interested in food, their work is seen more as a middle class identity and a hobby (Hollows, 2003; Cairns *et al.*, 2010). Cairns *et al.* (2010) for example argued that men do cooking to show off their skills and competence, and that they do not have the same nurturing discourse as women. However, there are increasing studies that show men can also develop a nurturing discourse when they cook with other people (Szabo, 2014; Klasson and Ulver, 2015). Here I show that men can also develop and express care and love when they cook for their partners and therefore not only produce their sense of collective identity but also their own identity. Although doing food for themselves when they were single was a way for them to do their self-identity goals and adulthood, when they re-enter into the family consumption scape, they can also start to develop a sense of care work that has normally been associated with women (Devault, 1991; Miller, 1998).

But perhaps this is because they are a newly cohabitating couple. Whether men will continue to do the tasks as their family expands, is not known. Moreover, it's not all a rosy picture. Although majority of the men in my study do the cooking, there are still gender inequalities that exist, which contributes to how women reproduce themselves as a woman, as I will discuss next.

7.4.3 Women's Invisible Labour

Although men are becoming more interested in food, some studies have argued that inequalities pertaining to gender still do exist (Bove and Sobal, 2006; Cairns *et al.*, 2010; Cappellini and Parsons, 2014). I too found this in my study when I realized that majority of the men in my study do the creative aspects of the meal such as cooking, as can be seen from the table, but the mundane, repetitive and boring tasks of cleaning is still majorly a woman's job. Thus, in this section, I will show how the notion of gendered forms of practices and identities is still being produced and reproduced in unintentional ways through doing the family meal together. Firstly, although men did most of the cooking, most back end practices such as chopping and cleaning was done by women. As shown, many women tell me they are quite happy that their partners do the cooking. However, these same women also express their responsibility and emotions in doing the back end of the meals. I am using the quotes of the same women who told me they feel their housework is quite gender neutral to show how they are doing gender:

Annie: I prefer to chop so I will prepare everything before [...] It also saves us my stress because I like to keep it clean and tidy. I prefer to clean afterwards because I like to clean the dishes properly. I like to organize things in order....What I discovered is, what was initially kind of sweet and nice and now that drives me mad is that whenever he cooks, everything becomes a mess. He uses 10 spoons, 10 knives. When I cook I use only 1 spoon [...] But I suppose for men maybe they don't care because they think they can put it in the dishwasher and it will be fine [...] I think that cannot change because it's just a normal thing for men.

Hannah: Yeah, I mean, I help chopping and you know cleaning up or something. Personally, because I was taught to always make sure that everything is always clean in the kitchen. You always tidy up for yourself immediately [...] I just don't like a messy kitchen [laughs].

In Wallendorf and Arnould's (1991) study, they found that in preparing Thanksgiving dinner, women were doing all the invisible labour of shopping, serving, cleaning and preparing the bulk of the meal. Whereas men did most of the work that is symbolic or public in nature such

as carving the turkey or lifting it from the oven. They go on to argue how this gendered nature of preparing the Thanksgiving dinner is indeed reproducing gendered forms of practices, which allows men's work in the domestic sphere to be seen as more important, symbolic and "worthy" of display, whereas women's invisible work mostly go unappreciated (p. 26). Here too we see how women's invisible and back end work of chopping and cleaning the dishes is rarely acknowledged and appreciated in their discourses about preparing the meal. It is often only discussed when asked about or during the observations. Whereas men's role in the meal is more creative (e.g. in cooking), often discussed in their day-to-day interactions, and brought to the limelight when asked about their meals. Some women have even romanticised their partner's cooking and describe how he is a very 'good cook' and 'can cook almost anything' but later reveal that in fact she does the bulk of the chopping and cleaning. Thus, aligning with Wallendorf and Arnould's (1991) study, such division of tasks is leading to reproducing gendered forms of practices in everyday life. Even though the meal tasks are shared, and men share the meal work, and as shown can also display their love and affection through doing food for their partners – there is still gender inequality that persists in terms of the types of housework that is divided. Majority of the women who took part in my study are still doing the hidden labour which requires a lot of time, effort and energy, but which is rarely discussed about.

Furthermore, in justifying that women care more about cleaning, couples further reproduce their gendered forms of identity. Like in Annie's case we can see how she justifies her chopping and cleaning by arguing that she is more attentive about it than her partner. Like many women, Annie describes her stress and anxiety in doing the back-end practices of the meal, and in keeping the house clean and tidy, further stipulating how she is more attentive of such tasks. Her partner, Chris, also reveals "I think our standards of cleanliness are not the same [...] I would clean the tray and she would say that it's not good enough." In Cappellini and Parsons's (2014) study, they showed how mothers constantly do gender through doing the meal task management in the household. Even when other family members do the actual tasks such as shopping and cooking, the management still falls on the mother, and with it the guilt and anxiety of managing such tasks, reproducing the mothers' gendered identity and interactions in the household. Here I show that by being responsible for the back-end processes of the meal (especially chopping and cleaning), these women are still managing the bulk of the meal, the flow of time in the practice and the emotions of stress and anxiety that comes with it, which is producing their gendered assumptions and identities in the household. Furthermore, in

justifying her partner's (un)cleanliness standards as *normal for men*, Annie is also producing and reproducing herself as 'recognizably woman' (Devault, 1991; 1997). Although we have seen how Annie feels that she is different to her grandma and traditional gender norms in her society and that she feels men should do the house work as well, by justifying her expectations and normalising her partner's practices, she is rationalising this division of labour and thus producing gendered forms of assumptions about practices within her household (see also Beagan *et al.*, 2008). She is thus taking part in producing her own gendered identity as a woman (Devault, 1997), and creating the inequality of gendered relations and interactions in her home.

7.5 Discussion

This chapter was divided into two parts. First, I showed how collective identity of the couple emerges. Collective identity emerge through the practice of doing the everyday meal together, but it is also a reflexive project that involves conscious constructions through time. My findings reveal that doing the meal together was an important project for majority of the couples. From deciding and planning what to eat together, to often going to shop together to sitting down and eating together, doing the mundane meal together was becoming an important project, but also a collectively co-ordinated routinised practice in everyday life. There were three aspects of collective identity-work that emerged from my findings, what I called: 1. Symbolisation of doing together, 2. Collective aspirations of the couple, and 3. Embodiment of collective routines. I will discuss these in a subsequent section. The second part of my findings reveal how individual identity-work were also being performed as a consequence of doing the collective meal. I discussed two aspects of individual identity-work that were emerging from my study, both of which are related to gendered constructions of identity: 1. Men's identity and love, and 2. Women's invisible labour. Figure 5 below represents the summary of the findings for this chapter.

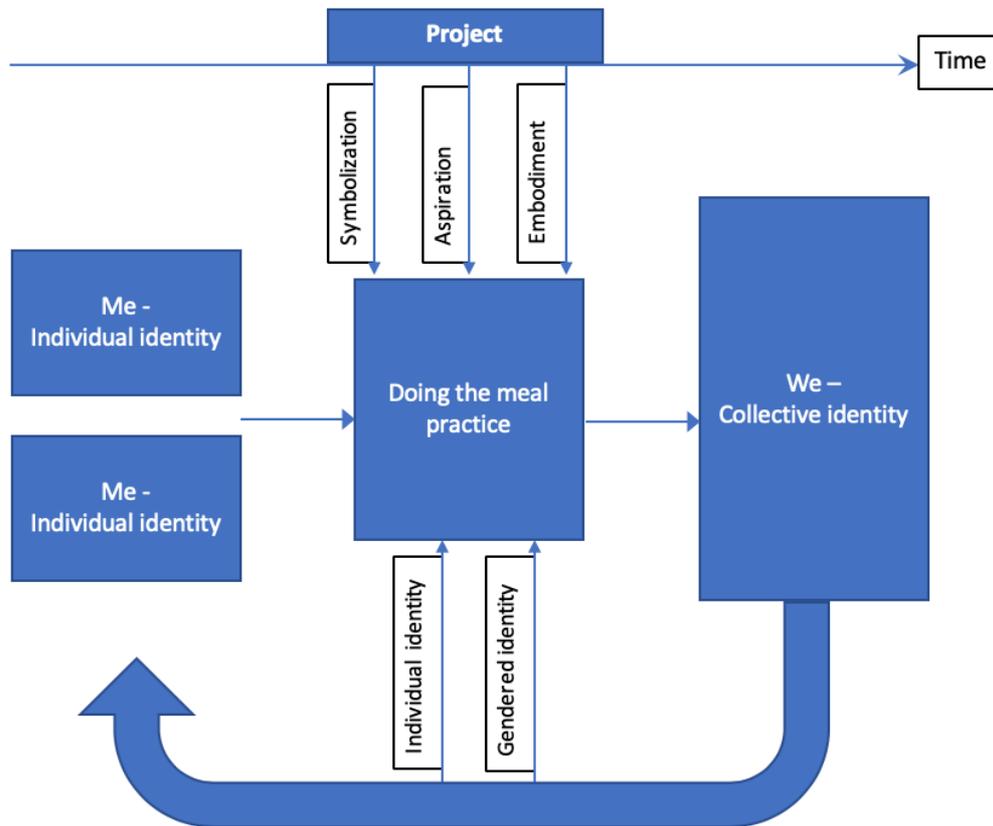


Figure 5: Individual and collective identity emergence

In the above figure, I show that when two individual identities interact with one another while doing the collective meal practice, it can lead to the process of collective identity. The arrows in between the individual identity and collective identity represents the process. The ‘doing of the meal practice’ together [box in the middle] plays a key part as I showed that it was only through co-engagements in the meal practice together, that collective identity work was being born. However, as the figure illustrate this process is also a project, which involves deliberate construction through time. The long arrow at the top of the figure represents time. In doing the meal as a project and a practice, I showed three ways that collective identity work was being done: symbolisation of doing together, collective aspiration of the couple and embodiment of collective routines. The arrows in between the project and practice represents these three aspects. The bottom half of the figure represents individual identity-work. As in doing the collective, I showed that there is repercussions for individual identity-work as well. The U-turn arrow at the bottom represents doing of individual identity-work as a consequence of doing the collective, which as I showed also involves doing gender. I will now elaborate on the figure by first discussing the three aspects of collective identity-work.

First, symbolisation of doing together involves creation of new shared meanings in doing the meal together, which plays a role in the couple's collective identity-work. Aligning with previous studies on newly cohabiting couples (Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Marshall, 2005), I showed how new meanings such as sharing, caring for each other, compatibility were being materialised and manifested in doing the shared meal. Couples appropriated new meanings to eating and cooking together, which aided them to transition into a collective unit. For example, Milena and Bernard discussed how they changed from when they were single as cooking is now more meaningful for them, as it is a place where their compatibility and bond for each other is played out. I also showed that through doing the meal together, couples were able to express their love and appreciation for each other in material form (Miller, 1998), as I showed how Tom and Joanne discussed their appreciation for each other's labour. Therefore, it was only in co-engagements in the meal consumption practices together that their collective identity-work was being performed and emerging (as represented in the figure 5 above). However, collective identity was also constructed as a project (Giddens, 1991) as I discussed how couples deliberately made time and efforts to do the meal together, and attribute meanings to the shared meal.

Therefore, the second aspect of collective identity-work is the creation and materialisation of collective aspirations of the couple. In doing the meal together, I showed how the couple is able to reflexively negotiate and create their collective aspirations together. Couple aspirations such as consuming healthy together were discussed. I showed how material objects (e.g. the steamer in Roberto and Barbara's case) can aid in the couple's creation of collective aspirations, as it acts as an investment for their future. However, I showed how these aspirations were often idealised and re-created based on acceptable compromises (Holttinen, 2014) and individual treats (Miller, 1998), such as when Sara treated herself to the mayonnaise. Or when Barbara and Roberto treat themselves to the fish pies and ready-made meals, showing that it's acceptable to make compromises as long as they are spending time on other more meaningful practices. But in enacting their collective aspirations, I showed how couples were going back and forth between I and we, in order to negotiate what they want in the collective as well. For example Sara changed her narratives of what 'she' wants in the healthy project, and what 'they' (she and her partner) want many times during the visit. In doing so, she was reflexively negotiating her individual identity and what she wants in the collective endeavour, in order to persist her identity in the collective. I showed how people often needed to see the benefits of the collective aspiration for their individual selves as well in order to make it a truly collective

endeavour (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). But such going back and forth between I and we suggests that collective identity work is constantly changing, and involves going back and forth between individual and collective identity.

Third way through which collective identity is emerging is through embodiment of shared collective routines. I showed how couples' repetition of shared practice co-performances over time allowed them to co-ordinate and sync their bodies in an internalised manner in relation to the time, space and material context, which plays a role in emergence of their embodied collective identity (Bottero, 2010; Molander, 2016). Their embodied sense of knowing how to behave in relation to each other, and how to co-perform together in an unarticulated manner was discussed. However, there were also critical moments when these embodied competences come to the forefront of consciousness (Giddens, 1984) to be reflexively negotiated in the intersubjective space. I will return to these discussions of collective identity-work in my discussion chapter. However, in showing how all of these aspects: symbolisation, aspiration and embodiment of routines is performed, I showed how the 'me to we' work is emerging from a collective perspective over time. I also showed how collective identity emerges as a practice (Miller, 2010) and a project (Giddens, 1991) when it is "situation in intersubjectivity" with others, that is when it is co-enacted with others in the same space and time (Bottero, 2010, p.3). As mentioned, I will return to these discussions in the next chapter.

And as the U-turn arrow in the figure above represents, in doing the collective identity I showed how individual identity-work is also being performed. First as discussed in the collective aspirations section, couples were consciously negotiating to prolong individual preferences and projects while doing the collective meal. Second, I discussed individual identity-work in terms of gender. I showed how both men and women were producing and reproducing their gendered identity while doing the meal. I showed men's construction of their (gendered) identity of being a man was shaped through their past experiences, as men created their self-understandings of being independent and self-sufficient through doing food for themselves when they were single. And when these men enter into the family consumption scape, they can further re-construct their identity through cooking for their family, and express love and care for their partners in doing so. However, I argued that although men's involvement in food work is increasing in these young couples, there are still gender inequalities that persist in terms of the type of housework that is divided. I showed how gendered practices were being produced as men take up the more creative aspects of the meal (e.g. the cooking), while majority of the

women are responsible for managing the mundane, repetitive and non-creative aspects of the meal (e.g. the cleaning) (I discussed in relation to Wallendorf and Arnould's (1991) Thanksgiving study). And in justifying these gendered forms of practices and meanings (e.g. women care more about being clean, it's normal for men to be messy), these couples are producing gendered relational interactions and gendered assumptions in the household, which plays a role in reproducing the women's identity as a woman (Devault, 1991).

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the themes of identity that emerged from my findings. I discussed three aspects through which collective identity-work was being done, what I labelled as: symbolisation, collective aspirations, and embodiment. These three aspects emerged when doing the meal together, and it aided in the couple's identity transition from singlehood to coupledom. I also showed how individual identity-work was being performed and reproduced through the process of doing the meal together, and I discussed these in terms of men's and women's identity-work. In the next chapter, I will now turn to consolidate my findings in relation to existing literature and the aims of my thesis. I will discuss in more detail how collective identity work is being produced and enacted in everyday life.

Chapter VIII

Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis started out with two main theoretical aims. First, it aimed to understand how a collective practice is born. And second, it aimed to understand how collective identities emerge through co-performing practices over time. In order to achieve these aims, the research had three main objectives. First is to analyse the co-performance of meal consumption practices of newly cohabited couples over time. Inspired by a practice theoretical approach (Warde, 2005; Shove *et al.*, 2012), the research approached co-performances in practices as interactions between various elements in a practice. In particular, I analysed practices as comprising of three main elements: “Meanings, Competences and Materials” (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.14), which are interacting with one another at the collective level during a practice co-performance. The second objective is to analyse how these elements of symbolic meanings, competences, materiality along with their interactions can play a role in the collective practice emergence. And third is to analyse how individual and collective identity-work is being done during co-performing the collective meal practice over time.

Chapters five, six, seven in turn showed what happens when two actors co-perform a meal consumption practice together (chapter V), to how elements within a practice can play a role in the collective practice emergence (chapter VI), to analysing how individual and collective identity-work is being done during practice co-performance (chapter VII). This chapter will bring my three findings chapter together to discuss my theoretical contributions. Namely I will discuss 1. how a collective routine is born and 2. how collective identities emerge through co-performing practices over time. I approach my theoretical discussion through the lens of Daniel Miller’s dialectical materiality theory of thesis-antithesis and synthesis. As will be discussed, his theory on how subjects and objects dialectically interact with each other through time and how this results in a subject-object co-creation (Miller, 1987; 1998), is useful to understand how collective identity emerges when two subjects interact with each other during co-engagements in practice over time.

The chapter will be divided into three sections: styled as *Thesis*, *Anti-thesis* and *Synthesis*. The first section, *Thesis*, discusses what happens when two actors co-perform a consumption practice together. It brings back my discussion on conflicts and how actors carry pre-existing identities and routines that gets disrupted when doing the meal together. *Anti-thesis* discusses how collective routines are born when the two materialities become synchronized with each other over time. *Synthesis* then focuses on understanding how individual and collective identities emerge through this process of interaction between *Thesis* and *Anti-thesis*. But first, I will briefly recap Miller’s dialectical materiality theory of thesis-antithesis and synthesis.

8.2 Miller’s Dialectical Materiality Theory

Using Hegel’s theory of dialectics, Miller (1987; 1998; 2010) discussed how subjects and objects have a dialectic relationship to each other as one co-creates the other. A dialectic, according to him, is a way of seeing how contradictory and paradoxical natures interact with each other, which leads to new forms of understanding the world (Miller, 2001). It consists of a thesis (the subject and his world), an antithesis (the object and material world), and when these two contradictory life worlds interact with each other (objectification process), it produces a synthesis (a subject-object co-creation) (Miller, 1987; 2001). Figure 6 below shows my illustration of Miller’s theory of dialectical materiality.

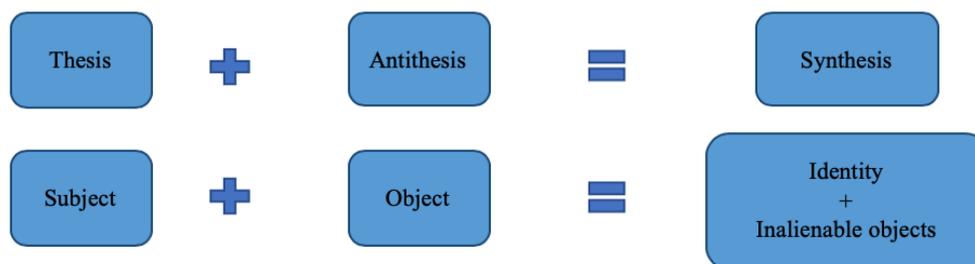


Figure 6: Recap Miller’s dialectical materiality theory

In the figure above, I break down Miller’s process of dialectical materiality into simpler terms. As Miller (1987) discusses in his book *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, when subjects (thesis) interact with objects (antithesis) in the material world, there results a process of interaction whereby the identity of the subject is formed. But in this process objects also gain it’s inalienability and meanings. He terms this process as “objectification” (Miller, 1987, p.28).

Through his ethnographic works of mothers' shopping in North London, Miller (1998, p.151) argues that human subjects can only emerge through the process of "objectification" with the object world, as it is only through engagement and submersion with the material world they live in, such as through shopping for others, that mothers can come to understand themselves and form their identity as a loving, devotional mother. The subject (the mother) cannot constitute itself outside of its material counterpart (the object), as only through materiality can we know and "become what we are" (Miller, 2005, p.8). Miller thus discusses consumption as a process of "objectification" in the Hegelian sense - a process requiring labor, time, effort, resources to be performed (Miller, 1987; 2010). It is through consumption in everyday life that mothers can find, re-appropriate and form their identity as a loving caring human being that consumes in relation to their loved ones (Miller, 1998). Miller goes on to argue that this process is dialectical in the sense that shopping not only produces the subject, but objects also gain meanings, relevance and inalienable position in the process (Miller 1998; 1987). As material objects provides the basis through which love and connection with others can grow, it gains its significance and paradoxically can become the mode of realizing that love and connection altogether (Miller, 1998).

As discussed in my literature review, although Miller's studies has been very influential for me in understanding how identities emerge through consumption and engagement with the material world, he has mainly analyzed the process from a uni-lateral perspective (the mother's perspective). He has also mainly focused on the reflexive accounts of the mothers, and did not analyze how consumption was performed in action. He also did not show *how* this process of this synthesis is achieved over time. In analyzing engagement in consumption as involving interactions between a set of elements in a practice, I hope to show the process through which identity is emerged from a more dynamic and collective practice, taking into account elements of meanings, competences and materials involved in a consumption practice. Especially when one is studying how two subjects newly interact with each other in the material world, analysis of how these subjects' pre-existing materialities interact with each other over time can lead to understanding how collective identity emerges from a more collective perspective. I will now turn to show my approach to understanding how identities emerge through co-engagements in a practice, taking inspiration from Miller's idea of thesis-antithesis and synthesis.

8.3 Thesis

8.3.1 Subject-Subject Interaction

When two subjects first interact with each other, their pre-existing identities will predominantly come into contact with each other, an aspect I will discuss in this section. In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Giddens (1991, p.53) defines identity as “*not something that is just given [...] but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual.*” According to him and other sociologists like Bauman and Beck, modern societies have resulted in individualized societies (Bauman, 2001a), where people are seen as agents who can construct their own identity as a project or a task to be worked upon. As Giddens (1991) discusses that individuals are nowadays faced with the task to develop themselves for personal self-growth. We are faced with the need to find an inner “authenticity”, which is a sense of understanding oneself as who one really is (Giddens, 1991, p.78). For in order to live a meaningful life, people have to develop an identity, a coherent sense of who they are through time. All the three sociologists discuss how consumption aids individuals to construct an identity. As through consumption of market related goods and services, and through choosing to consume certain things over others, we are able to create and sustain a coherent sense of identity through time.

In different ways these sociologists argue that such a condition of individual identity development has changed the way people approach love and relationships (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In today’s times, people are not only free to choose their romantic life partners whom they want to spend their lives with, but as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) discusses every relationship entered into is kept going only for the rewards it can deliver for the individual (see also Giddens, 1993). Giddens (1991; 1993) discusses how individuals need to be seen as equals in a relationship. Each person need to be able to have an agency such as to fulfil their individual identity projects and life goals in the relationship (Giddens, 1993). For in order to have a long-lasting relationship with others, he discusses how people first and foremost need to have a fulfilling relationship with themselves (Giddens, 1991). He defines agency as “capability of doing [...] It implies exercise of power” (Giddens, 1984, p.9). And it is only when both partners in a relationship obtain freedom and autonomy to “do their own thing”, then they can discover the basis for which their relationship and love can grow (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p.3). For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, p.2) love in this form is more “chaotic” but more “democratic”, as it is a process of construction that needs work and effort.

Thus, when couples enter into a new relationship, these sociologists imply that they enter with a sense of pre-existing identities of who they are. They have an ongoing identity project that is manifested through their patterns of consumption. In other words, they have a consumption pattern that has been ongoing through time, that gives them a sense of identity coherence and meaning in life. Giddens (1991, p.81) discusses this type of consumption patterns as “routines”, which are organized in the form of consumption habits of eating, dressing, behaving, but which provides a sense of security and unity in people’s lives, and contributes to their self-identity development. Especially routines of eating (what to eat, what not to eat, how to eat, amount to eat) but also cooking and shopping, all of these consumption activities can symbolize one’s identity as it is an integral part of who we are and who we would like to be seen as (Fischler, 1988; Bugge, 2003; Warde, 2016). Thus, when two people enter into a new relationship, they carry their existing identities in the form of existing consumption patterns into the relationship as well.

Taking inspiration from a practice analytical approach (Shove *et al.*, 2012), I thus analyzed subject-subject interaction as a site where people’s pre-existing meanings and competences in consumption come into contact with each other at the collective level. Although as practice theory reminds us such meanings and competences may be gained through one’s habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), social and cultural upbringing through time, and is not necessarily an individual construct. But as each actor carries their own set of meanings and competences which has been biographically accumulated through time, into doing the collective practice together, such elements may be in conflict as they interact with each other at the collective level. Thus in Chapter six, I showed what happens when actors first attempt to co-perform the meal practice together. In attempting to do the practice together, people’s existing routines gets disrupted as they encounter the strange ways of their partners (Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). I showed how pre-existing elements in a practice such as meanings, competences, understandings of how to do the meal (in shopping, cooking, planning, eating, storing) that were carried within subjects would most often come into the forefront of consciousness to be conflicted, disputed and compete with each other at the collective level through time when the meal is co-performed.

For example, I showed how Sara and Nick’s differences in gendered attitudes and values of doing the cooking and cleaning of the meal dishes caused numerous arguments on how to do

the meal and who should do it. As identifying herself as a feminist, Sara does not want to handle the whole meal task for the collective by herself which in her eyes were being imposed upon her, but her partner did not share the same values. Similarly, Pia and Max's different norms on how to serve and portion the meals were in conflict with each other. As they tell me they have different cultural norms and meanings in serving and plating the food, which in their own eyes is tied strongly with their ethnic identities and difference in cultural upbringing. Similarly, Paul and Jenny's conflicting skills on how to sense flavour and texture of the meat and how to do things faster/slower in the kitchen were discussed as an embodied competence internalised through their different habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). I discussed how most of these pre-existing meanings and skills are mostly gained through one's social and cultural upbringing through time such as through family environment, but as Wilk (2006) discusses such existing meanings are a deeply engrained part of who we are. Bell and Valentine (1997) similarly discuss how our food activity is strong linked to our social and cultural values and in turn identity as every meal and every activity we do in relation to the meal can reveal aspects about ourselves, the way we have been brought up and our place in society.

I also showed how pre-existing elements such as knowledge and techniques in doing the meal, that was developed later in life, could equally cause a conflict when the two partners attempt to co-perform the meal together. For example, Chris and Annie's conflicting knowledge of taste in brands which was developed through one partner's trial and experimentation (Maciel and Wallendorf, 2016) before the cohabitation, became a form of pre-existing knowledge that was carried to the meal co-performance and caused a conflict. Similarly, Vanna and Simon's varying techniques and meanings in buying and storing the meat in the fridge and freezer. As they both have pre-existing preferences of how to consume the meat, as Simon prefers to buy the meat in bulk to freeze and Vanna prefers to buy daily from the supermarket, such differences can cause a conflict through time. Such pre-existing meanings and knowledge in consumption is a manifestation of their ongoing identity projects (Giddens, 1991). As if we remember Simon had contended that he exercises regularly and wants to have protein in every meal, thus he prefers to buy meat in bulk to freeze. Their conflict in this consumption practice therefore stemmed from him having to fulfil his ongoing project of having a certain lifestyle (Giddens, 1991; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995). In carrying certain meanings, knowledge and understandings in consumption, people can thus have a preference for consuming a certain way or certain brands over others (Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007; Cutright *et al.*, 2013; Ruvio and Belk, 2013). Such pre-existing meanings and knowledge are therefore a manifestation of

pre-existing identity, which as shown can be gained through social and cultural upbringing through time (Bourdieu, 1990), but also developed later in life as part of a certain project of the self (Giddens, 1991). But it was only in consuming the meal together that their pre-existing identities in the form of materiality (meanings and competences) emerge to become visible and conflicted with each other through time.

Conflicts itself then is an aspect of doing agency in the relationship. Agency in this sense is negotiating one's individual identity - one's values, norms and knowledge - in the collective. As Giddens (1991) discusses how each partner needs to be able to have an agency in the relationship, in order to develop a more fulfilling relationship with others; One needs to be able to have a democratic say and autonomy in the relationship. But one also needs to be able to continue individual identity goals in the collective. In having numerous arguments about how the meal should be co-performed, couples are therefore doing their agency in terms of negotiating their democratic say, their autonomy and individual identity in the relationship. In resisting what they don't want for the collective, they are enacting their agency. Thus in this sense, we can say that couples are also being "internally referential", as they recognize that their loyalty is first and foremost to themselves (Giddens, 1991, p.80). However, as both partners in the relationship fight to prolong their pre-existing individual identity in doing the collective, it can result in a constant conflict through time.

8.3.2 Reflexive Interactions

When two subjects first interact with each other, it will most likely result in a reflexive interaction. Giddens (1991, p.76) defines "reflexivity" as a process of "self-interrogation" and "self-observation". Although he discusses how reflexivity is important for people's identity project, as reflexivity helps people monitor their consumption decisions in order to create a coherent sense of self through time (Giddens, 1991; 1993). However, in order to have security in one's life, one cannot have a constant reflexivity but need to be "able to go on" with everyday life (Giddens, 1991, p.35). As he discusses how most of what people do is in fact routinised, we have a certain "practical consciousness" on how to go on about with everyday life which gives a sense of security and stability in our lives (Giddens, 1991, p.37). As he explains that there are certain knowledge that "*is not directly accessible to the consciousness of actors [..]*

but is practical in character: it is inherent in the capability to 'go on' within the routines of social life" (Giddens, 1984, p. 4).

Within a mundane practice, theorists have also argued that an actor's performance is considered "neither fully conscious nor reflective" but one simply does what makes sense for one to do (Warde, 2005, p.140). Schatzki (2001, p.47) for example discusses how there is a "practical intelligibility", a sense of understanding and knowing what and how to do. He compares this practical sensibility to Bourdieu's (1990) *habitus* and Giddens's (1984) *practical consciousness*, where there is a consensus that there is an embodied, tacit and unarticulated meanings and knowledge, mediated by material arrangements, that governs human activity (Schatzki, 2001). Such engrained and embodied understandings of knowing how to perform a practice help people achieve routines (Phipps and Ozanne, 2017). And as Wilk (2009) discusses, people often want to have routines in their everyday lives, as routines are meaningful, it helps people achieve a sense of normality in their lives. It gives order, security and a sense of stability in one's lives (O'Dell, 2009; Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). And since routines are often taken for granted everyday practices, they are rarely reflected upon (Wahlen, 2011).

Wahlen (2011) discusses how most of our domestic consumption practices are routinised. Most of what we do in our everyday environment is rarely reflected upon. This is because as Warde (2014) discusses that domestic sites provide comfort and familiarity that encourage routines to be formed. For example, Marshall (2005) discusses how most of our daily food related activities is routinised and often un-reflected upon. As he says we can rarely remember what we ate, what we bought in the supermarket even if it's a couple of days ago. We also tend to buy mostly repetitive things. Thus, as Giddens (1984, p.7) discusses we mostly perform with a "practical consciousness", which involves a tacit and "embodied sense of how to behave" (Bottero, 2010, p.4). However, as Phipps and Ozanne (2017, p.364) shows in their study of natural droughts in Australia, we will discursively account for our practices when there is a "disruption" in routines. As people's routines gets disrupted, they start to contemplate and reflect on their tacit often taken for granted meanings and competences, those that were normally performed without much conscious thought. In reflecting on their practices, people could attempt to recreate their routines in such events (Phipps and Ozanne, 2017).

Similarly, in an event where two existing food routines carried within actors encounter each other, previously existing meanings, knowledge and materialities, that were tacit, engrained

and mostly un-reflected upon suddenly became visible as each person were forced to contemplate the way they do things and how is it different to the other person. Since each person carry pre-existing meanings and knowledge of doing the meal in everyday life, when in interaction with the other, such tacit materialities are often questioned by the other actor in the co-performance. What was previously a practical understanding (Giddens, 1984) now has to be articulated, reasoned, communicated and disputed in action as it encounters the other contradictory understanding. One has to explain one's sensibility to the other person. I showed how previously unarticulated and tacit meanings and competences of, for example bodily skills of experiencing taste and texture of the meat, different understandings of storing food items, or even norms of how to serve food were discussed, as it became explicit and disputed in action when there is a contradictory understanding. I showed how couples then had to justify their pre-existing understandings, and many a times people use the language of science and/or culture to rationalise and justify their particular ways of doing. For example, I showed how Ted and Elias had different competences in storing the food items in the shopping bag. Their competing references to temperature, pressure, density, humidity, so on, provided a tool for them to justify and legitimize their techniques of storing food during the debate. Similarly, Simon and Vanna had a conflict in competences about storing the food items in the kitchen, as Vanna would use the fire to seal plastic packet for tortilla wraps. Vanna's reference to the state of the food (Vanna: they won't go bad) or normal kitchens (Vanna: this is how it's done in normal kitchens) in using fire to seal plastic also involves basic understandings of scientific mechanisms such as how to create a vacuum/airtight container, how to delay dehydration, how to create a non-permeable sealing, so on. Justifications in terms of rationalizing one's habits then allows existing meanings and competences from each actor to be communicated, recognized, adopted or discarded in the collective practice.

Thus, we can understand this process of justifications as a reflexive interaction situated in "intersubjective" positions (Bottero, 2010, p.5). According to Bottero (2010, p.4), although within routines actors are functioning through an un-reflected, "embodied sense of how to behave", when two actors co-perform a practice together such un-reflected behaviors will often become reflexive. According to her, actors carry both "dispositional identity" (the embodied and tacit kind emerging from routines) and "reflexive identity" (the conscious and explicit reflections), as both these forms of identity are part of practices (Bottero, 2010, p.3). But we need to see a practice in its "inter-subjective" state, those that are co-performed with other subjects, to be able to see how these two identities are enacted (Bottero, 2010, p.5). Such that

when we are co-performing the same practice with others, in order to align the practice and have a successful “collective accomplishment of practice” (Barnes, 2001, p.24) with other agents, there needs to be explicit interventions and accounts of one’s conduct in order to coordinate the practice. I have shown how couples will talk, justify, explain their meanings and competences in co-performance. People will make known what they are doing, how they are doing and what it means to them, when they are in co-performance – in order to align their practices.

For in order for their collective identity to emerge, it also depends on this justification interaction that goes on in the meal negotiation context. Couples have to negotiate how much of their pre-existing identities (their pre-existing meanings and competences) they are willing to dissolve and compromise. Thus, as Schatzki (2001, p.43) contends, “*being also springs from contexts in which arrangement exists*” - It depends on how the couples negotiate their arrangements in this justification context at the initial interaction, that the identity of the collective is born. This is because such reflexive interactions provides them with the basis of aligning their practices as they create a new collective practice that can be shared together, an aspect I will now turn to discuss.

8.4 Anti-Thesis

8.4.1 Old and New Materialities Interact at The Collective Level

As subjects interact with each other during co-performing a practice, they are also interacting with the material world. In this section I will discuss the process of co-engagements in the material world through doing the meal practice together. I will discuss how the couples’ old and new materialities interact with each other and how this lead to understanding how a collective routine was born when the two worlds became synchronized with each other over time. As mentioned Miller (1998) has focused mainly on material objects and materialization of meanings in shopping. His emphasis on subject-object interaction and how this lead to transformation of commodities to inalienable possessions did not consider the other elements involved in the practice (Miller, 1987; 2010). He also mainly focused on the reflexive accounts of the mothers, and did not really analyze engagements in action. But as practices have been

defined as co-constituents between various elements including “meanings, competences and materials” interacting with each other (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.14), we can understand how subjects carry out the coordination of these elements when they engage in the practice together. Miller’s anti-thesis can thus be approached through a practice lens as it can provide a more dynamic and collective perspective of understanding how the process of synthesis is achieved over time.

Shared routines as a collective activity has rarely been analyzed in practice theory (Barnes, 2001). Although most practice theorists acknowledge the idea that practices are shared and collective in nature (Southerton, 2013), most empirical research have focused mainly on the experience of single practitioners who perform an inherently shared social practice (e.g. Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017). But we know little about how a particular practice is co-performed by more than one actor, especially ones that are co-performed together for the very first time. In order to understand how collective routines can be co-performed, especially those that did not exist before the cohabitation, we first need to understand how conflicts and synergies were managed over time. Therefore I will first revisit my findings from chapter seven. In chapter seven, I showed how elements can work to cooperate and synergize together at the collective level as time passes. Being inspired from Phipps and Ozanne’s (2017) study on natural droughts, I showed how consumers worked to align their shared practices through adopting various synergistic approaches at the collective level through time. Phipps and Ozanne (2017) discusses how during events like natural droughts, consumers adjust to re-align their routine disruptions through strategies of changing, adjusting, adding or removing one or more elements in a practice, to create new links between them. Whereas I showed three ways through which synergies were formed but at the collective level, what I called: *Blending, Combining and Domineering* approaches.

I defined *blending* as a process whereby the different sets of elements mix, transform and change each other over time. Blending of elements are achieved through *learning and teaching* approaches and *merging* together through time, creating a synergy in the co-performance. Here I illustrated how the old elements such as attitudes, standards and skills of shopping for convenience and healthy produce from both partners were altered and blended as they interact with each other’s through time. For example, I showed how Bernard and Milena both changed their attitudes and skills in doing the meal as Milena, from being very practical became more health focused and active in finding new superfoods ingredients for the collective. Whereas

Bernard, from being what they identified as a “health freak” became more practical and relaxed in his healthy attitudes. In challenging, teaching and learning from each other, both their pre-existing meanings and competences were transformed, which helped them form one common standard practice. I also showed in the case of Pia and Max how they merged their various competences in relation to knowledge, timing and preferences for the meal. I discussed how they both co-ordinated their multiple schedules (Southerton, 2009) and blended their knowledge of efficient meals, as well as leftovers (Evan 2012), all of which aided to align their planning practice. However new elements such as new material resources, technological devices, new supermarket ingredients were added in their practice to aid in the synergy process. For example, I showed how mobile phones, and the associated digital devices (online recipes, timetabling app) (Denegri-Knott and Jenkins, 2016) helped both these couples in blending their existing meanings and competences.

Elements can also *combine* together for the collective practice co-performance but doesn't necessarily alter each other. I defined *combining* as a process whereby the different set of elements unite and cooperate with each other over time. Combining is achieved through elements *sustaining* and *managing* themselves in the practice, creating a synergy in co-performance. This approach would have resulted from the conflicts that were still ongoing through time, as the old existing elements combine together to cooperate, but sustain themselves in the collective practice and do not change one another. For example, I showed how Tom and Joanne sustained their different food preferences, and in turn values and lifestyles through managing the materiality of the food during eating. Such that they made vegan meals but added meat on top of one portion for Tom, so they both can eat the same meals but had individual variations. I also showed in the case of Vanna and Simon how existing techniques and norms of buying and storing meat in the household were managed strategically to combine both their approaches. For example, through the aid of material resources in the household (fridge and freezer space) and new resources in the supermarket (marinades, buying different types of meat) they were able to strategically combine their techniques for freezing and keeping the meat in the fridge. Old existing elements were kept and sustained over time, they did not change one another, but new elements such as new meanings of sharing the food and new material resources from the supermarket aided in the synergy process.

Lastly, I defined *domineering* as a process through which only one set of element will strive to exist over time. Here the more stronger element will take over and dissolve the other during

co-performance over time. For example, I showed how a stronger meaning of consuming healthy food, or more professional competence of knowing how to make meals efficiently, takes over. In the case of Alex and Olivia for example, I showed how Olivia's strong morals of eating vegetarian and healthy food took over for the collective meal, as Alex gives up his preferences for eating meat and what Olivia calls "dirty burgers" during their collective dinners. I showed how new market resources such as new kitchen appliances (the acti-fry) and market services (ordering weekly vegetable boxes) aided to develop the synergy process as Alex could learn to enjoy vegetarian foods through cooking it in the acti-fry. New meanings of eating together and sharing the same meal were also important in aiding this process.

Synergies between elements were therefore achieved through addition of new elements in the practice co-performance, in order to create new links between the existing elements. In other words, synergies were formed when the old and new pool of elements coordinate together at the collective level. As shown, it is formed through blending, combining, domineering or dissolving the set of pre-existing elements, but is aided by new materialities provided by the market. It is also aided by new meanings and competences added in the practice co-performance. As in Shove *et al.*'s (2012) study, they discuss how in order for a practice to be performed smoothly, there needs to be a successful links between elements. And as Phipps and Ozanne's (2017) study showed, practices can achieve linkage through changing, removing, adding, altering any one element of practice. I thus discussed "linkages" between elements (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p.12) in practices as synergies.

From my findings, I therefore define collective synergies as the links that have formed between practice elements at the collective level. As mentioned, collective synergies are formed when old and new pool of elements carried within actors coordinate together at the collective level. It was only through looking at the collective materiality of meal practices, such as during co-engaging in shopping, planning, cooking, eating, serving the meal that the process of collective synergies were revealed and understood in my study. As mentioned, synergies are formed through the aid of new elements added in the co-performance. For example, as discussed new meanings of eating together and sharing food, as well as new material resources from the supermarket can be appropriated and integrated to aid in the synergy process. Like in Tom and Joanne's case, I showed how they appropriate meanings of unity and respect for each other in combining their meal preferences (when Tom says we should respect each other's choices). The old pool of elements carried within actors were therefore interacting not only with each

other, but also with the new elements that were being appropriated and integrated in the new practice. In such new settings, links between old and new elements lead to successful co-performance of practices – practices that could be performed together at the collective level.

Therefore, we can understand how removing or not having any of these elements then plays a role in restricting the couple's negotiation and practice synergy formation. For example in chapter six, I showed when couples did not have the material resources for a dining table or the space in the kitchen, it resulted in an ongoing conflict that could not be resolved through time. Similarly, when couples did not have the meanings of sharing and doing food tasks together, it could also result in an ongoing conflict through time. Like in Sara's and Nick's case that Nick did not have the symbolic values of sharing the meal task, and this hindered their process of synergy in co-performing the meal together. But I discussed that even in having conflicts, new meanings of gender debates, tolerance, fight for equality and communication were being produced and enacted.

In analysing linkages between elements, Shove *et al.* (2012) discuss how we can understand the emergence and disappearance of a practice. As according to them once we change, remove or add any one element of the practice, it will result in changing the arrangements within the practice (Shove and Pantzar, 2005) resulting in the practice to be performed in new ways (Hand and Shove, 2007). And thus, changing or adding elements in the practice will result in adapting and creating new practices altogether (Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Magaudda, 2011; Shove *et al.*, 2012). Analysis of elements thus has implications for understanding how the collective practice of the couple is born. In blending, combining and domineering elements in the co-performance, which involves changing, adding and removing one or more elements of the practice, we can understand how this leads to emergence of a new collective practice altogether. The practice is new in the sense that it has not existed before the cohabitation. It has its own set of blended, combined or domineered elements that can be co-performed by two actors. But these new set of elements led to creation of collective practices over time as the practice is co-performed.

8.4.2 New Collective Routines

Through repeated co-performances of shared practices over time, we can then understand how new collective routines are being formed and reproduced. One of the key characteristics of practice is that it is routinised (Southerton, 2013). Warde (2014, p.292) highlights how practices are regularly repeated performances, routinised activities, arising from “embodied and embedded” competences which have been acquired through time and experience. There are many definitions of routines within practice theory, but I took Barnes (2001, p.23) conceptualisation of routines as “*things people learn by repetition so that they can do them smoothly, easily and competently*”. Routines allows practices to be performed without much conscious thought (Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). They are “*performances of stable practices*” (Southerton, 2013, p.337).

As synergies between these different set of elements were being formed, it allowed for successful repetition of the practice co-performance over time, which helped to reproduce the practice as “stable entities” (Southerton, 2013, p.339). In other words, it was through collective accomplishments of practices (Barnes, 2001) over time, that new collective routines were being born. This was because the new shared practices were being internalised and co-performed without much conscious thought as practices were repeated through time (Wilk, 2009). For example, in chapter seven, I showed how couples that had managed to create a routine in their shared practices were able to internalise their meanings, competences, material and bodily co-performances. As shown how Emily and Harry were able to synchronize their performances with each other routinely in the kitchen. They did not need much thought or vocal interaction in doing the practice together, which allowed them to relax and move on to other things, as I discussed how they were doing the meal but at the same time talking various other things with me. They both had embodied and internalised the collective competence and meanings of how to do the new shared meal together in harmony along with using the material resources and space in the kitchen. It was only when they had to do a new dish or when a new approach was adopted, that their consciousness and discursive interactions surfaced again. Thus, repeating the shared meal practice together over time allowed couples to internalise their co-ordination of bodies that are positioned inter-relationally with each other in the time, space and material context. As Barnes (2001) suggests shared practices requires mutual alignment and coordination of bodies, minds and use of things; collective practices can be understood as a routinised co-performance, where actors share thoughts, abilities, emotions, knowledge, understanding but also objects and space.

Routines also allowed the couples to establish inter-relational trust, order and security (Giddens, 1984). As shown in Harry and Emily's routine performance, their bodies were able to be positioned in relation to each other and the space, and they were able to establish predictable encounters which aided in securing themselves in the company of the other. In doing so, their abilities, knowledge and understanding of the meal also became aligned and stabilised relationally. They could relax, save time and energy in being conscious all the time (Wilk, 2009). But in order for this process of routinisation to be achieved, it must have taken various reflexive interactions to align their bodies, meanings, competences and use of things through time.

However, routines were not static. Couples constantly worked on adjusting their collective routines every time I met them. As I showed how sometimes they buy new gadgets, tried new online recipes, new market services in order to recreate and adjust their collective routines. For example, I showed that Roberto and Barbara had bought a new steamer for their collective healthy project, which made them have to adjust and re-create the newly shaped shopping and eating practices. Other couples like Olivia and Alex, and Ted and Elias had started ordering a veggie box couple of months after their cohabitation, which made them have to readjust their planning and shopping practices. I also showed some couples had extracurricular activities, for example Pia and Max who attended social events, went to salsa classes together, at times one of them stayed back after work, which made them have to readjust routines in terms of timing to accommodate for these other practices as well. Therefore routines were constantly changing and ongoing through time that involved construction in a "liquid" manner through time (Bauman, 2000; 2003).

Routines were also meaningful (Marshall, 2005; O'Dell, 2009; Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). Especially during this transitional period of the couple's lives, creating a dinner routine aided them to materialise and manifest new meanings of unity, compatibility and togetherness in everyday life. As I showed in chapter seven, couples wanted to share, do and eat the dinner together on a daily basis. It gave them meaning of being able to share and enjoy the experience of doing something together every day. Previous studies on family transitions also show how routines aid families to adapt to change in new contexts (Fiese *et al.*, 2006; Budescu and Taylor, 2013), as it helps them create new meanings during these transitional periods (Rania *et al.*, 2015). Especially in newly cohabiting couples, studies show that creating a weekday dinner routine became an important process of living together as it helps them transition to living as a

couple (Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Marshall, 2005; Bove and Sobal, 2006). However, going beyond past studies, here I showed *how* collective routines were born in everyday life. I showed the process of collective routine formation. As it was through creation of synergies in co-performances of meal practices (which included shopping, planning, cooking, eating and disposing of the meal) that practices could be co-enacted regularly, and routines formed.

And since the couples in my study were in a transitional phase of their lives (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998), they too aspired to form a collective routine. Perhaps it gave them a sense of stability and security (Giddens, 1984), and helped them achieve normality to go on with other things in life (Wilk, 2009). As shown, they constantly tried new ways to resolve their conflicts, to form a collective routine that could be shared through time. Conscious effort was also made in order to allocate time to doing dinner together (Southerton, 2009). For example, as I showed in chapter seven, Pia and Max tell me dinner is the only time of the day they have to talk and bond therefore they make food plans to coordinate their schedules and preferences so that they can share and eat the dinner together. Similarly Harry and Emily make an effort to cook and eat together on a regular basis as they tell me dinner is the only time they can spend together. Dinner thus became an important activity in everyday life. Aligning with Marshall and Anderson's (2002) study, routine dinner became "part of the couple's normalisation" into being a couple (p.203). It became an activity where they could develop and reproduce shared meanings on a daily basis, which contributed to their collective identity formation, as I will discuss next.

8.5 Synthesis

8.5.1 New Collective Identity

According to Miller's dialectical theory, as the thesis and anti-thesis interact with each other through time, it results in synthesis, which he discussed as a subject-object co-creation. The subject and object then cannot be separated as one constitutes the other. The subject's identity is formed through engaging with the object, but also the object's meaning is created through the subject's engagement. Figure 7 below is my adaptation to Miller's dialectic theory. I

adapted Miller’s theory and related it to practice theory and collective identity, as I analyze how two subjects interact with the consumption practice together.

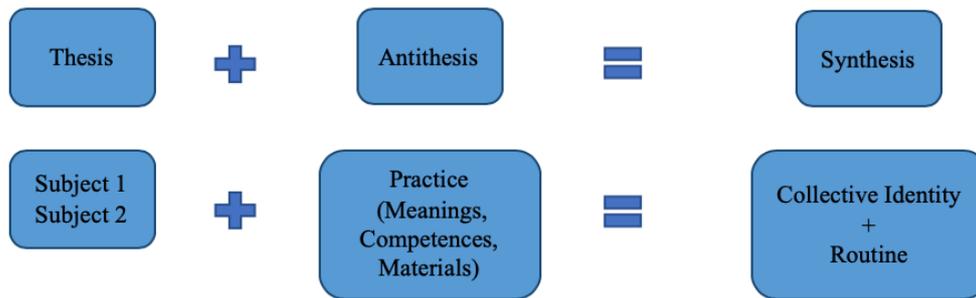


Figure 7: Collective identity as a dialectical process of interaction

In the figure above, I analyzed thesis as subject1-subject2 interaction where two pre-existing identities are interacting with one another. I discussed how each subject carry existing identities to the relationship, but only when subjects interact with one another in the material world, such as during doing the meal together, such pre-existing identities will become visible and will be reflected upon. Antithesis is analyzed as co-engagements in the practice world involving engagements of meanings, competences and materials. I discussed how meanings, competences and materials can synergize together at the collective level over time, and how this lead to collective routine emergence that can be co-performed. As Miller’s dialectic theory suggests how thesis and antithesis interaction leads to a synthesis, I am analyzing how subject1-subject2 interact within the practice, and how this can result in synthesis, which is the collective identity and meanings in routine that emerges through time. I have discussed routines emergence in the previous section. In this section, I will focus on collective identity emergence.

As Miller (1987; 1998; 2005) discusses how identity of the subject emerges through the process of engagement and submersion in the material world, which is a process that requires time, effort, resources and labor to be performed. In doing the meal together, we can also understand the process of co-engagement in consumption practices as a process where collective identity emerges. In engaging in the material world together (shopping, planning, cooking and eating together), couples can come to understand themselves and form their identity as a couple as they are able to develop and express meaningful values of love and care to each other through the practice. Miller (1998) discusses that through doing the practice, new meanings such as that of devotion and sacrifice can be materialized, aiding especially new mothers to re-appropriate themselves. When two actors co-engage in a consumption practice together, new

meanings and new materialities can also start to emerge at the collective level, which changes the subjects through time. New meanings in doing the meal together aided the couples to transition from singlehood to coupledness. This process also requires time, effort and resources to be performed, as it is through time that the couple was able to create a synergy and develop shared meanings. Thus in chapter eight, I showed three ways through which collective identity work of the couple is being born as they co-engage in doing the dinner together, what I called: through symbolization, aspiration and embodiment of routines.

I described symbolization as a process whereby new meaningful values of the couple is being produced and materialized through doing the dinner together. I showed how new meanings such as sharing, caring for each other and compatibility were being materialized and manifested in doing the dinner together. Couples appropriated new meanings to eating and cooking together, which aided them to transition into a collective unit. For example, Milena and Bernard discussed how they changed from when they were single as cooking is now more meaningful for them, as it is a place where their compatibility is being played out. I also showed that through doing the meal together, couples were able to express their “agapic love” (Belk and Coon, 1993, p.393) and appreciation for each other in material form (Miller, 1998), as I showed how Tom and Joanne discussed their appreciation for each other’s labour. Engaging in the meal and meal activities together therefore became a practice where they could develop and materialise their meanings, values and feelings of care and love for each other. Through doing the meal together, they could construct themselves as new subjects of their love, and form their collective identities as a couple.

Embodiment of routines is the collective routines that are being internalized as they are being co-performed. I showed how collective routines emerged in the previous section. In co-performing routines over time, collective identity-work of the couple was being done. As Bottero (2010) argues how in doing a routine, people can have an “embodied identity”, which is a tacit, internalized sense of “knowing how to behave” and do a practice (p.13). In doing a routine together, couples were also internalizing their knowledge of how to do and behave together – “*a type of knowledge that is unarticulated and tied to the senses, movement skills, physical experiences, intuition or implicit rules of thumb*” (Molander, 2016, p.152). Co-performing such embodied knowledge over time has implications for their collective identity work, those that tacit in nature, and can be co-performed without much conscious thought.

Lastly, in doing dinner together, collective aspirations of the couple was also being constructed and materialised. I discussed aspirations as the future goals of the couple (Holttinen, 2014; Dittmar *et al.*, 2014), which I argue is also an aspect of collective identity. Doing the dinner together allowed couples to co-create and co-enact their collective aspirations. For example, I showed how Roberto and Barbara, and Sara and Nick materialised their aspirations of eating healthy during dinner together. However, these aspirations required a conscious construction, as couples needed to build their collective aspirations relationally and reflexively through time. I thus discussed aspirations as an aspect of collective identity where the couple was consciously negotiating and constructing their collective identity project together (Giddens, 1991). As Giddens (1991) discusses how “*self-identity is not something that is just given [..] but something that has to be routinely created*” (p.53). Some aspects of collective identity such as aspirations of the couple also needs to be consciously negotiated and constructed as it is not simply a given. For example, in Roberto and Barbara’s case I showed how they both reflexively talk about consuming healthy, as they both aspire to consume healthy as a couple. Thus, they had recently bought a steamer in order to be able to fulfil this collective project. The steamer thus acts as their investment for the future and as a means to do their project together.

We can thus understand the process of collective identity as an *emergence* as well as a *construction*. It is an emergence because it was only through doing the meal together and through engaging in the practice performance together, that the collective identity was able to develop, materialise and be manifested. Bottero (2010; 2015), through her analysis of engaging in researching family archives, argues how “*identity-work emerges as a consequence of [engagement in] the practice*” (my emphasis Bottero, 2015, p.552). Here too we see how collective identity-work is emerging from consequences of engaging in practices together. It is the co-engagement in symbolic and material aspects of the dinner practice that shapes the meanings, values, aspirations and goals of the couple performing the practice. As couples share their pre-existing meanings, competences and aspirations in the practice during co-performance, such pre-existing elements interact with one another along with the new elements added in the practice. Such interactions therefore recruit both of the practitioners into the new practice as they both adopt the new meanings, competences and aspirations of the shared practice through time. “*Identity is [thus] carried within and steered by social practices*” (Bottero, 2015, p.535). However, as shown there is also reflexive interactions as both actors can knowingly negotiate and perform their collective identities together as well. As Giddens (1991) discusses how in modern societies, “*Self-identity is something that has to be routinely*

created” (p.52). It is “*the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography*” (p.244). Couples also needed to construct their collective biography through time as it is not a given. The meal is therefore a practice and a project that enables collective identity to emerge and be constructed. As the meal is a key practice where couples deliberately and consciously input time, effort, resources into the practice – their collective identity is also constructed as a project. They choose to engage in the consumption practice together, and reflexively construct who they want to be and be seen as (Fischler, 1988; Bugge, 2003). The meal allows new materialities, meanings, competences and aspirations to emerge, be incorporated and enacted. Couples do as well as construct identity together, especially when they are “situated in intersubjectivity” (Bottero, 2010, p.3), that is when they are co-engaged in the doing.

However, what I want to highlight here is that the collective identity that is emerging from co-engaging in practices and reflexive negotiations is a *new collective identity*. It is a new collective identity that has never existed before the cohabitation that resulted from this subject-subject and practice interactions. This was because as the old and new pool of elements interact with each other to create a new collective routine (Section 8.4.2), it results in materialisation of new symbolisations and collective aspirations that has never existed before. For example, new meanings of love and compatibility were being materialized and internalized on a daily basis. New aspirations of consuming healthy together as a couple was being created. Subjects were constructing themselves anew as subjects of love in order to create a unified single world together (Badiou, 2012), and the meal played a key part in allowing such development and materialisation of the love in daily life.

However, taking cue from Miller (1998; 2005), we could say that it was only through engaging in the material world together that they were able to materialize their collective identity – their aspirations, love and care for each other. Couples could only come to understand themselves as subjects of love and advance their relationship with each other through engaging in material practices together, where the practice of the meal plays a key part. According to Bauman (2004), “*To love means being determined to share and blend two biographies*” (p. 63). The meal was a key practice that allowed the couples to merge their existing biographies and materialize their love in everyday life.

This process of co-engagements is thus dialectical in the sense that the material world then could potentially become a means to facilitate their relationship (Miller, 1987). The meal

routine and materialities in the practice then perhaps becomes as important as their relationship to each other. As I discussed how couples tell me doing the dinner together is the only time they have to actually sit down and talk to each other in daily life. Although they may co-engage in other practices together, but the meal played a key part in allowing them to exert their individual and collective identities in daily life. The practice of doing dinner therefore became a mode of realizing the couple's love, compatibility and connection to each other altogether (inspired from Miller, 1987). I also discussed how material objects and market resources played a key part in their construction of the collective practice and thus their identity (e.g. in synergies). And that how lacking material resources such as lacking the dining table can restrict their collective practice formation. Material objects thus can guide and restrict collective identity. As I showed in chapter eight, how new material objects such as the steamer for Barbara and Roberto, and mayonnaise for Sara and Nick, can guide how couples construct and restrict their relational aspirations. Therefore, material objects also gain its relevance, meanings and inalienable status in the practice, as it provides the basis through which the couple's goals can be enacted (Miller, 1987; 1998). However, as the market provides a constant array of new material resources (Connell and Schau, 2013) to incorporate into the new practice formation, collective identity is also constantly changing and is an ongoing process.

8.5.2 Doing Individual Identity in The Collective

According to Giddens, Beck, Beck-Gernsheim and Bauman, with individualization comes a new kind of social change that affects not only the individual but is creeping into other parts of social life as well (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2001a ;Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In a social setting, such as in spousal settings, individuals should have the agency to fulfil their personal projects within the collective as well (Giddens, 1993). According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), this is because in modern societies, personal relationships and marriages are no longer bound by traditional constraints. We increasingly see more same sex, mixed race and live-in relationships, that are not confined to legal and societal obligations. Thus, individuals are not only free to choose their romantic life partners, whom they want to spend their lives with, but every relationship entered into is kept going only for the rewards it can deliver for the individual (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1991).

Since the couples in my study were in a newly cohabiting relationship and apart from one couple none of them were married. Living together was thus not bound by any legal and societal contracts. The negotiation of individual agency in the relationship was therefore manifested to a great extent, as I showed the various conflicts I encountered. Perhaps as Murphy (2000) describes of young unmarried couples, they needed to “test the waters” of their joint domestic life beforehand (p.124). Couples constantly negotiated to develop their individual agency within the relationship (Giddens, 1991), and as I mentioned the meal played a key part in allowing them to do their individual identity too (Valentine, 1999). As in chapter eight, I showed how couples were negotiating their own individual projects while doing the collective meal. In constructing their collective aspirations and goals, couples needed to see the benefit of the project for themselves too in order to make it a collective endeavour.

For example, I showed how in Sara and Nick’s discussions of consuming healthy, Sara constantly shifted between discourses of I and we (e.g. Sara: I prefer to eat healthy... we are eating healthy as you can see) to negotiate what she wants for herself as well as for the collective. Similarly, in Roberto and Barbara’s discussions of buying the steamer, Barbara reflects on what she wants to achieve (Barbara: I usually never eat so much vegetables... I really want to start eating more) while at the same time talking about their collective endeavour (Barbara: and that is why we always want to have vegetables every dinner). In doing so, these individuals show they were not only reflexively negotiating the collective projects, but also negotiating their own identity project within the collective as well. The meal therefore became a site for doing their multiple identities (Valentine, 1999). They needed to persist and prolong their individual identity. They also needed to see the benefit of consuming healthy for themselves in order to make it a collective endeavour. And the project will be maintained as long as it can offer rewards and pleasure for the individual (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2002). In constantly shifting between I and we – of what they want for themselves and for the collective – both their individual and collective identities were being co-performed and negotiated. Identity is therefore in no way static but filled with contradictions and is a fluid process in a continuous making (Bauman, 2001a; 2001b) that involves moving to and from between ‘me’ and ‘we’.

8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed 1. How a collective routine is born from a collective perspective over time. And 2. How collective identity emerges as couples co-performed the practice over time. I used the lens of Daniel Miller's (1987) thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis approach, combined with pre-existing identity theories and practice theory to discuss the process through which collective routines and collective identity emerge through time. Miller (1987; 1998; 2005; 2010) discusses that when the subject engage in practices of consumption, it can result in the subject's identity and materiality (meanings in practices). Going beyond Miller, I showed the process through which two subjects when they co-engage in practices of consumption together, how their collective identity and materiality in routines emerge through time.

The first section of this chapter therefore discussed subject-subject interaction. I discussed that when two subjects interact with one another while doing the meal, their pre-existing materialities in the form of meanings and competences in a practice will first come to the surface of consciousness to be interacted, reflected, communicated and disputed upon. I showed how tacit and often un-reflected upon materialities becomes reflexive in interactions during conflict co-performance. The second section of this chapter then discussed how collective routines were formed as both subjects interact with one another in the material world. I discussed how synergies between practice elements were formed at the collective level as old and new materialities interact with one another through time. I discussed three ways through which synergies were formed, what I called as blending, combining and domineering. I discussed how routines were formed as practices were repeated through time. As Miller (1987; 2001) discussed that when thesis and anti-thesis interact with one another, there results a synthesis – I discussed how couples' interaction within the practice is resulting in their collective identity emergence. The third section of this chapter therefore discussed how collective identities emerge through time as actors co-engage in consumption practices together. I also showed how individual identity work is being performed and negotiated in the process.

Chapter IX

Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

I think my partner and I realized how much we have changed in these past four years when both our younger sisters came to visit and stayed with us for a couple of weeks. Eating habits that we have forgotten about, norms that we used to do, suddenly became visible again as both our siblings reminded us of our past selves – in very different ways. Of course, both my partner and I have lived alone or with flat mates before the cohabitation, but our habits from childhood stayed with us all along. But in these past four years (of my research) we moved from being a newly cohabited couple to I can say a mature couple, but changed each other tremendously. I resonate with all the couples who took part in my study. From fighting about how to serve the meal (Wilk, 2006), how to shop, what to eat, how much to eat, all of these material conflicts were present in my own relationship as well. At times I even use justifications from news sources, cultural magazines or articles I have read to rationalize my way of doing. Some of our conflicts are still ongoing, but for the majority we found a way to compromise, which I feel also contributed to our sense of collectivity through time.

This thesis explored how collective routines are born and in turn how identities emerge from doing routinised practices through time. Throughout the thesis, I answered two main research questions:

- How do collective meal practices emerge over time in newly cohabiting couples?
- How does collective identities emerge through co-performing meal practices over time in newly cohabiting couples?

As mentioned in the introduction, these research questions involved shifting the focus away from asking how do newly cohabited couples negotiate their identity, to analyzing their meal consumption practices and identity emergence from the practice. In doing so, I wanted to be able to analyze not only what people say about themselves, but also how they do in everyday life to understand their identities (Epp and Price, 2008; Molander, 2011). In doing so, I aimed to provide the understanding of identity emergence from a more collective and dynamic perspective, taking into account both actors perspectives and their performance in the practice.

In order to answer these research questions, I adopted a set of ethnographic methods combining participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews (Arnould, 1998; Willis and Trondman, 2002) to analyze the meal consumption co-performances of newly cohabited couples over time. In particular, a 1-year participant observation combined with in-depth semi-structured individual and collective interviews was conducted with 13 newly cohabited couples residing in London. Each couple was visited once a month for around 6 months during the 1-year period. The ethnography entailed observing shopping and attending normal workday evening meals with couples at their homes. The participant observation allowed a perspective in how the practice is being co-performed, whereas the individual and collective interviews allowed to understand the underlying meanings and attitudes about the practice (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). Data was collected through speech-in-action recordings, interview transcripts, fieldnotes and photographs, which were analyzed to identify common themes (Spiggle, 1994).

The first research question (How do collective meal practices emerge) was answered through analyzing the co-performance of dinner consumption practices in newly cohabited couples over time. As mentioned, I approached co-performances in practice as interactions between elements in a practice, comprising of meanings, competences and materials (Shove *et al.*, 2012). The dinner was approached as a set of practices involving planning, shopping, cooking, eating, serving and disposing of the meal (Cappellini *et al.*, 2016). I analyzed how meanings, competences and materials interacted with one another at the collective level over time across the various practices of the meal (planning, shopping, cooking, eating, so on), in order to understand how the collective meal practice emerge over time. Chapters five and six were dedicated to answer this first research question. In chapter five, I showed how elements within a practice conflict and compete with each other at the collective level over time when actors first co-perform the practice together. In chapter six, I showed how elements within the practice can synergize and cooperate together at the collective level over time in order for the practice to be co-performed smoothly together, and how this lead to formation of new collective practices that can be shared. I illustrated three processes through which collective practices were formed, what I called through blending, combining and domineering elements in the practice. I discussed how these collective practices that emerged over time were new practices that had not existed before the cohabitation, as it had its own blended, combined or domineered elements that could be co-performed by the two actors.

The second research question (How does collective identity emerge) was answered through analyzing the meanings, aspirations and co-performances of couples as they co-engage in meal practices together. I analyzed how co-engagement in meal practices over time led to emergence of collective identity. Chapter seven was dedicated to analyzing identity emergence from the practice co-engagements. I illustrated three ways through which collective identity was emerging as actors co-engage in the meal practice together, what I call through: symbolization of doing together, materialization of collective aspiration, and embodiment of routines. I discussed these three as aspects of collective identity work. Symbolization involved development and materialization of new symbolic meanings to aspects of eating and doing the meal together, which contributed to their collective identity emergence. Collective aspiration involved development and materialization of new goals and ideals of the couple while they do the meal together, which contributed to their collective identity projects. Embodiment involved internalizing and embodying knowledge and understandings of doing the meal together in harmony, which also is an aspect of their collective identity. In showing how collective identity emerge through co-engagement in practice, I was able to provide the understanding of identity emergence from a more collective and dynamic perspective, taking into account both actors perspectives and materialities in the practice. But I also showed how there was a level of reflexivity involved. Especially in this new phase of doing their collective identity, there needed to be conscious negotiations of their identities too. As in doing collective identity, individual identities was also being negotiated and compromised in the process. Hence, I discussed that collective identity emerged as a project and a practice as actors do the meal together over time.

9.2 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis contributes to the growing research interest on routine consumption, practices and collective identity. Specifically, my findings theoretically contribute to research in two main disciplines: Sociology and Consumer Culture Theory. In both these disciplines, my research opens up new avenues for understanding embodied routines, materialities and identity formation. In the following section, I will now discuss my theoretical contributions, and its offering to these two fields.

9.2.1 Contributions to Sociology

Since I combined different identity schools of thought (traditionally opposing theories) within sociology, I advance sociological theories on identity and practice in two main ways. First, I showed how collective identity emerges as a dialectical process of interaction between actors and their co-engagements in practices, through combining Miller's (1987), Giddens's (1991) and Shove et al.'s (2012) theories. These sociological theories were traditionally not viewed as compatible as they belonged to different schools of thought. However, I showed how these theories are compatible if we look at the process of collective identity. Second, I showed how collective routines are born through my ethnographic approach, advancing insights on co-enactments within practice theories.

9.2.1.1 Collective Identity Emergence

My first novel theoretical contribution is that I show the process through which collective identity emerges. Collective identity emerges as a dialectical process of interaction between subjects and their co-engagements in practices over time. Inspired by Miller's (1987) dialectical materiality theory, I showed how collective identity of the subjects, and meanings in routines, emerge as a process of co-emergence through time, as one co-creates the other. I discussed how collective identities can only emerge through their co-engagements in practices, but at the same time meanings in routines aid the couples to form their collective identities. In showing this process, I used Miller's (1987) theory and related it to practice theory (Shove *et al.*, 2012; Southerton, 2013; Warde, 2014) and pre-existing identity theories (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) to discuss this process of collective identity-routine emergence. As I discussed how subject-subject reflexive interactions (thesis), are interacting with materialities in doing practices (anti-thesis), and how this process lead to new collective identity synergies. The study therefore theoretically combines existing identity literature with practice theory literature, using Miller's materiality theory as a bridge. These sociological theories were traditionally not accepted as compatible as they belonged to different schools of thought (see Warde, 2005). However, using Miller as a theoretical bridge, I showed that collective identity can emerge as both a practice and a project. It is both a reflexive construction as well as a doing as actors co-engage in materialities together over time.

Moreover, I also advance Miller's dialectical materiality theory by showing the process of *how* collective identity emerges from a collective and dynamic perspective over time, taking into account the various elements involved in a social practice. As mentioned, Miller (1987; 1998)

did not show how the process of synthesis is achieved over time. He also did not analyze identity emergence from a collective perspective, and mainly focused on the mother's accounts. Inspired by practice theory (Shove et al, 2012), I showed how engagement in practices involved engagement in materialities (meanings and competences) in consumption. Synthesis formed through actors' co-engagements in materialities over time.

Within this theoretical contribution, I also showed three processes through which collective identity-work is being formed and performed during doing the meal together, what I describe as: symbolization, collective aspirations and embodiment of collective routines. I discussed that these three processes are aspects of doing collective identity as a practice but also as a project. Therefore, I highlight that collective identity is both an emergence as well as a construction, it is an enactment but also requires conscious reflexive interactions, especially when it is situated in "intersubjectivity" (Bottero, 2010, p.3), that is when it is co-enacted with other agents. As Barnes (2001) highlight, in order to align the practice and have a successful collective accomplishment of practices with other agents, there needs to be explicit interventions and accounts of one's conduct in order to co-ordinate the practice. In order to align, I have shown how couples will talk, justify, and explain their meanings and competences in co-performance. People will make known what they are doing, how they are doing and what it means to them, when they are in co-performance – in order to align their practice and identity.

My findings on how collective identities emerge can therefore contribute to advance the theoretical debates on identity in sociology. Scholars who work within practice theory can understand how identity and meanings in routines emerges through doing practices. And those working with identity can understand how we can take into account a more dynamic approach to understand the phenomenon by focusing on practices. Scholars within both these schools of thought can understand how collective identities emerge, as it involves symbolization, conjoining materialities but also embodiment of collective routines. Miller's work can gain more prominence in both these schools of thought as his work discusses subject-identity but it is compatible with practice theory, allowing us to bridge the gap between identity project and practice.

9.2.1.2 Collective Routines

My second novel theoretical contribution is that I show the process through which a collective routine is born over time as practices are co-performed by two actors. Although most practice theorists acknowledge that practices are collective and shared in nature (Southerton, 2013), most empirical research have focused mainly on the experience of single practitioners who perform an inherently shared social practice (Magaudda, 2011; Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Phipps and Ozanne, 2017). In analyzing the co-performance of the meal practice in newly cohabiting couples, my findings reveal how elements within a practice are key in shaping the practice from individual doers to collective doers. As when actors first attempt to co-perform a practice together, pre-existing elements carried within the actors interact with one another as the practice is co-performed. I showed how elements within the practice conflict and compete with each other at the collective level through time. In this process, tacit elements that are embodied and often unreflected upon suddenly come to the forefront of consciousness to be discussed with the other actor in co-performance. However, elements can also synergize with each other over time, creating a successful practice co-performance. My findings reveal three ways through which synergies between elements of the practice are formed, what I called: blending, combining and domineering. Synergies were aided by new elements, such as new symbolic meanings, competences and material resources provided by the market. In creating a synergy between elements of practice at the collective level, my study revealed how a new collective routine is born.

My findings therefore theoretically contribute to sociological literature on collective routine formation as I showed how elements were key in understanding how practices move from individual to collective performers. As discussed most practice theorists did not look at collective engagements in practices. In analysing the process, I showed how actors are doing their embodied cultural capital and materialities in the everyday meal. My study can be applied to understand how two people engage in social practices in any context. For example, in a workplace, when two actors co-perform any team task together, their existing elements of meanings, competences and materiality may also interact with one another at the collective level. And in order to carry out the practice together successfully, there could also be a more professional competence that dominates, or the skills and values could be taught and learnt to be blended, resulting in new practices. Hence, when two people carry out the same practice together over time, existing meanings, norms, understandings, competences, knowledge, and materiality in a practice can be blended, combined, dominated and/or removed, perhaps also

through the aid of new elements (market tools, techniques). I show how elements in a practice play an important role in collective routine formation using a practice theory approach.

9.2.2 Contributions to Consumer Culture Theory

Although the contributions to sociology also apply to consumer culture theory, I believe my thesis specifically advances theories on identity within CCT in two main ways. First, existing literature rarely take into account a collective perspective when analysing identity and consumption. I showed how we can take a more collective and dynamic perspective into understanding consumption and identity through taking a practice theory approach. Second, I contribute to the growing literature on tensions in consumer transitional period and how consumption aids but also creates a problem in these periods.

9.2.2.1 Identity Transition from a Collective Perspective

My third theoretical contribution is that I showed how individual and collective identity emerges from a collective perspective over time as actors do the meal together. Studies in consumer research have highlighted how consumption plays a role in identity transitions, as it can aid transitions but it can also cause tensions and anxiety (Voice Group, 2010). However, previous studies analysing consumer identity transitions have mostly concentrated on individual experiences of change. For example, the mothers' transition (Hogg *et al.*, 2003; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Ogle *et al.*, 2013), the fathers' transition (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006; Bettany *et al.*, 2014) or uni-laterally interviewing couples separately to analyse their transition experiences (Kemmer *et al.*, 1998; Marshall and Anderson, 2002). In this research, I showed how consumption played a role in identity transition on a collective level and from a collective perspective.

I was able to provide an understanding of identity emergence from a more collective perspective, taking into account both partners perspectives as well as their involvement with material objects through taking a practice theoretical approach. Analysing the elements of practice allowed me to analyse interactions of materialities, embodied competences, cultural capitals and values at the collective level. As I analysed how two actors were doing one practice at the same time, and narrating the stories about the same practice over time; I thus was able to

gain an understanding of identity change and emergence from practice via a collective perspective, contributing to identity transition literature.

9.2.2.2 Tensions in Transition

This research took place in a context where there is ongoing identity transition, and negotiation of consumption taking place. As the Voice Group (2010) contends, we should not ignore the problematic aspects of consumption as well especially during transitional periods when people are moving into a new role. In analysing conflicts co-performance, I also showed how tensions can arise as two actors transition together to a new role. I showed how consumption of food especially plays an integral role in causing the tensions and disputes, but at the same time, consumption can aid the couple's transition into their new identity as a couple. Thus following cue from previous studies (Voice Group, 2010; Voice Group, 2013; Theodorou and Spyrou, 2013; Banister and Hogg, 2004), as people consume products and services that positively contribute to their self-identity project, consumption can also be a source of conflict and tensions. However, I analysed this process of conflicts from a *collective perspective over time*.

In analysing how conflicts were repeated through time, I showed how previously existing identities and materialities, that were tacit, engrained and mostly un-reflected upon suddenly became visible (Phipps and Ozanne, 2017) as each person were forced to contemplate the way they do things and how is it different to the other person. Since each person carry pre-existing identities to the relationship (Wilk, 2006), when in interaction with the other, such tacit materialities are often questioned by the other actor in the co-performance. What was previously a practical understanding (Giddens, 1984) now has to be articulated, reasoned, communicated and disputed in action as it encounters the other contradictory understanding. And people often use justifications from science and culture to legitimize their particular ways of doing, and 'win' the episodic debate. Such basic justifications were employed to deal with tensions in everyday life. My findings can therefore contribute to CCT literature on understanding conflicts in collective doings of practices, and tensions in collective transition from a collective perspective over time.

9.3 Methodological Contribution

This research also has a novel methodological contribution in analyzing couples over time. Inspired by Cappellini *et al.*'s (2016) analysis of the meal as comprising of shopping, cooking, eating, disposing; I observed these various practices at different times and visits in a longitudinal approach. Since I observed the couples over time, I had to use an approach that would keep the interest of the couples going. I therefore broke down the various practices of the meal into smaller tasks over time. Therefore, I analyzed various practices several times over the six months. In breaking down the tasks into smaller sets, I was able to prolong the relationship and interest of the couples, which allowed me to observe change over time (O'Reilly, 2012). It allowed me to establish trust and friendship (Oakley, 2016) as the study progressed.

Moreover, in employing both observations and interviews to analyse consumer doings, I was able to provide a more complex account of analysing consumption doings in order to analyse identity during transitional periods. I provided consumer accounts of doing from their own perspectives as well as my accounts of their doings over time. Previous studies analysing consumer practices during their transitional period have mainly employed interview methods to analyse changing accounts of consumption (Marshall and Anderson, 2002; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006), and there is less consideration of the ethnographer's accounts of seeing consumption in transition over time. In observing consumption negotiations in action, I was able to analyse the interactions between the couple over time (Khanijou and Pirani, 2020).

9.4 Limitations

9.4.1 Empirical limitation

The first limitation is perhaps the practice studied. I have studied the meal practice and made dinner practices the main focus of my analysis. However, I acknowledge that there may be other practices going on in the evening that couples do together on a daily basis. For example, many couples have revealed they would exercise in the gym together before coming home for dinner. Other couples would light a candle, do the laundry or (one person) take a shower while the meal is going on, but I had concentrated only on the meal. Hence, in focusing on the dinner, I thus perhaps neglected other practices that couples engage in everyday together. As exercising together or doing the laundry could also play a key role in understanding how collective

practices and identities come to be formed. The meal as a practice has its own sets of meanings, competences and materialities that couples carry with them to the collective (Wilk, 2010; Shove *et al.*, 2012). In other practices such as laundry or exercise, partners would also carry their own set of materialities, embodied competences and meanings in the practice (Warde, 2005), which may be in tandem with each other. A person who is competent in doing the meal may be an amateur in exercising and therefore may negotiate the practice in a different way.

9.4.2 Methodological limitation

The second limitation is perhaps the data itself. Since I recruited couples based on my social circle, I mostly recruited a particular sample with a particular social class profile. As shown in my methods section, all the couples were middle class with all of them having a University degree, and they were all in the age range of 25-35 years. Majority of the men and women who took part in my study was also in professional jobs. Hence, I acknowledge my sampling may be a potential source of bias, and had I analysed couples in a different age group and not living in London, perhaps it would have yielded different results. Future research could therefore analyse working class couples, older couples or re-married couples, and compare the process of collective identity and collective practice emergence. Older newly cohabiting couples for example may reveal lesser verbal conflicts, and there may be less implications of power within the relationship. In researching young couples, I could have also concentrated on other aspects of doing the meal. My research questions could have focused on other aspects such as power and gender relations. Although I did encounter power and gender implications in my findings, and at some points they were analysed, however, I could have concentrated on those aspects rather than collective identity emergence.

Another limitation refers to the research design. Since I observed the couples various times over a period of 6 to 8 months, their practices could have changed drastically from one month to the next. Maybe I could have observed them continuously for 1 week within their first month of cohabitation, and then another week in three months, which could have provided different insights. As observing couples continuously for a week could reveal the back-stage (Goffman, 1959) performances to a greater extent. I could have also conducted interviews and observations before the cohabitation commenced in order to compare their identity transition.

9.5 Areas for future research

Future research could analyse other consumption practices that couples do together on a daily basis. As mentioned, there were other consumption practices going on during the evening, but I had concentrated on the practice of the everyday dinner. Building on my theoretical revelation, in the future I could analyse other practices couples co-engage in to understand their collective practice and identity emergence from the practice. For example, I could analyse furniture consumption, laundry, media or even technological consumption. As from my own experience, my partner and me had to negotiate our space in the house, but also our purchase of furniture in the flat. We also binge watch Netflix together and often fight about what is a 'good' series to watch. In doing so over time, I have realised we both have adapted our preferences, our values and knowledge to a great extent. Both my partner and me also recently bought a Fitbit as we exercise in the gym together. We often share, track and compete on our health and 'steps' on a daily basis. The app also allows us to track and share our calorie intakes. Hence, future research could focus on other practices of consumption couples do together, and how the collective materiality is formed in various contexts.

Gender, culture and power relations were also concepts I could have investigated more on. As shown, there was gender and cultural differences in doing meanings, competences and materialities of the meal. There was power imbalances in negotiating the meal practices. Future research could concentrate on these aspects and how elements within practices play a role in creating the disparity in gender and power imbalances between couples. Many men were more involved in the household tasks, and we see a shift in how the roles are being divided. Future research could focus on understanding these societal shifts from a practice perspective. I could have also immersed in a historic and media analysis of gender relations in the UK, and how this has changed in the past decades. Couple practices are carried out under the conditions of larger institution dynamics, such as the structural conditions shaping young couples' lives. Future work can analyse these institutional dynamics through taking into account the historic and media analysis of changing practice relations in society. For example, I could analyse how a couple practice (e.g. gyming together) has changed historically and in media representations in the past decades, and use that as a context of my ethnographic study.

Another area of research that I could develop in the future is the role of brands in the construction of a collective identity. As many couples in my study bring brand meanings and

knowledge into their relationship, these can be sources of conflicts, negotiations and discussions. I could potentially analyse how collective brand materialities are formed and how this leads to construction of their collective identities. As sometimes old brands from one partner is abandoned, and new brands are being added to aid in their collective doings. Brands also need to be taught and learnt, negotiated, and appropriated in their everyday practice. In one of the cases for example, brand competences play as important role as brand meanings and attachments for the couple. Hence, future work could involve the role of brands in negotiations, conflicts and collective identity formation.

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Appendix A: Self-Assessed Ethics Form



Ethics Self Assessment

Your answers indicate that you do not need ethical approval. If your research includes use of animals as research subjects, you will have been emailed separate guidance which must be followed before you begin your research. Should the circumstances of your research alter in any way please revisit this process to validate your project.

Applicant details

Declaration

By clicking the 'submit form' button, I declare that the questions above have been answered truthfully and to the best of my knowledge and belief, and that I take full responsibility for these responses. I undertake to observe ethical principles throughout the research project and to report any changes that affect the ethics of the project to the University Research Ethics Committee for review.

Project type: Royal Holloway postgraduate research project/grant
Name: Khanijou, Ratna (2013)
Email: MYVB064@live.rhul.ac.uk
Academic supervisor: Sameer Hosany, Benedetta Cappellini
Department: Management
Title of research project or grant: Identity negotiation and construction in newly formed couples through food consumption practices
Email address of Academic Supervisor:
Funding Body Category: No external funder
Funding Body:

Information about the Research Project

Will the research project involve the use of human participants or human tissue (with or without their knowledge or consent at the time)?, No

Are the results of the research project likely to expose any person or community to physical or psychological harm?, No

Will the research project involve the use of animals as research subjects?, No

Will you have access to personal information that allows you to identify individuals or company confidential information (that is not covered by confidentiality terms within an agreement or by a separate confidentiality agreement)?, No

Does the conduct of the research project present a significant risk to the environment or society?, No

Are there any other ethical issues raised by this research project that in the opinion of the PI require further ethical review?, No

Does the PI believe that the results of this research could reasonably lead to legal action or negative press coverage, for which the PI would require University support?, No

Certificate produced for user ID MYVB064

Certificate dated 2/20/2017 7:05:26 PM

Appendix B: Information Sheet and Consent Form

What's on your plate? Food negotiation practices in newly cohabited couples

Dear couples,

I would like to invite you both to take part in my PhD study. Before you decide, I will give you an overview of the study and what it would involve for you both. Please take time to read through the following information. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at Ratna.Khanijou.2013@live.rhul.ac.uk.

Purpose of the study:

The research is for my PhD thesis that I'm undertaking at Royal Holloway University of London. It aims to understand how newly cohabited couples negotiate their everyday meal consumption practices to form a collective consumption routine. Since you both have recently moved in together within the last 6 months, you very well fit in with my research agenda.

What do you have to do?

I will be conducting ethnographic interviews for a period of 6 months to understand how your food negotiations are adapted over time. Hence, I will meet you both once a month in these 6 months and conduct different activities such as interviewing you at a place of your convenience, seeing how you shop and plan meals, as well as having a meal at your house. I've created a table below as a guideline of the activities that will be conducted.

Interview/observation	Activities
1 st visit (1-2 hours)	Couple interview: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At a coffee shop or at your home• Answer any questions you may have about the study
2 nd visit (2 hours)	Shopping <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I'll go shopping with you at your local supermarket at your normal time. Just tell me a day in advance.• After the shopping trip, I will see how you store your food
3 rd visit (3-4 hours)	Dinner <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I'll see how to plan and prepare your dinner on a weekday evening. The meal should be anything you normally have on a weekday.• I can have dinner with you both if its ok
4 th visit (2 hours)	Individual interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I will conduct individual interview with you both separately
5 th visit (1-2 hours)	Shopping again <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repeat what we did in 2nd month
6 th visit (3-4 hours)	Dinner again <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repeat what we did in 3rd month

Throughout the process, I will record our conversations through audio recording. I will occasionally take pictures of your practices and your meals. All the interviews, audio

recordings, and pictures will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. I have received ethical approval from my University Ethics Committee to conduct this research. All the information you provide may be used for publishing, however names will be changed and pictures will be blurred so that you cannot be identified.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw your participation at any time during the research process. This research project is funded by Royal Holloway University of London. If you have any concern about any aspect of this study, you can email me at Ratna.Khanijou.2013@live.rhul.ac.uk or the RHUL School of Management at management-school@royalholloway.ac.uk.

Appendix C: Fieldnotes

Participants: Tom and Joanne (name changed)

Date: 3rd April 2017

Task: Shopping observation

Location: Their local supermarket, South London

Time: 16:30 - 18:30

Tom messaged me yesterday if I wanted to go shopping with them. I met them at Waitrose at 4:30pm. They had saved me their shopping list of the past two weeks which he gave to me. Their shopping list is a combined format of their timetable, the meals and the ingredients they need to buy. He explains to me again how they sit down every week to plan for the week together. They then write the meal plan on a weekly food planner notepad, which they can tear off and carry with them to the supermarket every week. He was holding the big sheet of paper (the list) in his hand, which he said he will give it to me next time I meet them. They write the name of the dishes, but also the ingredients. I see how some ingredients have been crossed out and he tells me they check the cupboard before, and if they already have it they cross it out.

We spent some time outside the supermarket as he was explaining me the timetable, and what their plans were for this week. As we enter the supermarket, Tom is the one who carries the trolley, while Joanne holds up the list. She directs and guide them on what to buy based on what is on the list, and then ticks it off once its already in the trolley basket. At times, she says they need 'this, this and this', and so they both leave the trolley and go on their separate ways to pick up the items, which I think are the ones they want. I stuck with Joanne because she had the list. She tells me they drink different types of milk as she is intolerant to cow's milk, and he loves to drink milk. So she picks up soy milk for herself, and then 2 big gallons of cow's milk for him. It seemed like she didn't really need to think much about which milk to choose, but just got separate ones for them both, as she already knows which soy milk she liked and which milk he likes.

He comes back carrying a big Toblerone cake to add in the trolley and says to her 'it's only 3 pounds and you know how much I love it'. It seemed like she was going to say something but didn't. She turns to me and just rolled her eyes. He makes an excuse saying the cake is good for energy as it has a lot of calories. They then change the topic and continue shopping. For ingredients on the shopping list, they pick up things quite fast, like the fruits and vegetables. When they could not decide which one to buy, she mostly lets him decide on what to buy. Like when it came to the beans, she says they need butter beans and baked beans. They take a while to decide on which bean in which sauce. As they tell me it's something they are still trying to make – mixing both types of beans to make baked beans with potatoes. They both have opinions on what they can do to make it tastier and cheaper. It was a lot of going back on forth on ideas. But in the end, she lets him decide on which one he likes.

After they have finished their shopping for the week, they move on to the snacks and treats section. Here they spend the most time. They don't need a list for that. Here they both need to negotiate a lot more. They both pick up bars of chocolate for themselves. But Joanne tells me she will buy dark chocolate so that he doesn't steal hers. Tom had wandered off to get more treats for himself. He brought rocky chocolate tubs, and he talks about the calories of it and how he needs to have high sugar intake when he is on intense sport. He tells her the price, and she just looks at me and laughs, as if she is amused at his ways, or trying to show me that she is amused. But she lets him have it his way. He puts it in the trolley and wanders off for some more snacks. She just buys one thing for herself, dark chocolate and doesn't ask him for his opinion, but just puts it in the trolley and moves on. Tom comes back with chorizo snacks, energy bars, pork chips, but then also complains how he feels there isn't a lot of variety in this supermarket.

They finished their shopping. They both had bought backpacks to add the food items in. As they tell me it is a long walk home and they don't want to carry bags in their hands. I walk with them to their house. On the way, Tom takes out the chorizo snacks from his pocket and starts to eat them. He didn't ask Joanne if she wanted a share but maybe he knows she didn't like meat snacks, as she had told me last time she likes vegan meals. They talk to me about their sports and their flat mates while on the way. I helped them carry one of the bags. We reach their house. Their house was next to the main road, and you could hear the noise of cars passing by. They were on the first floor, which had 3 bedrooms and a living room. They had one bedroom and the other bedrooms were taken by other people. The kitchen was also communal. The kitchen was filled with cups and plates on the sink. The waste bin was full. There were plates on the kitchen tops. They showed me around their kitchen, fridges, cupboards, and also their bedroom. Their room was filled with clothes lying around. But the bed was made and there was a work desk and a tv in the room [..]

Participants: Vanna and Simon (name changed)

Date: 18th June 2017

Task: Shopping observation

Location: Their local supermarket, South West London

Time: 11:00 am – 14:00 pm

I met Vanna and Simon in the supermarket at 11 am. They didn't have any list, but tell me normally they just go by intuition. As they both love cooking and love to try new foods, so they are just going to go look inside the supermarket to see what's available. Simon said they want to make fish barbecue for lunch today as it is a weekend and its quite a good weather to stay outside. They had drove to the supermarket and so they are able to carry lots of things back. I asked how did they decide on the fish barbecue, but he says it's a random plan.

As we enter the supermarket, the first thing they did was go to the fish counter. Their supermarket had a fresh seafood counter. They tell me they will see what's available first then decide what they will make with the barbecue. There was seabass and salmon available that day, but also squid and prawns. He says he had wanted sword fish, but there isn't any. So then she says maybe salmon? And she asks him to google recipes with salmon. But then she sees the salmon is not so clean as it has debris [white stuff], and asks if he wants sea bass instead. They had quite a negotiation in front of the seafood counter on what to buy. There was a queue but they let other people pass as they agree on which fish to buy. In the end they settle with sea bass – 2 pieces of whole sea bass but then Vanna asks if the salesperson could take out the insides. The person said to come back in 10 mins. She then asks if he wants squid as well as there was only one portion left. They can put it on skewers she said. He nods no and so they didn't take it.

There was the normal meat counter [the packaged shelf] beside the fresh seafood counter. There Simon checks for his sword fish, but they didn't have any as well. So he bought a pork steak for himself, as he says he needs more meat, only fish is not enough. As he was choosing red meat for himself, Vanna was still at the seafood counter. She sees there is mussels as well and asks him if they should get it. Its good on the grill, she says. They weren't sure of the price, and so asks the counter to check it, which then they took the mussels. He then tells her lets buy some more meat from the shelf he was looking at, to freeze. She argues no it won't be fresh. But he argues it isn't fresh anyway, as the supermarket also freezes. They had a bit of an argument as they tell each other off about their ideas of freezing and not freezing. It didn't seem like they were angry at each other though, but it was more like playful argument.

Appendix D: Interview guides

Joint interviews:

1. Could you start off by telling me something about yourselves, your background?
 - Age
 - Education
 - Job
 - Where were you born and previous places you have lived
2. Can you tell me something about your relationship?
 - How did you meet?
 - How long did you go out before moving in together?
 - How long have you been living together?
 - What do you like about each other?
3. Can you describe to me a typical day of the week, how do you normally spend your time during the week? (ask for weekend also)
 - Favorite activities you do together
 - At home/out of home
4. How is the housework being divided?
 - How did you decide on this division of task?
 - Who tends to do what around the house?
5. How is food organized around the house?
 - How did you decide on this division of task? Can you give me an example?
6. What did you cook last night?
 - Who cooked it?
 - Who decided it?
 - How do you decide what will be cooked?
 - Can you describe to me the events of yesterday's meal?
7. How often do you have a meal together?
 - When? What time is dinner?
 - How do you decide this? Who decides it?
8. How do you plan what will be made for dinner?
 - What planning system do you have? Who does it? Why?
 - Can you give an example? For last night/this week's dinner, how did you plan?
 - How do you both feel about this arrangement?
9. How is grocery shopping done?
 - How did you decide on this arrangement?
 - Where do you shop?
 - How often?
 - What time of the week?
 - Do you shop together or separately?
 - Who does the shopping?
 - Who decides what to buy?
 - Who pays for the shopping?
 - Can you give describe to me your shopping trip for this week?
 - How do you feel about this arrangement?
10. How is the preparation done? (chopping vegetables, setting the table)

- How did you decide on this division of task?
 - Who does it?
 - Who decides who will do the preparation?
 - How do you both feel about this arrangement?
11. Can you tell me a bit more on how is the cooking normally done?
- How did you decide on this division of task?
 - Do both of you know how to cook?
 - Do you like to cook?
 - Do you cook together or separately?
 - How often?
 - Do you have a system of who cooks when? (if both cooks)
 - Who decides on what and when to cook?
 - Is there a difference between when you cook or when your partner cook? How? Why?
 - How do you both feel about this arrangement?
12. How is eating done? Where do you both normally eat on a normal day (eg, couch, table)? Why?
- How did you decide this?
 - How important is eating dinner together?
13. How is the cleaning done? How did you decide this?
- Who washes the dishes? How often?
 - Who clears the table? How often?
 - What do you do with leftovers? Who eats it?
 - How do you feel about this?
 - Can you give me example?

Individual interviews:

1. Were you living alone before moving in together or with other people (eg, parents, flatmates)?
 - When did you move out?
 - Have you ever lived in a lived-in relationship before?
 - Was it different? How?
2. Would you say you have changed after moving in with him/her? How?
 - In what ways?
 - Can you give me an example?
 - Why do you think this is so?
 - How do you feel about that?
3. Are there some foods you miss eating and wish you could?
 - What foods? Why? Can you give me an example?
 - How often you used to eat before living together?
 - Why do you think you can't eat it now?
 - How do you feel about not being able to eat it?
4. Are there any foods that you eat now which you did not use to eat before?
 - What foods? Can you give me an example?
 - When did you first try it?
 - How often do you eat it now?
 - Why do you eat it now?
 - How do you feel about it?
5. What foods do you enjoy eating/cooking the most when you are alone?
 - Why? Can you give me an example?
 - How often do you do that?
 - Would you prefer to do it more/less often? Why?
 - How do you feel about it?
6. What foods do you enjoy eating/cooking the most when you are with your partner?
 - Why? Can you give me an example of the last time?
 - How often do you do that?
 - Would you prefer to do it more/less often? Why?
7. Do you ever get bored with what you cook/eat together? How do you decide what will be taken out of the menu? Or added in the menu?
 - What? Can you give me an example?
 - Why?
8. Who tends to do the meal shopping/preparing/cooking/disposing of the food on a normal day? (go through each one)
 - How do you divide the tasks? Why?
 - Can you give me an example?
 - Do any of you do more things? How? Why?
 - Do you share duties? How?
 - Do you wish anything could be different? Why?
 - How do you feel about this arrangement?
9. How do you feel about your partner's eating habits?
 - What do you like about his eating habits?
 - What do you not like? Can you give me an example?

- When was the last time he made something you didn't like? What happened? What did you do?
 - Are there any things you would not talk about with him of his food habits? Eg?
10. What about disagreements?
- Do you fight about food?
 - How often? Why?
 - What is the cause of the disagreement mostly?
 - What do you do about it?
 - Would you confront him? How?
 - Who gets the final say in the disagreement?
 - Can you give me an example?
 - When was the last time you had an argument about what to cook?
 - How did it happened?
 - Can you tell me the story of what happened?
 - How do you feel about it?

Appendix E: Open Coding

Competition
leftovers
Food plus
started
leftovers.
→ Mom taught

Competition
leftovers
the toberone cake
he bought.
individual beans

Negotiation
Can we use this?
Need to share ingredients

Competition
with
gender? (can't promise he doesn't like, I check)
I have to
jazz baked
beans, b/c
he doesn't
like them

Competition
in using
leftovers.
Save money.

Negotiation

Yeah, he is going to be (so spoilt so?). You know when they say never bring someone out when they're hungry. He's never got that. He's always like, yeah, it's good. And then like oh my god, I'm really hungry.. But I guess we realised and just sort of sat down and said we spending too much money on food and then I'd end up spending all of Sunday I came back from work using up waste. Cus my mom has always taught me, you should never have waste, like you have to use up everything. So like she does or my dad would make up a soup or stir fries. (picks up 4 gallons of milk) Oh yeah, drinks a lot of milk.

Me: (astonished) Wow

Yes, likes milk.

Talk about this (puts in toberone cake in the basket) It's only 3 pounds and you know how much I love it.

(Was going to say something but just got cut and shut)

Yes.... Ummm, anyway (to me)

It's really dense. It's really fine calories. And it's good for energy.

I've got your milk already... what else are you looking at?

Well, I was looking at that (looking at the milk put in, and the milk on the shelf)

The chocolate one? They haven't got the chocolate one. really wants try the chocolate almond milk, cus apparently it's really great.

So we not drink a lot of milk but we do drink a lot of dairy alternatives as well, because doesn't..

Because I don't eat (dairy).. I try not to eat any dairy.. cus it makes my skin clear up really badly.. and since the past couple of weeks I keep finding stuff that accidentally got it in, which has been quite annoying to be fair. Umm, (we reach the canned section, to) we need butter beans and baked beans (they start looking through the shelves)

Me: So you said this one you made it only once before?

I made this one this week because we had loads of leftovers.

(to) Can we use kidney beans in chilli sauce?

Yeah, we can use kidney beans in chilli sauce. That'll be quite nice. (he puts it in the trolley and she continues talking with me) I have this thing where I literally have this in the store cupboard, and this is what I need to use up (I have this so many in the store cupboard, and need to use it up)

you know what I mean, it's 45p so it's probably cheaper than. so they got umm cannellini beans as well.

Do you want me to quickly check, do you want me to do a quick price comparison?

yeah that would make more sense. (turns to me) So this one I made, so (this week) we'll have jacket potatoes and baked beans. But he doesn't like baked beans on their own, so I'll have to like Jazz them up. [laughs] Because he hates baked beans.

We can just get loads of beans (to)

Oh no because I can make the same thing but cheaper, because I've got all those stuff in the cupboard. So I've got all those tinned tomatoes that we need to use up. So instead of running out soon. We'd end up eating tins. (he wanted to buy a more expensive version, and she says she has it in the cupboard, can make it for cheaper, and he was like oh, screw that, but she says no and he listens).

Oh, screw that. Why don't we just get the central (essential) waitrose ones. That's 1.25. (pre made)

Cus I never really use them anyway.

Yeah, but we use them when we have beans.

Appendix F: Creation of Subcategories

<p>Adoption of new elements - transferring elements to re-align a synergy</p> <p>Transferring Meanings</p>	<p>Roberto & Barbara - freezing. Transfer meanings of convenience to each other: Making sauces in batches to freeze (her idea). Like her family used to freeze sauce and meats. Or buying more things to pan fry in the oven when they went shopping together. When they go shopping together, they always try something new. Eg. more ready made meals (his idea). There is more variety here than in Italy, she being a new comer adopted his way.</p> <p>Convenience can also mean - adoption of already chopped veggies for quick stir frys. They buy stir frys because it's less amount, more diverse variety and less waste (Giovanni). Maybe more of a merging?</p> <p>Roberto: I'm not used to it freezing. The year I lived here I almost never froze. Since I know something was going to go bad because I was going out for the week, but I wouldn't eat it. I had to freeze. And so sometimes I would eat the same meal, date in a row to finish the portion. Because everything you buy here is mainly for 2 people. But now that we are together we already have more stuff. So I would say it wasn't in my mind to freeze before but to freeze. Actually I think it's convenient now to buy something that you want to try but have, without having to cook to freeze the day.</p> <p>Franco: Because when I was living at home with my parents, it was very common to freeze things, from meat, vegetables to even prepared food. Because it could be useful to have it when you need it. But now, we don't freeze because when we don't have time, it's more convenient. So we always have the freezer full of things. For example, sauce to prepare the pasta. Because some sauces take long to cook [...] so you just prepare pasta in a fast way. Things like lasagna, or pizza sauce. We usually have those prepared and put in the freezer. So it's convenient to have it prepared. And this is why when I came here, I just told him, why don't you freeze the things, you don't need to eat something for 5 or 6 days. And if you don't like, because he usually bought chicken.</p> <p>Roberto: It's usually 2 portions most of the time. Because that's how they sell it here, something in 2 portions. Some double portions for new fish, especially on Fridays. But now we are 3 people, so whenever we have something we can finish it in one week. There are no leftovers in that case. And we don't have to freeze. Like when we are making the sauce, let's make more. So we plan.</p> <p>Franco: And we are planning to cook and bring pasta with us for lunch on work days, and so unfreeze the sauce and put it together with the pasta would be very fast.</p>	<p>Tom & Joanne - Transferring ethical meanings:</p> <p>Tom: you got the weird ones again? (to Joanne)</p> <p>Joanne: they are not weird, they just don't match the food standards, but they are hygiene food.</p> <p>Tom: I don't wanna blend them twice.</p> <p>Me: Why do you say this is weird?</p> <p>Joanne: so these are... or they are bruised, but they are not... they are not meant to be sold as a perfect apple</p> <p>Tom: So they are like malformed. They are supposed to be malformed, but they are not usually that bad. This is actually, blemishes on the skin, they sell them for less because they're... Joanne: You get more because it's cheaper and the farmers don't raise out</p>	<p>Olivia & Alex - transferring meanings of ethical. Veggie Olivia:</p> <p>Olivia: I think the main motive was we realized that we it's really made an improvement. But also from a packa, packaging and it's all bio degradable and the box can be Alex. And the vegetables have zero kilometers so they i Olivia: [and] from the box it's completely organic [...] we Alex: Yeah the tomatoes in the box are completely dirty Olivia: And besides, you know for a fact that you can't [...] Olivia: And you know the potatoes before washing them? Olivia: Look, they still have dirt around them, so this is it</p>
<p>New materials are adopted</p>	<p>Pia & Max: Snacking - new practice/materials adopted to merge their eating timings</p> <p>Pia: We've both shifted slightly [...] Max: Yeah exactly. A bit more towards Pia. I tend to eat much more for dinner [how] for example [...] [later]</p> <p>Max: yeah, so for example, just when she gets home at 5:30 and say 'oh I want to eat something now', she can have a small snack and she can wait for 6:30 and then we can eat dinner together. We eat between 6 and 7. For me, it's not a problem.</p> <p>Pia: Tomatoes in the fridge [...] Depends how much of the snack I've had. If I've had a big snack, it can even wait till half past [...] Max: I don't feel like eating too much in the evening, so I can shift the time easily [...] For me it's not much of a problem to anticipate [dinner]</p> <p>Pia: For me, after 5:30 my brain is like 'food, food, food'</p> <p>Max: So it's like a small snack maybe, in the afternoon when I'm hungry [The grapes are snacks he takes to lunch for work [...]]</p> <p>Max: What I think she taught me is how to do this [as he washes the grapes, plucks them from the stems and keeps them in a bowl]. So before, I will just take out a few grapes, wash them and put them in a small plastic box and take them to work in the morning. She said no, do them all at once. So [now] I prepare everything and then put in small boxes... She forced me, to not force but convinced me to do this job all the time.</p>	<p>Roberto and Barbara - new steamer. She used to do it before with her family, she suggested the idea, and he agreed because he also wants healthy food. So this new gadget is accepted when there is similar meaning and competence in using it. Also new stir fry mixes/works combined with market competence, and meaning of healthy - helps them create new practice of cooking.</p> <p>Roberto: I think we were mostly on the same page. Maybe a little bit of discussion about, 'but do we need something too small, isn't it better to get something a bit bigger?' And in the end, we figured it out. So even to this day, after that, we just brought one more part, to make sauce for more people. And the work of course. But there hasn't been any other addition, because in the end I was a good idea.</p> <p>Barbara: No, even because it's like we're having different things for the house. So even pots or something like that, so if one of us has a good idea, for example, when I came here, and he brought the grill pan.</p> <p>Roberto: Ah yeah, the one with the grill. Like instead of the normal fry pan.</p> <p>Barbara: When one of us has an idea of buying something for the house for the other, it's always good.</p> <p>Steamer also helped him transfer meaning of healthy food to her. She started to eat more vegetables, which she didn't before.</p> <p>Roberto: Today we started some and stop after the first one in the steamer. Like that the steamer, the one she brought. The steamer we simply dump the things in and it works it's magic. I'm definitely happy with the choice.</p> <p>Barbara: Since we want to have vegetables in every dinner, it's a commitment was to mix things up, so one day stir fry, one day, one day steams. So every day we change, and it's nice different.</p> <p>They then have fish cakes with steamer.</p> <p>Roberto: you want more fish cakes? Well to be a new and since we think the fish pie, we've been getting them fairly regularly. We have them with steamed vegetables. It's fairly easy to make, you just put them in the oven and put on the steamer, you forget about everything for half an hour and it's ready, to be honest. even though that might not be too healthy.</p> <p>I'm not going to tell the other person how to do things: [Barbara: I recently made mashed potatoes. And I remember that like he boiled the potatoes and then I wanted to help and I started peeling the potatoes.]</p>	<p>Ted & Elia: Veggie box. New market service helps their transition from meat to veggie.</p> <p>Elia: Most of the time, since I usually work earlier than him, I usually that we talk about what he has during breakfast. I usually have a bit more of Elia: Usually during the morning we discuss, he says 'oh tomorrow I'll go to have that, and then we go out on Wednesday so we don't need anything. [...] We don't plan it day by day. But we just say as we want to have A, B, C, D, when we do that. It's normally something that we know how to make. [...] We just buy the things we need for the week, but then I don't need some milk. And we already have the vegetable, and we can use the one what is Elia: the things go together at the last one, because it's the morning and they want to prepare grocery shop, it's probably myself alone, but when [...] Elia: We do the list over a couple of days. Maybe we check the fridge (let's write it down). And then when the day approaches, and then I'll write it on a clipboard, you know the vegetable, chicken, fish. Those are pretty oop. [and the house] can also use it on the laptop. So I usually write or then, something like morning up, then we discuss. [...] by the way things in shopping basket.</p> <p>Elia: I don't know, it's ok for me like this. Because we usually agree what to really need to come home straight. So for me, it's really convenient that the supermarket, I will probably be at home at 8. So we have done earlier I need to go to the supermarket, and something is delivered to you, the same week, I'm really tired after work.</p> <p>They talk about dinner during breakfast:</p> <p>Elia: Always at breakfast. Like what should we eat tonight, what do we have going to eat yeah. Also maybe to organize what to eat at lunch because I cook at work. Just to organize ourselves a bit. [...] When we do the grocery</p>

Theme	Conflict	Strategy for resolving	Which step	Couple	Issues
Conflict in diet	Veggies vs meat (taste?)	Actify (Material)	Meal appropriation	Olivia+ Alex, Ted + Elias	Power- veggie dominate
	Deciding what to buy	Veggie box + Sending 2-3 recipes through messaging at work	Meal acquisition	Hannah + James	Competence
	Gluten	One just accepts the other	Meal acquisition	Ted + Elias	Power?
Conflict in meaning	Abundance + timing	Snacking	Meal appreciation	Pia + Max	Power- he change to her time
	Abundance of resources (olive oil)	One would still put a lot of oil	Meal appropriation	Vanna + Simon	Power- person cooking does what he wants
	Portions	Chris would serve	Meal appreciation	Annie + Chris	Power- person who has a problem does the portioning
	Repetition vs variety	Those who know more variety cooks		Ted + Elias Emily + Harry	Competence
	Throwing away food	Upgrading leftovers (the rice omelet)	Meal disposal	Jenny + Paul Milena + Bernard	Competence
	Tahini BRAND	Small conflict - but use brand story to connect meanings	Meal acquisition	Chris + Annie	
	Buying meat bulk vs daily	Labelling before freezing + Marinating (Competence)	Meal acquisition	Vanna + Simon Tom + Joanne	Competence
	Shopping in bulk vs daily	Using app (Competence/Materiality); More professional takes control of decision	Meal acquisition	Pia + Max Harry + Emily	Competence
Conflict in competence	Storing	Both have competence in storing - But one wins	Meal disposal	Vanna + Simon	Power
	How to organize	Both have competence in storing - But one wins	Meal acquisition	Elias + Ted	
	Deciding what to buy during shopping - both can make food	Both do what they want/both add whatever they want in the basket - trust/give each other space	Meal acquisition	Milena + Bernard	Equal competence = Sharing power
	Choosing ingredients in the supermarket (eg Malformed apples to help farmers, save money vs don't want to blend them twice), Salt Packaging	Cheaper option/more sensible option wins	Meal acquisition	Tom + Joanne Harry + Emily	
	How to manage eating meat daily - Freezing vs Fridge/Buying Daily	Labelling before freezing + Marinating (Merging Competence)	Meal appropriation	Vanna + Simon	
	Giving each other space/trust - people do what they want without letting the other person know (I check if she does it correctly but doesn't tell her if I throw a spoil piece she chopped)		Meal appropriation	Roberto + Barb	Power
	What constitutes a substantial meal? Eg. Soup is not substantial, it's a wastage of vegetables	More professional takes over	Meal appropriation	Raz + Elad	
	Slow vs fast	Learning/teaching Competence - how to chop more efficiently; Division of task tole - one chops, the other seasons	Meal appropriation	Ver + Cl; Ruben + Gullia; Poushall + Luca	Learning and teaching competence = one more powerful?
	How to cook something: eg strategies to boil egg, strategies to cook rice. Follow instructions vs cook by instinct.	More sensible/faster way will be adopted; Take turns to cook - both have chance to show competence.	Meal appropriation	Raz + Elad	Equal competence = Sharing power
	She doesn't know how to cook - Competent vs incompetent	I have to teach, she has to learn (Leader/Follower) - Learning and teaching competence - But sometimes the more competent doesn't cook daily but teaches till she knows it and cooks for us!	Meal appropriation	Sophia + Daniel; Gullia + Ruben	Competent = more powerful
	Timetabling: How much time they have to prepare the meal, saving time in thinking day to day about what to make, Coordinate who				

Appendix G: Reflexive notes

Participants: Hannah and James

Date: 24th July 2017

Task: Dinner observation

Location: Their home, East London

So it took a long time for me to get this meeting because they weren't free. When I messaged Hannah for her address, she said 'oh I thought we were going to do the shopping first!' implying we can meet in the supermarket then she will walk me home. But when I arrived at the supermarket, I saw they already did the shopping. They had arrived before 7. Maybe it's because of the message, they thought they didn't have to wait for me as today was focused on cooking. Anyway, James didn't even say hi to me, he was quite cold throughout, as we walked back to their house. I managed to get his attention to say 'hi' much later. On the way, Hannah mostly talked to me about their house and the kitchen to prepare me for what I was about to see. But I felt James was quite quiet, he didn't talk to me at all.

At their home, there was a lot of people in the kitchen. When I arrived, there were 3 flatmates, and then one more joined later. So we were total 7 people in the kitchen. I opened my voice recorder but there was so much noise from their flat mates cooking that it was so frustrating. Hannah started taking things out of the shopping bag and putting on the counter for James to start chopping. I asked to put my bag in their room because there isn't any space in the kitchen. James started chopping the red pepper and lining it in the oven tray with tin foil. While Hannah took out the items from the shopping bag and started keeping in the fridge and cupboard. They didn't buy much, as it was only for tonight's dinner, tomorrow's dinner and few snacks. Hannah started peeling the mushrooms, and told me James doesn't peel it. And he just looked and said yeah but it's ok. I felt he just didn't want to talk to me.

The oven already had their flat mates food in both the racks, so he said its ok he will make it [the halloumi wraps] in the pan. I wanted to ask them to talk through with me what they are doing but feel like I was blocking people's ways, there was no room, and James was in such a foul mood. I didn't even take pictures because there was so many people and so much tension going on. At one point, he got so frustrated that when I or even Hannah asked anything he wouldn't reply. I felt like I wasn't getting anything from this observation, as they are not talking to me at all. I asked him to explain to me once what he was doing and why as he was grilling the halloumi, and he swore at me 'Jesus Christ, I don't know why'. I felt so bad, like he didn't want me there. He also made me feel like I was asking a stupid question. I just wanted to leave. But then Hannah took me to a corner and told me they have been having problems with the flat mate. That James doesn't like his flat mates, and they were having a problem because the flat mate broke a lot of things in the kitchen. She has a bit of a temper (the flat mate). And at the moment, she is there so he is frustrated. I really thought he was angry with me for some reason, or that it wasn't a good time today and Hannah had pressured him to have me over. I don't know.

Participants: Tom and Joanne

Date: 21st March 2017

Task: Couple Interview

Location: At a local café near their house

Reflexive:

Tom [name changed] talks a lot. I feel like he has can go on talking about himself, his sports and calorie count for a long time. I can't hear Joanne sometimes, because she speaks so soft. And he likes to cut her mid-sentence while she is talking and gives his own opinion of things. So in the interview, I couldn't really get her opinion much, because he was taking over the talks. I had to listen to the recording time and again to hear her mumbles and in between comments when Tom is talking. As while he is talking, she would mumble comments or remarks (like, 'I do the cleaning', 'yeah right'), which I could hear only after I listened to the recording. But I couldn't hear or didn't pay attention to during the interview. I should have been more attentive of such things and ask her to elaborate when she made comments. But I couldn't focus. They talked so fast. But when I finally transcribed the interview I could hear it, and I need to have separate interview with her to let her speak as well. Tom also speaks very loud. But of both of them also have very thick British accents which is quite difficult for me to understand and grasp some words sometimes. They use some jargons that initially I couldn't understand but then I've had to google later. But I try not to show that I don't understand. I felt I wasn't asking the right questions for them to elaborate...

I felt Tom had an airy vibe towards himself. He works out quite a lot, at least three or four times a week. They talked a lot about healthy food and calories, which he says he counts every time. He is quite concerned with protein and fats, and that's what he wanted to talk about all the time when asked about their meals. I should have asked more about their relationship and their division of task. But at the same time they also talked about having chocolates, as both of them love chocolates (but different flavors), which is so contradictory to the healthy lifestyle. I'm not sure if I should ask them about their contradictions.

Appendix H: QMR Paper

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Ethical dilemmas in studying family consumption

Ethical dilemmas

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the types of ethical challenges and dilemmas researchers face when engaging in family consumption research.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing from the concept of micro-ethics to bridge reflexivity with ethics in practice, the paper provides a reflexive account of the various ethical dilemmas encountered by two family consumption scholars during their fieldwork. Both researchers conducted qualitative research on family meals.

Findings – The paper reveals five types of ethical tensions that can arise when doing research on family consumption. These tensions are addressed as display, positioning, emotional, practical and consent dilemmas, all of which have ethical implications. The findings unpack these dilemmas, showing empirical and reflexive accounts of the researchers as they engage in ethics in practice. Solutions and practical strategies for dealing with these ethical tensions are provided.

Originality/value – Despite the growing interest in interpretive family research, there is less attention on the ethical and emotional challenges researchers face when entering the family consumption scape. As researching families involves entering an intimate area of participants' lives, the field may be replete with tensions that may affect the researcher. This paper brings the concept of micro-ethics to family marketing literature, showing how researchers can do ethics in practice. The paper draws on reflexive accounts of two researchers' personal experiences, showing their emotional, practical, positioning and display challenges. It also provides practical strategies for researchers to deal with dilemmas in the field.

Keywords Reflexivity, Ethics, Consumption, Family, Display, Dilemmas

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There is a growing interest amongst marketing scholars in studying family consumption and identity through a qualitative research approach. Interpretive family consumer researchers have contributed to our understanding of how family relationships and identities are created, shaped and transformed through consumption of market-related goods and services (Epp and Price, 2008; Cappellini and Parsons, 2012). Despite increased attention to this area, the conversation about the ethical issues arising from doing research on family consumption remains limited. As studying families involves entering an intimate area of participants' lives (McGraw *et al.*, 2000), the task may be replete with ethical tensions and issues (Etherington, 2007; Notko *et al.*, 2013).

In line with calls to incorporate greater reflexivity in interpretive consumer research (Thompson, 2002; Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton, 2009; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008), this



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paper aims to contribute to the methodological discourses in studying family consumption in two ways. First, we provide insight into the types of ethical challenges researchers may face when studying family consumption. Second, we offer three strategies on how scholars can improve reflexivity and deal with ethical issues arising in the field. We introduce the concept of micro-ethics in the family consumption research to provide a tool for researchers to address reflexivity. According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), micro-ethics is a process of reflexive thinking to address “ethically charged moments” – what we regard as ethical dilemmas – while in the field (p. 262). We provide a reflexive account of five ethical dilemmas we experienced in two research studies conducted on family food consumption. We call these: display, positioning, emotional, practical and consent dilemmas. By illustrating these dilemmas and ways of addressing them, we show how to do micro-ethics (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Etherington, 2007) in the family consumption research.

Our guiding research questions at the core of the study are therefore:

RQ1. What are the types of tensions, dilemmas and challenges researchers face when researching family consumption?

RQ2. How do researchers deal with these dilemmas?

We chose two research projects we were independently involved in to build on our experiences and reflexive thinking. Both of the projects focused on different aspects of family food consumption. Project 1 adopted interviews to study family morning routines during breakfast, while Project 2 adopted participant observations to study creation of dinner routines in new families. We identified ethical issues arising from both our projects separately, then combined and classified them together. While we do not claim that these dilemmas arise only within interpretive family consumption research, we argue that it is relevant to investigate how they manifest in this context to improve reflexive thinking within this scholarship. As qualitative research involves the researcher as instruments of data generation (Ruby, 2000), reflections on part of the researcher’s role, function and challenges can aid in administering a more critical approach towards understanding the context in which knowledge is produced (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

The paper will be organised as follows. We begin by providing a brief literature on micro-ethics and reflexivity, and our approach to reflexivity in practice. We then provide an outline of our two research projects on family meals. Our findings illustrate the five types of ethical dilemmas encountered in the field. The last section discusses how we overcame these issues, offering practical solutions.

From ethics to reflexivity

Borrowing the term from bioethics, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) adapt the concept of micro-ethics to describe the everyday ethical issues arising in qualitative research. Micro-ethics comprises pivotal day-to-day decisions on ethical issues that develop while in the field, “ethically important moments” or dilemmas the researcher is likely to encounter (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p. 261). Micro-ethics is different from procedural ethics, which is understood as the preliminary work done to comply with the requirements of the research ethics committee (Rossman and Rallis, 2010; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). However, micro-ethics is not prescriptive, as it requires the researcher to deal with the mundane, yet relevant ethical issues experienced in the field. When carrying out qualitative family research, we are in a particularly close interaction with participants in their private life worlds (Notko *et al.*, 2013). Family researchers may encounter unpredictable yet important ethical moments that

require their attention (McGraw *et al.*, 2000; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). To address these moments, we need to adopt a reflexive way of thinking (Etherington, 2007).

Reflexivity is not a new concept. The marketing literature has engaged with the concept of reflexivity, from categorising the epistemological complexity of reflexive thinking (Joy *et al.*, 2006) to exploring possible reflexivities according to ontology and power (Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton, 2009). Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) for example, discuss how reflexivity on the role of the researcher can improve the research process. Takhar–Lail and Chitakunye (2015) discuss how sharing multi-person reflexive experiences can develop deep insights. Similarly, Jafari *et al.* (2013) and Downey *et al.* (2007) reflexively explore researcher emotions in studying vulnerable consumers and argue that the context may also affect the researcher. Our paper contributes to this growing literature by focusing on reflexivity in action, as a way to connect ethics with the practice of research. As interpretive researchers aim to understand consumer's lived experiences through entering their life world (Tadajewski, 2006), we need a reflexive way of thinking to address ethical matters that may arise in context (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). Such aspects of doing research often go unacknowledged in publications. Ethical processes often move as if all ethical issues can be foreseen and managed before fieldwork commences (Rossman and Rallis, 2010). However, as Gummesson (2007, p. 132) notes, there are fewer reflective accounts on interactions in the field, especially interactions between “our inner self and accumulated experiences”.

In the following analysis, reflexivity is adopted as a process of self-awareness to highlight the ethical dilemmas we faced as researchers. Borrowing from Finlay (2002), self-awareness is a component of reflexivity as it:

[...] involves a shift in our understanding of data collection from something objective that is accomplished through detached scrutiny of “what I know and how I know it” to recognizing how we actively construct our knowledge (p. 532).

Such scrutiny is essential to track the challenges faced while in the field, as well as to account for “the ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and impinge on the creation of knowledge” (McGraw *et al.*, 2000, p. 68). To us, understanding the different variations of micro-ethical dilemmas is a way to enhance the authenticity of a study, demonstrating how the researcher has been immersed in the field (Hogg and Maclaran, 2008). By applying a reflexive process to micro-ethics in family consumption, we aim to use a critical approach into *how* we collected data, paying attention to the ethical decisions we took as well as how our role influenced the narration of our findings. We aimed to understand the nuances of ethical dilemmas we can face while studying family consumption, and if we can map them out. In this reflexive process, both the medium – the research method – and the researcher are identified as “instruments of data generation” (Ruby, 2000, p. 152). Thus, in this process, we account for our challenges and impasses, for the data we did not manage to generate, for the expectations we had from the methodology and for how we learnt from those tensions.

Overview of methodologies

We chose two research projects in which we have personally been involved in from the design phase to the final interpretation to build on our reflexive thinking. These two projects focused on different aspects of family food consumption. Thus, we reckoned both studies are likely to raise related ethical issues, which is useful to compare our reflexive experiences. The first project (conducted by Author 2) focused on family morning routines and family display at breakfast. Interviews were conducted with 34 participants to understand, from consumers' accounts, if breakfast was considered a family meal and if family beliefs and

ideologies affected this understanding. The second project (conducted by Author 1) used participant observations to explore how family dinner routines were born, and in turn, how collective family identities emerged in newly cohabited couples. The research design consisted of a six-month participant observation with 13 newly cohabited couples residing in London. The researcher visited each couple once a month to accompany them to grocery shopping trips, stayed at their house to see how they planned and prepared their meals, how they ate and how leftovers were used. As part of the observations, audios of the speech-in-action were recorded, supplemented by interviews and pictures. Both these research projects gained ethical approval from Royal Holloway University of London and were granted voluntary participation.

As both projects adopted different qualitative research methods to understand the aspects of family food consumption, we could analyse and compare the ethical dilemmas arising from both methods. Although we experienced all five dilemmas in both our projects, certain issues manifested more in certain methodologies adopted. The interviews were useful to analyse issues arising from the spoken collective, which is a sense of family retained by the individual. On the one hand, these accounts of family explore the meanings individuals imbue in doing family; on the other, they illustrate the idealisations individuals retain of certain family performances. In narrating their roles and expectations, individuals often reflect and update their accounts based on feedback from others and the stories in which they reside (Orbuch, 1997). Interviews were, thus, more likely to generate display and positioning dilemmas, reflecting how the display work of the researcher affected the families studied. Instead, observations captured the tensions arising from witnessing tacit behaviour and unintentional slips (Arnould, 1998). As observations required the researcher to be immersed in the social world of the participants over time, it can capture various revelatory moments (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). As such, the investigation generated more emotional and practical dilemmas, e.g. when witnessing family disputes in action.

Authors 1 and 2 independently identified the ethical issues arising from their own projects. In the second stage, these issues were combined and classified, using, where possible, the support of existing literature. Although our research journeys were independent, following Jafari *et al.* (2013), we reflected on shared tensions in our experiences, which fostered our collaborative project. In doing so, we “moved beyond our individual perspectives and attempted to find convergence”, to contribute to knowledge production (Jafari *et al.*, 2013, p.1187). As a result, the analysis identified five ethical dilemmas that are relevant to family consumption research, which we label as: display, positioning, emotional, practical and consent dilemmas. These dilemmas are not mutually exclusive, as they can overlap with one another. For example, as we will show, display can also have repercussions for emotional dilemmas. However, all five of them have moral implications. By organising ethical dilemmas underneath these five labels, we provide a reflexive tool on how to do micro-ethics in family research. We will now illustrate a reflexive account of each of the five ethical dilemmas, offering theoretical grounding where possible.

Findings: five types of ethical dilemmas

Display dilemmas

Display dilemmas refer to the display work of the researcher and to the researcher being on display. Displaying is part of an emotional work that the researcher does to establish empathy or to look for a common ground with the participants (Abell *et al.*, 2006). This display work starts from the first connection with participants, as it requires a negotiation of what can be shared, but such display can also prolong through time. To unpack the micro-ethics of display, we look into the problematisation of self-identity disclosure.

The researcher's display of her role and identity questions what can be shared and to what extent, problematising self-disclosure (Pezalla *et al.*, 2012). The vulnerability exposed by the researcher starts with the subjective voice adopted in interpretive research, and it continues in every decision taken about power relations with the participants (Etherington, 2007). In our analysis, both authors decided to be open about their personal life to establish friendship and empathy with participants (Oakley, 1981). However, one episode made Author 2 particularly aware about how much she was on display in front of her own participants, to the point of becoming the object of research herself. The author initially contacted a Conservative Catholic movement to source family members for her interviews, but after an initial positive reply, the communication dropped. The spokesperson later clarified that they had screened her private social media profile and connections, and deemed her LGBT acquaintances to be inappropriate. Following this episode, she felt that exposure, like vulnerability, does not mean that anything personal goes, as "it has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, nor exposure for its own sake" (Behar, 1996, p. 14). Thus, Author 2 decided not to disclose her own gay background to the families unless it was openly asked, being wary of how she could be "othered" by some research subjects and of how her identity could be interpreted (Bott, 2010). In concealing her sexual identity, she was, therefore, faced with dilemmas of if and how to establish friendship and empathy with the families.

Similarly, Author 1 faced display issues, but in terms of her display work as a researcher. As the research was conducted over time where she met the participants over several months, she had to perform her recollections of the participants' experiences. For example, in many instances of observing newly cohabited couples' dinner practices, the researcher witnessed conflicts and arguments over time. Although the conflicts were verbal in the form of bickering, the researcher was aware of the sensitivity of the context, which posed challenges for her (Jafari *et al.*, 2013). Such that as time passed, the participants may have forgotten their arguments, but the researcher still had memories and audio recordings of them. Thus, as she stepped out and into the field again (O'Reilly, 2012), following ethical and ethnographic guidelines of natural inquiry (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), she had to conceal her memory of their repeated arguments through time. This posed an ethical and emotional issue for the researcher, as she displays and performs (Finch, 2007) her memory and identity. However, the researcher kept reflexive diaries to develop her reflexive awareness (Finlay, 2002), an aspect which will be discussed later. Display dilemmas were common to both researchers, with differences linked to different methodologies adopted, but they equally pose ethical tensions.

Positioning dilemmas

Positioning refers to how the researcher is perceived by participants and to the relationships established between researcher and participants. Positioning is influenced by a wide range of personal characteristics, "such as gender, race, affiliation, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, personal experiences, linguistic tradition, beliefs, biases, preferences, theoretical, political and ideological stances, and emotional responses" of the researcher (Berger, 2015, p. 21). These characteristics impact participants' willingness to share their data, the relationship formed with the researcher, but also how the researcher constructs and interprets the field (Berger, 2015). Reflecting on the related ethics in practice, we contend that these dilemmas are directly linked to displaying, as the display work of the researcher can condition the trust built with participants and their own display of family identity. When accounting for family practices, the participants are involved in two kinds of display: the display of their identity as a member of the family and the display of family in relation to

dominant family discourses (James and Curtis, 2010). By positioning ourselves as family researchers, we triggered in participants the fear of being judged against an ideal family practice. Our positioning, thus, directly impacted our interaction with participants.

Firstly, we observed how our positioning was affected by how we got in touch with the participants. For example, having common acquaintances helped break the ice more quickly, allowing for development of richer data. This first in-person contact with the participants is particularly relevant for those methodologies where the participants are met only once. Accepting a cup of coffee or complimenting the participant's house helps to break the ice, making the respondents more comfortable with a stranger asking about their personal life. However, we noticed how little we recorded what happened at the early stage of our relationship with the participants. Often, while still setting up the recorder, the participants prompted the researcher with questions about the project, the scope of it, but also about the personal involvement behind it. Unfortunately, this kind of positioning work took place before the recording; therefore, it was never considered a context for the interview, nor as a reflexive element to understand interviewees' outcomes. But, such personal exchanges could have had direct ramifications for the interview (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Secondly, we realised that the researcher can become an unwilling bearer of a normative gaze, conditioning the interviewees in justifying their own practices. Idealisations of family life occur because being on display as a family, or as a family member, is never neutral, as it implies being judged against family norms and expectations (Heaphy, 2011; Harman and Cappellini, 2015). This is shown by Francesca, a stay at home mother in her 50s, who was introduced by her husband in the project run by Author 2:

Francesca: My mother-in-law feels inadequate if she cannot feed. Now that she fell sick, she says, "I can't cook for you" as if it was necessary. That's nothing. I don't even wake up in the morning to prepare breakfast, my son wakes up at 6, I can't make it [. .].

Author 2: Have you ever thought you should?

Francesca: [pause] No, maybe I try and make up for it in other ways, like spending some time with him in the afternoon, maybe I will prepare him a snack, to have some time with him and chat.

Francesca interlaces her motherhood skills with those of her mother-in-law on the ground of being a good feeder. Despite asserting that always being the feeder is unnecessary, Francesca quickly reverts her narrative to "the good mother" when asked about not waking up to prepare breakfast. Rather than confirming her lack of interest in preparing breakfast, she enforces her attention to afternoon snacks, displaying the compensation of what could be interpreted as sloppy behaviour. A prompting question from "the family researcher" makes her pause and rephrase her experience in terms of what is expected from the feeder in the family. Even if the comment was not meant to evoke in Francesca a sense of duty towards her own son, the lack of intimacy between researcher and researched elicited a fear of being judged. Albeit the shift noticed is minimal, it is still possible to observe how a normative gaze accidentally emerged through interaction. Reflexive self-awareness is important to consider how positioning affects the organisation and the process of the research interaction (Abell *et al.*, 2006).

Reflecting on positioning reveals how different accounts can arise from the different relationships family members have with the researcher. These differences lead to possible discrepancies of meanings between family members. This is the case of Tania, a personal connection of Author 2, who participated with her newlywed husband Fabio. Fabio did not

know the researcher personally, and he described family breakfast as a recent practice they developed together, as a sit-down meal with healthy food. However, Tania has a different view on it:

Tania: Maybe it's not very nice to say but we have the kind of breakfast I was having before and he just picked it up. We have rusks with jam, a bit of juice and that's it. When I was good, I was also having a fruit but then I let myself go.

According to her, this kind of breakfast is not a habit that generated from them as a family, but rather a routine he adopted from her. To have breakfast together, she had to find a common ground, letting go of the fruit that made her feel a better version of herself. Tania is compelled to begin her account by stating that this is not "nice to say", but she, nevertheless, feels comfortable to share her honest opinion of having contaminated his habits. Despite not being an issue of confidentiality, the researcher is facing a discrepancy that can be connected to a different experience of the meal, as well as with the different degree of familiarity participants have with the researcher.

Emotional dilemmas

With emotional dilemmas, we refer to the management of emotional tensions arising both in the researcher and researched. One of the key emotional challenges emerged during witnessing family conflicts, which had implications not only for the families themselves, but also for the researcher. In many instances, the families expressed emotions of stress during the arguments, followed by feelings of embarrassment after the conflict. Take the example of Olivia and Alex, where Author 1 witnessed one of their impromptu fights during cooking of the meal in their third month of cohabitation:

[I was at their house for Olivia's individual interview [.] They asked me to stay for dinner, as they were preparing pasta with tomatoes that day. Olivia had work - she therefore runs through the steps with him and then leaves. While he is cooking, Alex talks through his Mom's cooking with me, while also talking through what he is doing [adding what now, why, etc.]. At times he doesn't remember what she said, so he goes ask her for clarification in the living room. At one point, after seasoning the sauce he calls her into the kitchen to 'come have a look'. As she enters, she was shocked with he did].

Olivia: What are you doing? Why did you do this? Pasta is cooked separately!

Alex: I don't know [. . .] I wasn't thinking [. . .] I was speaking with her [points at the researcher]

Olivia: Ok, it's fine, it's fine.

Alex: See, this is why you should make pasta.

Olivia: But Alex, you know how to make pasta [laughs in disbelief] Ok, take it out. Very bizarre [. . .] like a soup [. . .].

Alex: I've never cooked pasta with tomato.

Olivia: What are you saying? [quiet pause] Alex, I'm really shocked with this. I think he was just genuinely distracted [turns to tell me].

Researcher: I'm sorry if I –

QMR

Both: No, no [. . .].

Alex: You don't need to –

Here, implicit and taken-for-granted meanings of what is a sauce and how it should be made, and competences of how to make it, becomes explicit in action and is a source of conflict when cooking together. However, such performance of conflict caused a stressful experience for both members, as they were themselves in the process of doing their new family and learning about each other's practices. The presence of a third party (the researcher) caused an even more stressful experience, as they were unable to successfully display their new and good relationship (Heaphy, 2011; Finch, 2007). They, therefore, attempted to justify their conflict in front of the researcher to have a rationale for their disrupted display of doing their family script. As Alex explained he had “never made pasta with tomato before”, but the researcher's role and participation in the situation also caused a distraction.

However, in observing conflicts in action, the researcher may personally face emotional challenges too. The emotional tensions researchers face when conducting qualitative research have recently been discussed, especially when they touch upon sensitive topics (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2009; Bahn and Weatherill, 2013). However, majority of studies exploring researchers' emotions were conducted on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2009; Sherry, 2013; Jafari *et al.*, 2013). As family researchers, we enter the intimate worlds of participants to collect data, and often do so through establishing trust and friendship (Edirisingha *et al.*, 2017; Oakley, 1981); yet, there is less exploration of the emotional dilemmas faced by researchers when we enter the family consumption scape. Although the emotional challenge of doing ethnography was present throughout the whole fieldwork process (gaining trust, prolonging relationship, maintaining access, etc.), one of the key emotional tensions faced was when witnessing family conflicts in action. As an active participant in the moment and in reflecting on ethics in practice, the researcher had to analyse her emotions and display in the situation. For example, when caught in the moment of Olivia and Alex's argument, Author 1 felt a range of emotions – from joy, excitement and discomfort, to guilt. This can be observed in the reflexive note, written directly after the conflict observation:

I just witnessed a fight between Olivia and Alex! He had gone to call her to come take a look at the pasta meal he was making, as it was her dish. But when she entered the kitchen, she was so shocked about what he did, as he boiled the pasta in the same pan as the sauce. He kept justifying his action by blaming that he was 'distracted'. At first, I didn't think she was serious, and so I tried to laugh it off, but then I managed to keep quiet after realizing they were seriously arguing. So, I let them continue their argument all the while standing there, controlling not to show my excitement. I didn't take any pictures because I think it would've been rude. But I was trying to keep the microphone near them [. . .] I felt bad though [. . .] because he was talking to me as I was trying to make conversation.

Such emotions perhaps stemmed from her observation of conflict between this couple for the first time. Being a novice researcher, Author 1 was excited about the prospects of her research, and how this conflict could provide her with rich data. She was goal-oriented; however, she was also uncomfortable and did not know how to act in the situation. For example, she was muddled on which “role” to perform (Hoffmann, 2007) – should she be a listener and keep quiet while they argue, should she be a friend and help them by laughing it off, should she be a researcher and take pictures because it is very good data or should she be the fixer and apologise for being the distraction? As she is encountering a sensitive moment of the new family, it is distressing for her as well as she is watching them in stress

and does not know how she “should” act or react in the situation (Watts, 2008). She must work on her emotion management (Hochschild, 1979) and be careful on how she displays her emotions and behaviour in the moment, which adds to another layer of discomfort.

Practical dilemmas

Practical dilemmas refer to the ethical issues generated when the researcher is asked to take a position on tensions and fights arising within the family studied. Many times, family members would also try to justify their sensibilities about their habits to the researcher, and the researcher experienced practical dilemmas about her role in their family negotiation. Take the example of Ted and Elias; Author 1 witnessed their conflict at the supermarket checkout counter during their sixth month of cohabitation. The situation is described in the field note excerpt below:

[At the checkout counter, Elias starts to bag the items bought then Ted says to him, ‘no I’ll do it’. They mumble to each other in Hebrew, subtly arguing during check out. Both were trying to exert their opinion over the other, I couldn’t hear much. Later, while we were walking to the bus station to go to their home, I asked them ‘what was the argument about’].

Ted: While we were packing? Just about how to organise [...] First of all, there is a logic of cold and not cold, and then just not to squash the more vulnerable vegetables [...] so, the things that are cold, like the yoghurt and stuff has to be inside first, we just had different attitudes towards how to be more protective [of the fruits and vegetables]. And it ended up being squashed –

Elias: No, they were squashed before –

Ted: I didn’t put the cucumber on them.

Elias: No that’s exactly the opposite. I said, ‘you need to put them last’ [the raspberries], and he said ‘no, they’re not that light.’

Ted: I said it didn’t need to be in my pack because I didn’t want them to squash the tomatoes.

Elias: You think raspberries can squash tomatoes? [turns to me] You understand how [...]?

Ted: [changes his tone] What response is this. It’s about how they are in the thing [the bag].

Elias: Such a ‘Shakshuka’ [Hebrew word]. Now he realised his mistake, but he won’t admit it [teases].

Like many couples, Ted and Elias tried to justify their sensibilities and meanings in storing items using the basic language of science, but also tried to convey it to each other through the researcher’s presence. In many instances, other couples have used words like “see?”, “right?”, looking for validation from the researcher to legitimise their practice to each other. At times, one partner would insist on their opinion, calling for the researcher to side with them. Here, the researcher plays a role in asking them to replay their thoughts by questioning, “what was the argument about?” to get a better understanding of their differences, as they would often change their language, communicate in non-verbal language or postpone the fight, when the researcher is present. Therefore, to get a better understanding, the researcher asks them to explain their conflicts. In doing so, she has to understand her role as a third party in exaggerating their conflict and negotiation, as they indulge in justifications of their reasoning through her even more.

QMR

The researcher's positioning as a third party in witnessing the family negotiations posed a dilemma for her. She understood that her presence influenced the way the participants act and negotiate. However, without interfering and asking them to explain their conflict, she would be caught up in trying to make sense of such conflict observations, as sometimes she was not able to understand such non-verbal communications or change in language. By asking them to explain their conflict/reasoning, she also played a role in forcing them to become more reflexive in narrating and making sense of their own, individual habits. In doing so, the researcher perhaps needs to be aware of her role in forcing the previously tacit meanings to become explicit and articulated through justifications. In understanding and reflecting on her role in the process of negotiating their family practice, the researcher emphasises her epistemological position that she is not trying to capture one true reality or the true identity of the family, but that researching family is itself researching its multiple representations (Denzin, 1997). However, we can try to represent the family's voice from their frame of reference as much as possible (Spiggle, 1994). Through having the audio of speech-in-action and the reflexive diaries, the researcher was able to capture her role and influence in the process of them becoming a family.

Consent dilemmas

Consent dilemmas refer to the tension between procedural ethics and the relationships developing in the field. Consent dilemmas include the implications of sharing intimate details and the role that the research is allowed to take. Despite the effort to plan the potential ethical issues emerging during data collection, it is almost impossible to anticipate what interactions will happen. Thus, neither the researcher nor the participants know exactly what consenting to the research, or carrying it out, implies in micro-ethical terms. In fact, capturing and writing about conflict within families is an ethical issue, as it can raise concerns about exploitation of their situation for research gain (Watts, 2008). However, on the one hand, it can be argued that participants have consented to take part in the study and understand that they can withdraw at any time. Thus, they still hold the power of deciding when to close off their conflict. On the other hand, we, as researchers, need to be wary that the privilege of being able to witness conflict is built on trust and establishing rapport over time (Edirisingha *et al.*, 2017). When reflecting on the ethics in practice, we need to be mindful of the implications that derive from consent and a lack thereof.

The interactions may also create unexpected meanings for the people involved, with the probability of participants to deem therapeutic value in the research (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2007). Schouten (2014) notes how "ethnotherapy" – a term he uses for combining consumption ethnography with therapy – can reveal people's inner selves and help them understand their problems. For the families too, talking about their differences, idealisations and expectations with a third person present may parallel a therapeutic effect. For example, for the couples in Author 1's study, it could have felt like therapy to talk through what they do and how they do it differently to "let off their steam" in front of the researcher. Perhaps, such conflicting moments can allow them both to feel empowered rather than vulnerable (Gilbert, 2000). However, in understanding ethics in practice, we need to be wary of assuming the roles we are not trained for, nor able to realise for our participants (Birch and Miller, 2000; Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, what also contributed to our dilemmas were the ethical implications of potential outcomes, arising from in-depth interactions carried out in the intimate sphere (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002).

Dealing with ethical dilemmas

The aim of this paper is to provide an understanding of the types of ethical dilemmas researchers may face when studying family consumption and to understand how we can deal with such ethical implications arising in the field. In illustrating these dilemmas, we applied a reflexive thinking to micro-ethics, which allowed us to organise ethically important moments in display, positioning, emotional, practical and consent dilemmas. In this section, we will suggest three strategies that researchers can adopt to deal with ethical dilemmas while carrying out fieldwork in family consumption.

Using multi-method, interdisciplinary research design

Despite being the most common method to study family consumption, interviews alone might have some limitations. Firstly, studying family practices through interviews allows to focus on individual meanings referring to a collective practice. However, interviews fail to catch the negotiation of conflicting meanings and how the consolidation of a shared practice comes about. Even if the accounts provided by one's experiences are still valuable, the emergence of the collective is always filtered by subjective experiences and narratives of the self. Albeit in-depth interviews provide a rich understanding of consumers perspectives (Stokes and Bergin, 2006), these perspective are always mediated by intentional displays, failing to observe family in the making. On the other hand, participant observation allows the researcher to witness the negotiation of meanings and practices, exposing them to practical and emotional dilemmas arising from being "caught in the moment". Rather than advocating for the superiority of one methodology over the other, we align with other marketing literature that fosters multi-method (Palakshappa and Gordon, 2006) and, possibly, interdisciplinary research design (Joy *et al.*, 2006). A multi-method research design, including, but not limited to, interviews and observations, can combine accounts and performances of family practices, providing a detailed view of consumption in family life.

Developing empathy

Following feminist principles of ethics of care, we see empathy as key to address ethical decisions (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). Empathy has been described as a shared feeling of "connection with others that [. . .] communicates an interest in and care about them" (Watts, 2008, p. 9). It has been associated with genuine interaction, active listening, compassion and shared experience (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). One of the ways Author 1 was able to establish empathy with the couples was through sharing experiences. As the researcher herself was in a new relationship during the fieldwork, she understood how it feels to negotiate with a partner in front of somebody. Thus, at times, she could reveal a similar conflict (if any) she has with her partner after they have closed off their arguments, which allowed her to communicate her empathy and reduce power hierarchy in the research (Oakley, 1981; Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). We also found that neutral, active listening was the most efficient way to deal with emotional and practical dilemmas. The researcher being caught in the moment has to learn to display her neutrality and play the role of the unbiased compassionate listener that knows how to remain equanimous during the conflict. In remaining neutral in the situation, the researcher can also be wary of blurring her boundaries. As such, researchers should equip themselves with contact information of therapeutic support sources before commencing fieldwork (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, keeping a log of encounters is a good reflexive practice (Berger, 2015) not only to record participants' behaviours but also for feelings arising from the interaction. This is particularly helpful to document the first interaction with participants, such as during

recruitment and pre-interview, which usually go unrecorded but that contribute to the development of empathy.

Including the researcher in the “we” of the collective family practice

Our research should always imply that the “we” studied in family research is never only the family, but it shall include the researcher too. We remark that collecting qualitative data demands displaying and being on display, both from the side of the participant and the researcher. Goffman’s (1959) seminal work on the representation of the self can be useful here to understand the interactional display between the researcher and the participant. According to Goffman, every individual is a “performer” in society. Like stage actors who perform in front of an audience – whenever we come into contact with others, we always try to perform ourselves (our behaviour and identity) to “give off” a certain kind of impression to others. This is because we like to control or influence how others will think and behave towards us. In qualitative methods, the researcher and participant are also performing and displaying versions of who they want to be seen as to control what goes on in the interaction, as we like to control the “definition of the situation” (Goffman, 1959, p. 4). Thus, display work is necessary to establish a smooth interaction, prompting both researchers and participants to “do” emotional and practical displays appropriate for the situation (Hochschild, 1979). Our analysis highlighted how both the accounts and the performances of family always rely on the researcher, on her private and professional display as well as on her emotional work (Hochschild, 1979; Kleinmann and Copp, 1993).

Concluding remarks

By introducing the concept of micro-ethics (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) into marketing research, this paper looked at the ethics in practice of research on family consumption. Although there is increasing interpretive research on family consumption, there is less acknowledgement of the ethical issues that arise as we enter an intimate sphere of participants’ everyday lives (Notko *et al.*, 2013). Through our personal experiences in the field, we illustrated five most common types of ethical dilemmas and challenges researchers face when studying family consumption. We label these as: display, positioning, emotional, practical and consent dilemmas. We showed how these were related to display work, vulnerability, role and emotions of the researcher. By illustrating these dilemmas and how we addressed them, we show how to do micro-ethics (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Etherington, 2007) in family consumption research.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, we provide an understanding on the types of ethical challenges common to studying and researching families. Second, we offer three strategies on how researchers can improve reflexivity and deal with ethical issues arising in the field. In doing so, we hope to answer the agenda on reflexivity in marketing and consumer research (Hogg and Maclaran, 2008; Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton, 2009). We agree with Joy *et al.* (2006) that “situated knowledge requires a deeper understanding of consumers, their contexts, their networks of interactions and their different points of view” (p. 357). However, we argue that reflexivity is not only a way to pick up what went “off script” (Goffman, 1959) in researching family, but mostly a way to reproduce the integrity of knowledge produced in inductive research (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008).

We highlight how reflexive analysis of display, emotions, consent, positioning and role of the researcher within family research allows a deeper critical understanding into the context and situations in which knowledge is produced. We showed how practices of reflexivity that concern emotional and practical tensions in the research process (Finlay, 2002) are necessary to study family life and consumption, as well as to grasp the “we” that is generated in the

field. Reflexivity contributes to producing better data on family consumption, but also accounting for the real collective in which this data is produced: the family and the researcher. We recommend researchers working in the field to be mindful of such dilemmas and work through them to gain richer understanding of the family practice. Given the reflexive nature of our insights, we believe such an approach can be applied to a wide range of marketing research, improving the recognition of underlying assumptions and the criticality of inductive consumer research. Nevertheless, while providing some useful insights, this paper has some limitations. First, we did not evaluate how two methodologies within the same research context can provide different data, but we provided a close-up interpretation of accounts from two projects on family consumption. Thus, rather than offering an evaluation of pros and cons, we focused on challenges, ethical implications and potential solutions.

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