

Baking Power: Cultural Identity as Defined by Evolving Traditional Foodways

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Abstract: Traditional foods have been shown to be very political expressions of personal values and opinions. By studying foodways, which are closely connected to language, religious practices, and rituals, this project seeks to understand how minority groups resist to societal pressures to conform to the majority. Knowing that modernization and urbanization have changed the lifestyle of once agricultural communities, that women now participate in the workforce, and that biography is an important factor in ascribing to cultural norms, this is an important time to understand the cultural evolution taking place in communities where the French population has gone from a majority to a minority. This paper presents a justification for an interdisciplinary approach by explaining the major tenets of interdisciplinary studies, and through a review of the literature and the disciplines relevant to this study.

Keywords: interdisciplinary; autoethnography; Francophone minority; foodways; gender; traditions

Résumé : La nourriture traditionnelle est l'expression politique des valeurs et opinions. En étudiant les habitudes alimentaires, qui sont étroitement liés à la langue, les pratiques religieuses et rituels, ce projet vise à comprendre comment les groupes minoritaires résistent aux pressions sociales conformes au discours de la majorité. Sachant que la modernisation et l'urbanisation ont changé les réalités quotidiennes des communautés agricoles d'antan, que les femmes travaillent hors du foyer familial et que la biographie affecte l'allégeance culturelle, il s'avère opportun de comprendre l'évolution culturelle qui se manifeste dans les communautés où la population francophone est passée du statut de majoritaire à celui de minoritaire. Cet article présente une justification pour une approche interdisciplinaire en expliquant les principes majeurs des études interdisciplinaires à travers une revue de la littérature et des disciplines pertinentes.

Mots-clés : interdisciplinaire; auto-ethnographie; minorité francophone; nourriture; sexe; traditions

Interdisciplinary studies aim to bring together various disciplinary perspectives in order to produce new knowledge (Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* 15-16). Through the process of *integration*, interdisciplinary projects tackle complex problems that cannot fully be solved from one view alone. Questions about cultural identity and allegiance are certainly complex. What makes a person French, French-Canadian or Franco-Ontarian? What is the difference between these various labels for Francophones? How do demographics, gender, and age impact the ways in which cultural allegiance is created, maintained, or discarded? What defines a person's membership in a cultural group? Is it one's ability to speak the language? To sing folk songs? To make and/or eat cultural foods? If one of these fails to be present, can the person still be a part of the group? In our current, multicultural, global country, and especially in rural villages in Northern Ontario where Francophones find themselves to be part of a minority, such questions do not have simple answers.

In this paper, I will begin by distinguishing between disciplinary and interdisciplinary research by explaining the differences in their focus and execution. I will then frame the rest of my paper using Allen Repko's six steps to doing interdisciplinary research. I will begin by "framing the research problem and question (Step 1)" then justify "the use of an interdisciplinary approach to investigate it (Step 2)" ("Integrating Theory-Based Insights" 9). Afterwards, I will explain "which disciplines are most relevant to the problem (Step 3) [and] which disciplinary literatures to mine for insights (Step 4)" ("Integrating Theory-Based Insights" 9). While it is not possible to fully address Step 5, "how to achieve adequacy in each relevant discipline in terms of the elements (i.e. assumptions, theories, and concepts) that pertain to the problem" ("Integrating Theory-Based Insights" 9) this paper will nevertheless present the most relevant disciplinary methods and theories. The present aims to highlight "how an interdisciplinary approach will generate more thorough

and practical findings than a disciplinary approach” (Cesar Battocchio 274). This final piece answers the sixth and final of Repko’s steps: “how to analyze the problem and evaluate each insight into it” (Repko, “Integrating Theory-Based Insights” 126).

1.0 Disciplinary versus Interdisciplinarity

Before explaining how interdisciplinary research is the best way to explore the link between cultural identity and traditional foodways, it is important to distinguish between monodisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. Fundamentally, the difference between the two is linked to a discussion of depth of knowledge production and the boundaries within which this knowledge production emerges. Disciplinary “will assert that their work generates in-depth organized understandings and contributes to the expert knowledge of a discipline... [They] draw insights (e.g. concepts, methods) specifically from one discipline and only solve problems pertaining to the discipline in question” (Cesar Battocchio 274-275). According to Joe Moran in the second edition of *Interdisciplinarity*, the word *discipline* “has two principal modern usages: it refers to a particular branch of learning or body of knowledge, and to the maintenance of order and control amongst subordinated groups” (2). This second usage “derives from the Latin, *disciplina*, which refers to the instruction of disciples by their elders, and it necessarily alludes to a specialized, valued knowledge which some people possess and others do not” (Moran 2). Thus within disciplinary branches of learning there is an inherent ordering and hierarchy of knowledge that is accepted by its practitioners. The boundaries of knowledge production are maintained through adherence to long established rules and principles.

Interdisciplinary, on the other hand, understand that “[c]omplex systems are more spontaneous, more disorderly, more alive than that” (Waldrop 12) and that no one discipline can fully answer a complex

problem. Within disciplines, “[t]he strong incentive to obey disciplinary preferences regarding theory, method, and subject matter means that disciplinarians *necessarily* ignore competing theories or methods, and they also ignore related phenomena that might cast an important light on the issues addressed by the disciplines” (Szostak 4). Contrarily, interdisciplinarity is defined as “a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline, and draws on the disciplines with the goal of integrating their insights to construct a more comprehensive understanding” (Szostak 16).

Integration implies a two-part process, according to Robert Newell. After determining that a problem is interdisciplinary in nature, interdisciplinarians must identify the most useful disciplines associated with the issue. They then push at the disciplinary boundaries in an effort to create a “*more comprehensive understanding or more comprehensive theory*” (Szostak 7). Importantly, interdisciplinarity cannot exist without disciplines, an often misunderstood element in debates about the merits of interdisciplinary studies. Not only do interdisciplinarians need disciplines but they must also understand their basic tenants. To do otherwise would be to build a house without a foundation or make chocolate chip cookies without chocolate chips. However, interdisciplinarians push back at their inherent assumptions by juxtaposing their disciplinary beliefs against each other in order to show similarities and differences. By analyzing and using these findings, interdisciplinarians advance a new, more complete, theory; they make a “*cognitive advancement*” (Szostak 7). Whereas disciplinarians seek to exclude, interdisciplinarians aim to include perspectives and methods knowing that this inclusion enhances the theory produced. In this sense, they are like architects who can transform a square box into a mansion or chefs who can turn a simple recipe into the next big food trend.

A well-known analogy for interdisciplinary studies is Moti Nissani's smoothie metaphor. A smoothie takes specific and complementary fruit (i.e. disciplines) and blends them to the point that the fruit can no longer be distinguished, either in appearance or flavour, from each other. The blending creates something new out of something familiar, a new insight produced from distinct disciplines. The ways in which knowledge is produced in a given discipline depends largely on the methods employed for gathering and analysing data. Here too, interdisciplinarians are inclusive rather than exclusive and remain skeptical of disciplinary preferences that "favor certain ontological and epistemological beliefs over others" (Cesar Battocchio 277). Here too the smoothie metaphor is apropos as interdisciplinarians use the most appropriate insights and methods in order to answer their questions. In doing so, they may adjust the "blend" as needed to use more or less of each original, disciplinary body of knowledge.

In respect to cultural identity and foodways, there are many different ways that one could answer the question "Are traditional foodways a marker of cultural identity?" One can gather information from surveys and questionnaires, which can provide statistical data that can help paint a picture of a particular social and demographic context. Findings from Statistics Canada, for example, can provide data about how many people identify themselves as French-Canadian, how many have French as their mother tongue, and how many claim to speak the language at home and/or at work. While useful for providing context, statistics do not capture the nuances and complexity of how language and culture play out in real life.

In order to truly understand what makes a person French-Canadian, and to know if the label is including or excluding responses, one needs to ask the people filling in the census forms about their attitudes toward these questions and categories. A better understanding of who the survey respondents are (i.e. how old they are, what gender

they are, how proficient they are with the language, if they've been discriminated against because of their culture, what language they work in and who they married) are crucial if one is to understand the numbers presented in the census. This can be achieved through interviews and participant observations which are transcribed and coded for reoccurring themes and answers. In order to answer my main thesis question, to understand what connection exists between French-Canadian traditional foods and cultural retention, I need to understand how evolution and adaptation of foodways threaten or facilitate cultural allegiance. I thus need to know who I am studying. How are the experiences of the Francophone residents of Astorville similar to the issues of minority populations elsewhere in Canada? What happens to culture in a minority setting? These questions necessitate an understanding of minority culture and the pressures that foster or hinder cultural retention when challenged by a dominant culture.

Furthermore, I have to understand what acts of cultural celebration, memory, and resistance are tied to cultural practices around food and what relationship these cultural acts have to the materiality of food ingredients, food production, and food practices. Knowing who procures, prepares, and consumes traditional foods is part of the answer, but understanding one's attitude toward these tasks and what systems govern behaviour will allow me to deconstruct the foodways and draw conclusions about how personal choices reflect the agency of my participants. Does one's gender, for example, present certain expectations in terms of who makes traditional foods? If hunting wild game is necessary for procuring ingredients, does gender or age constrain who may or may not participate in the activity? Like any other material object, ingredients are important objects to study as they tell us a lot about the historical and social realities of the people who use them. In continuing a tradition, one purposely accepts and acts according to a cultural script. Each performance, however, is unique

as each performer enacts the ritual in his or her own way; modernizing and/or altering the food to his or her liking. Observation of these performances is thus important for gaining true understanding.

Personal reflection of interview sessions and of my observations is also crucial to advancing new knowledge on the topic of cultural allegiance. While some disciplines advocate against including personal thoughts and impressions, or at least maintaining distance in the reporting of the findings, identifying bias and reflecting on questions and learning is crucial in the humanities. Here then, the purposeful use of autoethnography pushes at the boundaries of more objective disciplines and practices to show that the researcher's role and position bears on the conclusions produced. While this paper, written before the collection of interviews has been completed, cannot answer the questions outright, it will draw on the literature from a variety of disciplinary fields of study to advocate that no one disciplinary perspective can completely answer the fundamental question: Are traditional foodways a marker of cultural identity?

1.1 Studies, Multidisciplinarity, and Transdisciplinarity

Complicating this particular research project is the fact that many of the “disciplinary” perspectives being used are themselves already interdisciplinary in nature. Cultural studies, food studies, gender studies, and material culture studies signal this fact in their titles. Autoethnography is also interdisciplinary as it combines ethnography and autobiography. It is thus important to unpack these three terms in order to properly position this project as being transdisciplinary.

1.1.1 Studies

According to Allen Repko, the word “studies” first referred to research about specific geographic regions or historical eras (*Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* 8). More recently, however, the word has come to connote research about cultural groups (Repko, *Interdisciplinary*

Research: Process and Theory 8). Unlike traditional disciplines, which have an established curriculum that teaches its core set of knowledge principles and values specific ways of studying a problem, “studies” acknowledge that there is more to solving a complex problem than a traditional discipline can offer. Studies claim to narrow gaps between disciplines and do so by juxtaposing disciplines in a research project. In this way, “[s]tudies programs in general represent fundamental challenges to the existing structure of knowledge [and] share with interdisciplinary studies... a broad dissatisfaction with traditional knowledge structures” (Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* 9). Thus within its inherent desire to build on the existing traditions, “studies” are also rebelliously trying to break down the foundation of the existing academic silos.

Klein, Repko, and Salter and Hearn remind us that even if studies share with interdisciplinarity the need to bring disciplines together, they are not automatically interdisciplinary (27). Rather, in their borrowing of styles and trends, there is often much of the old in the new. Often missing in studies is a true *integration* of disciplines leaving the work produced synonymous with multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity.

1.1.2 Multidisciplinarity

In *Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity*, Julie Thompson Klein defines multidisciplinary as an approach that “juxtaposes disciplinary perspectives, adding breadth and available knowledge, information, and method” (55) to a project. Such research is important for pushing at the boundaries of established disciplines by allowing for a wider scope of knowledge and information. However, the disciplines often remain intact. This is because a project that is “multidisciplinary rarely looks at the dynamic, interactive, and cumulative effects of the complex problem over time; rather, it fragments the complexity and fails to comprehend its emergent holistic characteristics” (Henry

and Bracy 260). Ultimately, “the existing structure of knowledge is not questioned” (Klein, “A taxonomy of interdisciplinarity” 17). The lack of integration means that such studies may fall short of producing new knowledge on a given topic. They do not adequately present a new way of understanding the problem.

1.1.3 Transdisciplinarity

There are many ways to approach interdisciplinary research however, integration, according to Klein, is “widely regarded as the primary methodology of interdisciplinarity.” Interdisciplinary researchers have called integration the “distinguishing feature of IDS” and “the core methodology underpinning the transdisciplinary research process” (Klein, “Research Integration” 283). While the ultimate goal is to *integrate* disciplines, after all “another aspect of the prefix *inter* – is *something altogether new*, distinctive, apart from, and beyond the limits of any discipline,” (Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* 7) not all interdisciplinary research reaches the same level of integration. In “The Interdisciplinary Research Process,” Rick Szostak distinguishes between partial and full integration defining the former as “an ad hoc and temporary borrowing of tools and approaches from one discipline for use by researchers based in another” and the latter as “occur[ing] when the ideas from one discipline are so absorbed into the other that some new synthesis emerges” (14). In “A taxonomy of interdisciplinarity,” Klein characterises interdisciplinarity as “integrating[,] interacting[,] linking[,] focusing[, and] blending” but transdisciplinarity as “transcending[,] transgressing[, and] transforming” (16). Transdisciplinarity, therefore,

brings disciplines together in contexts where new approaches arise out of the interaction between them, but to a heightened degree. The focus is on its context of application, and on a particular approach to problem-solving that creates its own theoretical impetus. Interdisciplinarity may involve a common framework, shared across disciplines which each contributing their bit. But transdisciplinarity, in this definition, requires a ‘common

theoretical understanding' and a 'mutual interpenetration of disciplinary epistemologies.' (Strathern 70)

Nissani's smoothie metaphor is best suited to transdisciplinarity as this methodological framework not only brings disciplinary insight and knowledge together to integrate it, but, by finding gaps in the existing disciplinary attention and by questioning these overlooked aspects, also ultimately fills in spaces left by other disciplines (or fruit). Researchers form their own theoretical structures with which they can answer the complex questions individual disciplines have not yet been able to answer.

A key aspect of in the process of integration is finding common ground between disciplines. In Stuart Henry and Nicole L. Bracy's "Understanding Human Action: Integrating Meanings, Mechanisms, Causes, and Contexts," the authors synthesize from a number of interdisciplinary methodological works to suggest that relationships between disciplines can "be envisioned: [as] (1) end-to-end or sequential integration, which implies a sequential causal order; (2) side-by-side or horizontal integration, which implies overlapping influences; or (3) up-and-down or vertical integration, which 'refers to identifying a level of abstraction or generality that encompasses much of the conceptualization of the constituent theories' (Bernard & Snipes, 1996; Messner et al., 1989, p. 5)" (266). Here too Repko is extremely useful as he offers different techniques that are relevant for finding common ground:

- (1) *redefinition* of concepts or assumptions to include or exclude phenomena;
- (2) *extension* of concepts and assumptions or *expansion* of a theory to cover previously uncovered phenomena, perhaps even beyond their original disciplinary domain;
- (3) *organization* of previously unrelated concepts or assumptions into a relationship; and
- (4) the *transformation* of opposing concepts or assumptions into variables of an uncovered factor (cf. Repko 2008, pp. 281-291). (Keestra 251)

As interdisciplinarians move through the process of finding common ground, they must understand the disciplines they are drawing from. Using established disciplinary insights and methods gives them a toolbox which allows them to build an answer to the complex problem being addressed. Because such researchers are not bound to any of the disciplines they are using, they are able to find a “central point of unification. This search of unity and for integration, then, becomes the key principle of genuine research” (Salter and Hearn 35). The following will show how food and cultural studies are already part of many fields. The goal then is to organize these disciplinary ways of studying food and apply the appropriate methods to the study of French-Canadian foodways in a minority context; something that has not yet been done.

2.0 Concepts and Theories of Relevant Studies

2.1 Food and Cultural Studies

Without food, human beings would not exist. Food provides the nutrients necessary to fuel our bodies and it also feeds our souls. Good food shared with friends and family develops positive associations, creates fond memories, and allows our bodies to secrete dopamine. Bad food or food consumed in unpleasant situations has the opposite effect. Food must be procured. It must be prepared. It is served and consumed. It is then digested and must be disposed of. Thus food is part of a large system on which all humans, no matter their age, gender, or economic status, must depend.

In the 2013 introduction to the *Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies*, editor and well known culinary historian Ken Albala stated that despite the growing attention to food in all academic disciplines, food studies as an academic field was still in the process of defining itself precisely because “there is not yet a comprehensive list of what disciplines belong in food studies” (xv). In fact, he advised that it “is

still most prudent for scholars to maintain a traditional disciplinary homebase to conduct research on food” (xv). Rachel Black echoed this advice in her essay “Food studies as an interdisciplinary field” noting that despite the prevalence in food-related publications and conferences, there is difficulty separating the “anecdotal [from] the rigorous research” (201).

In 2009, Jeff Miller and Jonathan Deutsch posited in *Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods* that “[f]ood studies is not really the study of food... but rather the study of the relationship between food and the human experience” (3). Experience is not easy to study as it is highly subjective and depends on the myriad factors that make up an individual’s or group’s economic, social, and geographical context. Indeed, experience is based on the larger political and social systems in which an individual lives. In order to help researchers, Deutsch and Miller explained that “[t]hese relationships are examined from a variety of perspectives and from a range of places in the food system, from production to consumption, or from farm to fork” (3). In other words, work in this field is defined by an interest in understanding food habits, “how we produce, procure, prepare, and consume food,” and food choices, “what a person or group decides to produce, prepare, and consume.” Food studies means researchers seek to understand habits and choices as being representative of a group: “their beliefs, their passions, their background knowledge and assumptions, and their personalities” (Miller and Deutsch 7).

Food has long been part of academic work. Plato and Epicurus, for example, gave dieting and well-being a lot of attention (Black 201). Yet, it was not until the publication of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin’s study of gastronomy that a “truly holistic approach to studying food” (Black 201) was published. In “On Taste,” Brillat-Savarin presented a scientific approach to eating, explaining why we enjoy it and the ways in which our tongue and olfactory senses work together to make

eating more than a biological necessity (15-23). From these early roots, the study of food has moved through various schools of thought. Early work concerned with food took a structural approach. For scholars such as Claude-Lévi Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Mary Douglas, “food acted as cultural system and as a code continuously producing signs that allow a specific community to engage in meaningful symbolic action” (Parasecoli 275). While such structuralist approaches do show that food is used to order a particular group, it does not account for human agency in that not all members of the group will obey the socially established rules. Some individuals may face constraints that do not allow them to participate fully, if at all, in the established practices.¹ Furthermore, if one were to pick the food up from the context being studied and move it to a different place and time where individuals had never seen the foodstuff, it is highly unlikely that they would ascribe the same meaning and value to the food. Thus food does not have an intrinsic meaning. Meaning is produced and evolves over time. Structuralist approaches therefore do not account for this grey zone of human behaviour.

A response to the shortfalls of structuralism in relation to food studies has been to take a cultural approach. The culturalist focuses on “the lived experiences of people and their agency, often underlining their resistance to power” (Parasecoli 277). Using cultural relativism, one would begin by studying the culture in which the subjects find themselves. A culture is “frequently viewed as the environmental

¹ Constraints may include lack of access to certain foods because they are not available or are too expensive to purchase. Time constraints may also affect adherence to culturally set rules or beliefs. With two family members working full-time to support the household, it may not be possible, for example, to make healthy, balanced meals. Lack of knowledge is another constraint that forces changes in cultural groups. This loss of cultural capital will serve to redefine the group as certain foods disappear from the cultural repertoire.

constraint in terms of values, norms, beliefs and social sanctions it provides, it also provides legitimated means by which to carry out action” (McIntosh 15). This would mean a closer look at a subject’s family structure and social relationships as well as the prevalent food and social movements. In cultural studies, “culture is understood *both* as a way of life – encompassing ideas, attitudes, languages, practices, institutions, and structures of power – and a whole range of cultural practices: artistic forms, texts, canons, architecture” (Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg 5). In other words, it is understanding the link between the actual material object and the symbolic attachment a group has made to the object. Thus, like food studies, cultural studies explores “how meaning is generated, disseminated, reproduced, negotiated, and resisted through values, beliefs, symbols, practices, institutions, as well as economic, social, and political structures within a given culture” (Parasecoli 274).

It is important, when studying any culture or aspect of culture, that one be weary of power relations as individuals are constantly negotiating their place in their world. As males/females, employers/employees, consumers/producers, people behave according to the context they interpret themselves to be in. A postmodern approach to the study of cultural identity and foodways is important as it starts with the premise that there is no absolute truth. Though the same traditional foods do show up in many French-Canadian families and so can be considered a cultural element that structures identity, the food is far more complex than that. Understanding how traditional foods fit within the larger system of cultural allegiance is crucial to understanding the way individuals use food to identify themselves with the group. From this understanding, one can possibly see how food acts to bind individuals within a cultural paradigm and system. Through interviewing and observation of participants, listening to what they say about themselves then watching them behave in the kitchen space, this project begins with the premise that there is no absolute “truth.”

Rather, each individual speaks and acts the “truth” about his or her view of French-Canadian identity and culture. By combining their voices and views, the research project aims to better understand how social mores tie individuals together and promote, or hinder, cultural allegiance.

There many ways to define and study the concept of “culture” and the formation of a cultural group. On one hand, some believe that a culture is the “observable differences in custom, social structure, language, religion, art, and other material and nonmaterial characteristics” (Chang 18). This view of culture as being a system outside the individual, a system of signs and symbols, has been used by anthropologists to identify a culture and to show that the “culture has a life of its own, dictating, regulating, and controlling people to maintain inner-group ‘homogeneity’” (Chang 19). As people interact with each other, according to Geertz, they establish meaning and cultural norms. As in the discussion of food presented above, this paper and project believe that such an approach denies the possibility of human agency. There is no doubt that there are signs and symbols that, through their repetition and choice, signal a similarity between individuals. However, the fact that individuals choose to use these symbols to identify themselves and to tie themselves to others is determined by their own personal desires and is a product of their lived experiences. Thus, as Chang proposes in her “work-in-progress concept of culture,” this paper acknowledges that:

1. [i]ndividuals are cultural agents, but culture is not at all about individuality;
2. [i]ndividuals are not prisoners of culture; 3. [d]espite inner-group diversity, a certain level of sharedness, common understanding, and/or repeated interactions is needed to bind people together as a group; 4. [i]ndividuals can become members of multiple social organizations concurrently; 5. [e]ach membership contributes to the cultural makeup of individuals with varying degrees of influence; 6. [i]ndividuals can discard a membership of a cultural group with or without ‘shedding’ their cultural traits; and 7. [w]ithout securing official memberships in certain cultural groups, obvious traits of membership,

or members' approvals, outsiders can acquire cultural traits and claim cultural affiliations with other cultural groups. (21-23)

Foodways are a perfect example of how culture is produced both inside and outside the self. As much as they can "be interpreted as mirroring broader social, cultural, economic and political changes[, they] can also be manufactured" (Short 18)

In the last decade, Canadian food studies, that is the study of Canada's foodways, has emerged as its own subcategory. Works such as Dorothy Duncan's *Food, Fellowship, and Folklore Canadians at Table A Culinary History of Canada* (2006), Nathalie Cooke's *What's to Eat? Entrées in Canadian Food History* (2009), Diane Tye's *Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes* (2010), Franco Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek, and Marlene Epp's *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics Towards a Canadian Food History* (2012), and Ian Mosby's *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* (2014) are but a few of the works that have contributed to creating a bibliography of studies focused on Canadian foodways. Canadian journal publications, such as *Cuizine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures / Cuizine : revue des cultures culinaires au Canada*, and associations, such as Culinary Historians of Canada, are other examples of contributions to studying food in Canada. The issue that arises with both cultural and food studies is exactly what makes it interdisciplinary: its lack of boundaries and core knowledge base. Studying food requires a holistic approach. Though food studies may be either comparative or be based on a specific case, the study of a group's foodways is necessarily holistic. Understanding where food comes from; who procures and prepares it; how it is prepared; to whom, by whom, and how it is served; how it is consumed; and how it is disposed of requires a number of research tools. In her contribution to the *Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies*, Black explained that "[s]cholars adapt, adopt, and create methodologies that help them deal with the complex issues surrounding food. It is perhaps

this creative *bricolage* that most characterizes food studies. Studying food requires this kind of creative thinking in order to solve complex problems and generate new understandings of food systems” (Black 206).¹

2.2 Food Studies Toolkit

Saying that food studies require a creative approach or bricolaging of disciplines and methods does not mean that any and all disciplines can be combined to answer this question. As an interdisciplinary project, the review of the literature has made it clear that the disciplines best suited to my project are history, gender studies, material culture studies, and autoethnography. The following will first give a brief summary of the selected disciplinary fields’ link to food studies. It will become clear, from one section to the next, that the disciplines overlap vertically. On one hand, each of these disciplines has a historical component that will help me situate my participants in specific historical eras and periods. On the other hand, they each share deconstruction as a key way to understand how individuals make sense of themselves within the historical period.

2.3 History

According to Allen Repko, “[h]istorians believe that any historical period cannot be adequately appreciated without understanding the

¹ Cultural studies are described similarly by Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg in “Cultural Studies: An Introduction” where they claim that the “methodology of cultural studies provides an equally uneasy marker, for cultures in fact has no distinct methodology, no unique statistical, ethnomethodological, or textual analysis to call its own. Its methodology, ambiguous from the beginning, could best be seen as a bricolage. Its choice of practice, that is, is pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive” p. 2. Miller and Deutsch do not use the term “bricolage” but contend that the “*interdisciplinary* field of study of food and culture investigates people’s relationships with food from a range of humanities and social science perspectives, often times in combination” p. 3.

trends and developments leading up to it, that historical events are the result of both societal forces and individual decisions, and that a picture or narrative of the past can be no better than the richness of its details” (Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research* 103). By digging through archives, reading past cooking books, and studying census data, it is possible to understand the major historical movements, food trends, and demographic realities of Astorville, Ontario. However, as an interdisciplinary project that understands that culture and experience is more complicated than what is simply written down, this project makes a point of specifying important subcategories of historical research: culinary history, French-Canadian history, and post-colonial /race studies.

2.3.1 Culinary History

In “Culinary history,” Ken Albala is quick to remind his reader that historic cookbooks and gastronomic literature “very rarely are [an] accurate record of what people actually ate... a researcher can be sure that a cookbook reflects the ideas and values of the author and perhaps by extension a set of readers who purchased the book, but this is almost never an indication of exactly how people cooked or what they ate” (Albala 117). Rather, researchers should read cookbooks, both historic and modern, for what they can tell us about how gender was being constructed in the period, see what ingredients were valued and used, and what tools and techniques were needed to make the food in the book. As this research project is interested in understanding how people learn to make traditional foods and whether or not a lack of skill is overcome by actively finding instructions, recipes and cookbooks are important sources of data.

Personal cookbooks are also an important source of information for understanding culture and identity. Unlike professionally printed cookbooks that are endorsed by recognized chefs or companies, personal cookbooks often take the form of scrapbooks or boxes filled with recipes. Today, the internet provides a range of recipes as well as

sites such as Pinterest and Cooks.com that allow individuals to create online cookbooks, to tag or bookmark favourites, and to share their preferences with others. Though this project is not interested in studying personal cookbooks per se, it is interested in studying how food connects individuals and how food defines personal identity. Authors such as Anne Bower, Marlene Epp, Janet Theophano, Diane Tye, and Marie Drews, to name but a select few, have demonstrated that community cookbooks and personal recipes are ways in which individuals express themselves. Shared recipes create a community of individuals tied together by the similarity of the foods they consume, show respect for the culinary skills of others when a recipe is requested, and create posterity within families as recipes are passed down from one generation to the next. By studying the link between family foods and generational trends, this study will contribute to the growing interest on culinary history. Tracing foodways from one generation to the next as well as between community members, this project will be able to see just how entrenched some food habits are and will be able to predict the continuity of certain foods over others.

2.3.2 French-Canadian History and Postcolonial/Race Studies

The subject of French-speaking Canadians in Canada is the subject of much historical significance. Since the British North Americas Act of 1867, French has been recognized as one of Canada's two official languages. Yet, the right to be educated and to receive public services in French has not always been possible. In provinces outside of Quebec, and especially in New Brunswick, Ontario, and Manitoba, assimilationist policies of the early 1900s aimed to eliminate French as a spoken language. The ensuing public and political protests to these policies have remained the focus of much scholarly work about French-speaking Canadians. Though Astorville has not been the focus of any academic studies other than my MA project, a number of historical projects have documented its evolution. It is clear from

these texts that Astorville was one predominantly Francophone. Drawn to the area to work in the lumber industry, men also came out of necessity since land was becoming scarce in Quebec. However, the rural community remained isolated from other Francophone communities. With time, farming no longer offered sustainable employment and individuals were forced to move out of the village to seek higher education. Nearby public education, however, was only available in English until the end of the 1960s.

Linguistic assimilation is an undeniable element of any minority culture. French-Canadians are no exception. Since language is one of the primary ways through which individuals categorize themselves, linguistic fluency is undoubtedly an important factor to consider when studying cultural identity. Given that only 36% of Astorville's residents now identify themselves as being French, there has been a clear shift in the village's demographic makeup. The census data certainly gives cause for concern and seems clear evidence that Francophone Astorvillians will someday cease to exist. However, many French-Canadian traditions are very much alive and well in the community. Moreover, the local elementary school has over 200 students and just moved to a brand new building. The residents of Astorville clearly ascribe a certain degree of importance and value to French-Canadian traditions and to the French language. Understanding just what is valued is precisely the subject of this paper. Is it possible, as Dennis Au has demonstrated of the French in Munroeville, that one can identify as being French-Canadian even when one no longer speaks the language? Are other traditions, such as foodways, an equal measure of cultural identity – a cultural identity that is not dependent on language?

According to the definition of post-colonial studies, often understood as the study of a cultural group after a colonial government has withdrawn from a given territory (Gilbert and Tompkins 2), French-Canadians do not literally apply as a group that could be studied by

post-colonial scholars. However, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins suggest in *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, practice, politics*, that “post-colonialism is, rather, an engagement with and contestation of colonialism’s discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies” (2). Kitchens, like the stage of their study, are one place where individuals resist dominant ideas. A site where they affirm their cultural identity and express themselves in ways they find familiar and comforting. In this sense, food could be used to identify individuals as belonging to the French-Canadian group where traditional foods act like a common language used to structure the group. However, the traditional foods French-Canadians make is not inherently “French.” In fact, much of it is not unlike foods eaten in other cultures. *Tourtière*, for example, is more English meat pie than Quebecois *tourtière du Lac St. Jean*. *Gâteau aux fruits* is fruit cake and, like fruit or sugar pie or roasted meat, is in no way a distinctly “French” food. This project is interested in deconstructing history, specifically culinary and race history, to study how food like *tourtière* is a purposeful act; a choice to ascribe to a personal definition of culture. It combines archival research with interviews and observation to “understand the ways in which meaning is generated, disseminated, and produced through practices, beliefs, institutions, and political, economic, or social structures within a given culture.”

This project aims to show that personal definitions are actually shared by others and that in valuing (or not) traditional, French-Canadian foods, individuals are resisting (or are) changing their foodways to fold to the pressure of mainstream culture. Shifting trends “can reveal, it is argued, the shifting values, beliefs and identities of a society or culture” (Short 17). By studying how pressure from the dominant discourse impacts the food language of the home, this project will be able to see if Astorvillians are shifting their cultural values in more than just language.

2.4 Gender Studies

Gender history has several distinguishing characteristics: it focuses on specific experiences to look at the ways in which men and women interacted with each other in public and private places; it deconstructs the variables and the hierarchies of power that existed between and within gender groups; and it analyzes the language that is employed by politicians, the media, and individuals during the period in question to once again ascertain how gender is being defined and regulated. Essentially, gender history seeks to understand how gender is *constructed*. The notion that women are “natural” homemakers who live to create nurturing spaces and wholesome, creative meals for their families still exists in contemporary literature. In fact, recent works on motherhood often focus on the pressure and subsequent guilt that mothers face when it comes to making decisions about their children’s welfare and balancing the pressure to feed their families well while also working full time outside and inside the home. What some might consider archaic messages from a long time ago, such as the one found in the introduction to the 1877 *The Canadian Home Cook Book Compiled by: Ladies of Toronto and Chief Cities and Towns in Canada* which claims that “[s]uccess in housekeeping adds credit to the woman of intellect, and lustre to a woman’s accomplishments” (*Tried! Tested! Proven!* 3) have not disappeared. Contemporary cookbooks and cookbook authors, such as Food Network featured chef Nigella Lawson’s *How to Be a Domestic Goddess: Baking and the Art of Comfort Cooking*, echo this specific version of femininity. She argues that women need to reclaim the kitchen space from which they “have become alienated” (vii) and argues that women need to “claim back some of that space, make it comforting rather than frightening... [and that] baking stands both as a useful metaphor for the familial warmth of the kitchen we fondly imagine used to exist, and as a way of reclaiming our lost Eden” (vii). Thus even in 2016, where women must work outside the home to help their families financially and are often also depicted as the

primary homemakers, it is hard for women and men to ignore long-established ideas of gender. As researchers, it is important to recognize that these messages are still very prominent and look to deconstruct how they impact our study participants.

Recent food scholars such as Sherrie Inness and Diane Tye have noted that researchers are indeed beginning to move away from studies that assume women will be in the kitchen in order to ask: “Where do we pick up the ideology that women ‘naturally’ belong in the kitchen and men ‘naturally’ do not?” (Innes 3). By changing the lens from an expectation to an exploration, or from assumption to deconstruction, gender historians can use aspects of food-making to help understand how gender is constructed in specific places and/or periods. More and more work is emerging by men and women, about men who cook. These authors are pushing back at stereotypical portrayals of males in the kitchen space. Gary Draper, Christopher Dummitt and John Donohue are but three examples. Just as this study aims to deconstruct ideas of power and race, it also aims to deconstruct ideas of gender to better understand how gender impacts cultural transmission. By understanding how one’s gender is constructed in relation to traditional foods, this paper can contribute to understanding if gender impacts how culture is transmitted.

Along with reading cookbooks and recipes, semi-structured interviews, for which ethics approval has already been granted, will ask participants to discuss their food-making habits, specifically related to traditional foods. These open-ended questions are designed to help build a rapport with the participant and ease them into the more personal questions that ask about identity, language, religion, and culture. Supplementing the semi-structured interviews, this project also uses a specific form of observation known as culinary chats which, Meredith E. Abarca suggests in *Voices in the Kitchen: Views of Food and the World from Working-Class Mexican and Mexican American Women*, are a better way

to interview individuals when trying to understand their relationship to their foodways. In traditional, structured interviews, even if working-class men and women “belong... to a nonacademic world where textual knowledge does not directly influence their everyday life,” (4) they still felt and respond to “societal demands” (4) in a way that indicated that they were aware of the societal implications and limitations inherent in their gender and ethnic reality. Importantly, “[k]itchens and cooking, [are] a place and [an] activity that most women [and more and more men] engage in regardless of educational level, ethnicity, or class status, [and so] form the praxis to bridge the gap between academic theoretical discourses about ... subjectivity and quotidian working-class practices of... agency” (Abarca 4). Everyone has been in a kitchen, even if s/he was not actually making the food. Thus, when possible, placing people within this space is important to see how they are acting and reacting when in it.¹

In my past work, culinary chats have proven invaluable. Whereas the semi-structured interview yielded important information, people were often much more comfortable, open, and willing to share when they were making the food they were discussing and using the space and tools I wanted to analyze rather than having them talk hypothetically about them. The kitchen is a key site in which individuals define themselves as not only gendered being but also where they assume their place in the family hierarchy. How they act out these roles in the kitchen is telling of a number of other societal values and attitudes.

¹ Knowledge of the inner workings of the kitchen and of recipes came up in both my father and my grand-father’s interviews for my MA. Both were able to describe how certain meals were made even if they had not eaten these meals in a number of years. During her interviews of Sudbury’s Ukrainian community, Stacey Zembryzck’s male participants similarly recall their mother’s work in the kitchen though they were not necessarily actively involved. See Stacey Zembryzcki, “‘There Were Always Men in Our House’: Gender and the Childhood Memories of Working-Class Ukrainians in Depression-Era Canada.” *Labour/Le Travail*. 60 (Fall 2007), 77-105.

Ethics permission has already been granted for this part of the research process.

Together, these two interview methods aim to generate a fuller picture of traditional food practices by not only asking participants to speak of food practices, but also to demonstrate them. As Anderson et al suggest in *Acquired Taste*, “[y]ou can be the recipient of the goodness that comes from food, but you have to create it yourself to really ‘get’ on a deeper level the way that home-cooked meals and relationship-building are inextricably linked” (24). Through both talking about traditional food and then making it, this project aims to combine theory and practice to see to what extent the deeper meaning of these foods is understood by the participants.

2.5 Material Culture Studies

According to Julie Prown, “[m]aterial culture is just what it says it is – namely, the manifestation of culture through material productions” (1). Studying material culture “is the study of material to understand culture, to discover the beliefs – the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time” (Prown 1). Like food, objects are often ignored in contemporary research because of their ubiquity. Indeed, because they are not living, it is easy to forget the extent to which objects tell us about the people who use them and what they can tell us about the historical and social context being studied. Material culture studies shares with anthropology as anthropologists have long looked at the objects of ancient and primitive civilizations to study the larger cultural, social, and political realities of those people. It also shares with folklore an interest in rituals where objects become infused with symbolic life. Scholars have applied perspectives from anthropology and folklore to the study of more contemporary cultures. In *Sweetness and Power*, for example, Sidney Mintz suggests that the “social history of the use of new foods in a western nation can contribute to an anthropology of modern life”

(xxviii). In this sense, material cultural studies combines anthropology and folklore's interest in rituals and practices to show how the objects are not only a product of the culture but also influence the culture that uses them.

To study material culture, one must turn away, at least momentarily, from the people using the objects in order to study the objects themselves. Objects have their own history. They are made by humans for a specific purpose and thus understanding who made them and why can tell us about the people who used the tool. Being inanimate, objects may pass from one generation to another. Given that technology changes all the time, objects will eventually be used differently than they were initially intended and thus following the tools teaches scholars about cultural evolution. In order to study objects, scholars such as Igor Kopytoff and Psyche Williams-Forsen suggest tracing a biography of the object and plot its movement through space and time the same way a biographer would trace the life of a human subject.

The ingredients used to make traditional foods should similarly fall under the researcher's scrutiny. In our postmodern world, it might be easy to take for granted that we are autonomous beings free to eat what we want, when we want. We may not consider that our food choices actually tell us anything about who we are or where we belong. However, scholars such as Kyla Wazana Tompkins use the study of specific foodways to question just how free individuals really are. According to her,

[e]ating intervenes as a determining moment in what [she] argue[s] are paradoxical and historically specific attempts to regulate embodiment, which [she] define[s] as living in and through the social experience of the matter we call flesh. Nationalist foodways – and the objects fetishized therein – in turn become allegories through which the expanding nation and its attendant anxieties play out. What we see in the nineteenth century – as indeed we do today in such racialized discourses as obesity, hunger, and diabetes – is the production of social inequality at the level of the quotidian functioning of the body.

What also emerges, however, are fissures and openings in the body politic, spaces where political fictions are exposed, messy, and only semidigested. (191-197)

How we choose to eat, according to her and scholars such as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Judith Butler, Laura Shapiro, and Sherrie Inness, are the way that we perform our racial and gendered selves. Moreover, it is not just that what we eat tells us about who we are. Rather, as Ken Albala stresses in *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, it is more about studying how individuals feel about the food they eat that tells us about them. “Because underlying cultural assumptions and beliefs are taken for granted or repressed, they are not visible in what a society says, or does, or makes – its self-conscious expressions. They are, however, detectable in the way things are said, or done, or made – that is, in their style.... When groups of objects share formal characteristics, those resemblances or resonances constitute style” (Prown 4). Thus, by studying the food that is made and understanding how the ingredients are acquired, transformed into something edible, and how they are served, we can understand how individuals place themselves within the larger social and cultural hierarchy. In order to measure the impact of tools on a person’s food practices, the interview of the culinary chat will be transcribed not only words but also actions. This will allow me to see, among other things, how often a person refers to his/her recipe, where the recipe comes from, how comfortable s/he is in the kitchen or cooking space, and what modern conveniences the person uses and/or rejects. By seeing how individuals interact with objects, I will be able to see what power these objects have on individuals.

On top of tracing the historical biography of objects, a key methodological consideration in material cultural studies is having “a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body” (Bennett xiv). Bennett calls this demystification; what others might call deconstruction. Demystification “uncovers

something human, for example, the hidden quest for domination on the part of some humans over... others, a human desire to deflect responsibility for harms done, or an unjust distribution of (human) power. Demystification tends to screen from view the vitality of matter and to reduce *political* agency to *human* agency" (x). As with culinary history, race studies, gender studies, and also autoethnography which will be discussed in the following section, material culture studies requires tools: the ability to decode interview data and recipes, and the ability to trace the history of the object. By understanding the object's history, one gets a better sense of what ordinary people actually do rather than what they claim to do. Thus looking at not only the words that are used to describe and discuss traditional foods, but also the tools, techniques, and space where they are actually produced, I will better understand the full implication of the participant's attitudes toward traditional, French-Canadian foodways.

2.6 Autoethnography

Individuals exist in a complex world. A world that necessitates the ability to manoeuvre through, and make sense of, myriad situations in various contexts. How one reacts to a given situation is largely based on his or her background and biographers attempt, through their research, to make sense of these reactions. Autobiographies, which focus on key moments and situations, are one way that individuals, retrospectively, order and present a coherent picture in their lives.

In some ways, autoethnography is like autobiography. Both are self-narratives written by the individual who has not only lived a particular life experience but also whose life is a product of "[w]hat an individual does [as] a concrete realization of cultural-historical possibilities" (Roth 3). However, drawing on ethnographic traditions, these autoethnographic studies are also interested in studying a group or culture's beliefs and values and using specific and important historical moments to explain the group or culture's views. Both autobiography and auto-

ethnography tell a story and use literary techniques to enhance the story and draw in the reader. While autobiography may use dialogue and shifting narrative perspectives to tell this story, ethnography uses field notes, observations, and interviews to produce a “thick description” which ultimately describes those both inside and outside the group (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner).

Autoethnographers push back at accepted master narratives that have come to govern our lives and dictate our behaviour. Through its “systematic sociological introspection... and emotional recall,” (Ellis xvii) these scholars challenge the status quo. They accept that there is no absolute truth. Rather, they “realized that stories were complex, constitutive, meaningful phenomena that taught morals and ethics, introduced unique ways of thinking and feeling, and helped people make sense of themselves and others” (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner). By comparing and contrasting narrative perspectives and providing alternative experiences, autoethnography offers a voice to previously silenced individuals who were not recognized as authoritative or legitimate. Because it is interested in presenting “multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural,” (Muncey 30) minority groups and women, for example, have found in autoethnography an opportunity to contribute a more nuanced view of the world in order to present an understanding that defied established norms and practices. Importantly, autoethnography is not a narcissistic and self-indulgent monologue. Rather, it is “a self-narrative that critiques the situations of self with others in social contexts” (Muncey 31). It is “an ethnography that includes the researcher’s vulnerable self, emotions, body and spirit and produces evocative stories that create the effect of reality and seeks fusion between social science and literature. It also questions the notion of a coherent, individual self” (Muncey 30).

Reflection and layering, which are central to good autoethnography, are valuable ways to answer this project’s complex and multifaceted

question. Understanding how food is linked to culture and identity is far from simple and no two people will see this issue in the same way. By layering their voices and using my own personal reflections as a member of this community, I hope to be able to provide an answer that allows for the variety of responses I anticipate receiving. Indeed, I have been reflecting on this issue for a number of years now. It was the focus of my final project for my MA and has been the subject of the papers I have published and presented since beginning my PhD in 2013. I have been journaling on this topic and have been collecting and experimenting with traditional recipes for as many years.

Given that this topic is very personal and that questions about language, memory, and religion may be sensitive to my participants, the narrative and creative potential of autoethnography provides an advantage for me as it will allow me to incorporate the views of those who may not want to speak to me on the record about their experiences and beliefs. Indeed, speaking off the record is a very real, ethical concern for researchers and the contributions to *Oral History Off the Record: Toward and Ethnography of Practice* highlight the dilemma many researchers face when their participants provide very valuable information once the tape recorder has been turned off or who refuse to participate at all because they do not want to make their views public (Shetfel and Zembrzycki). Though I am not entirely sure to what degree my final paper will lean toward the creative or analytic spectrums of autoethnography, I believe that the narrative characteristic inherent in the layering and reflective process of autoethnography makes this a very valuable method in such a sensitive project.

3.0 Conclusion

Food is a necessary part of our humanity and is tied to numerous social and economic systems and layers of power. It is thus inherently interdisciplinary. Even though studies are themselves interdisciplinary in nature, this paper has identified the fields of study relevant to

studying how food can be used to study French-Canadian cultural retention. By explaining the key methodologies and disciplinary perspectives of each of these fields, this paper has organised the similarities of these fields to show how bringing their insights together can advance new knowledge and theory in the study of French-Canadians in minority settings. Through this specific combination, this project not only integrates but also hopes to transform the way we study this specific cultural group. It will advance our knowledge and understanding of how food may be used to resistant cultural and linguistic assimilation.

By studying traditional foods, rather than everyday ones, this project focuses on the foods that are generally more complicated, time-consuming, and special. Henry Glassie defines tradition “as ‘the creation of the future out of the past’ (1995, 395). He continues, ‘If tradition is a people’s creation out of their own past, its character is not static but continuity’ (1995, 396)” (Tye 224). In order to understand any culture, one must study the three aspects that are essential aspects of human experience: “*cultural behavior, cultural knowledge, and cultural artifacts*” (Miller and Deutsch 138).

Traditional foods are the ones for which there may be larger constraints but are also the ones that call for more obvious agency. Because these foods tend to require more skill, specific tool, and are often more expensive, they are a stronger indication of cultural allegiance. They are also the ones that may require specific behaviour and knowledge; the ones made with specific objects. While all the various fields of study associated with this project have a large body of literature, few have specifically studied the link between French-Canadian traditional foods and allegiance to culture in a minority setting. Thus the research question itself is unique.

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