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“Because I saw my mother cooking”: the sociocultural process of learning and teaching domestic culinary skills of the Western Brazilian Amazonian women

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ABSTRACT

This article describes and discusses the sociocultural process of learning and teaching women's domestic culinary skills. Drawing on descriptive qualitative research, we conducted an in-depth analysis of semi-structured interviews with 16 cisgender women who cooked at home at least once a day and lived in Cruzeiro do Sul, Acre state, Brazilian Western Amazon. Our results suggest that women develop their domestic cooking skills at different moments. In childhood, the women interviewed were taught by their maternal figures and learned the required culinary skills to prepare “Rainforest Foods,” traditional foods in their original places. In adulthood, female employers taught them the culinary skills needed to prepare “City food,” meals made with ingredients, tools, and cooking methods available in the urban area. Notably, the women interviewed also reported being taught by their husbands to cook foods that met their tastes and eating patterns. In contrast, women teach their sons and daughters culinary skills to develop their food autonomy and promote the egalitarian division of domestic culinary work. These findings are essential to understand the sociocultural process of learning and teaching domestic culinary skills among communities or membership groups who lived in forest or rural areas and migrated to urban centers.

KEYWORDS

Cooking skills;
femininities; gender;
sexual labor division

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

Introduction

“Culinary skills” are the abilities to perform tasks related to the production of dishes or meals from different foods and to master culinary techniques in a given society and historical moment (Jomori et al. 2018). Feminist researchers have investigated how teaching and learning domestic culinary skills remain linked to restrictive normative femininities (Oleschuk 2019; Janhonen, Torkkeli, and Mäkelä 2018; Wolfson et al. 2017; Utter et al. 2018; Lavelle et al. 2019). Oleschuk (2019) reported that it is essential to know the processes of transmitting domestic culinary skills to understand gender inequalities related to domestic culinary labor and to overcome them. This article will consider teaching and learning as processes sustained by specific social relations (Ausabel, Novak, and Hanesian 1990). In our case, these social relations are those established in the nuclear and extended family domestic unit. In this sense, teaching will be the process by which special or general knowledge about a subject is communicated or transmitted. On the other hand, learning takes place through instruction and observation (Rivilla 2010), through one act, or a series of acts or observations through one or more social interactions (Bruner 2001). This process ranges from data acquisition to the most complex form of gathering and organizing information.

Previous studies have investigated the ways people learn culinary skills (Wolfson et al. 2017; Janhonen, Torkkeli, and Mäkelä 2018; Oleschuk 2019), how they assign responsibility for teaching children to cook (Wolfson et al. 2017; Utter et al. 2018), and how mothers perceive children’s involvement in domestic cooking learning practices (Lavelle et al. 2019). These studies highlighted that, traditionally, the teaching and learning process of cooking takes place in the kitchens of family homes, where the mothers (or other female figures) are culturally designated for the intergenerational transmission of these skills (Lavelle et al. 2019; Wolfson et al. 2017; Oleschuk 2019; Janhonen, Torkkeli, and Mäkelä 2018; Utter et al. 2018).

Among these studies mentioned above, we highlight Oleschuk’s (2019) research that used qualitative interviews and observations of 34 individuals living in Toronto (Canada) who self-reported as the principal family cooks. She identified that the participants learned to cook within a cultural gender schema¹ that privileges the culinary knowledge acquired during childhood through participating and observing the mothers’ reproductive social work, which she called “cooking by our mother’s side.” This study stresses the gender inequalities present in sharing culinary skills by showing that teaching children to cook is constructed as a maternal food duty. Thus, we wonder if the “cooking by our mother’s side” schema is cross-cultural, i.e., applicable to any social group?

Moreover, Oleschuk (2019) suggests that the “cooking by our mother’s side” schema emphasizes that the experiences of learning culinary skills are related to the performativity of conventional or hegemonic femininity. The individuals she interviewed follow this cultural gender schema through emotional memories of teaching food and through feelings of “mom guilt” for not teaching cooking and having the fathers do it. Questioning Oleschuk’s schema, we wonder if there are different possibilities in which women can undo their genders when teaching domestic cooking to other family members, that is, whether they challenge normative constraints of gender? Deutsch (2007) reported that undoing gender is an enterprise of resistance against conventional gender relations that produced inequities between men and women and proposed more equitable interpersonal power dynamics. In this sense, by undoing gender, people could reduce gender inequalities in teaching and learning culinary skills (Da Silva Oliveira et al. 2022).

Based on the questions we raised above about the study of Oleschuk (2019), we developed a qualitative research program that aims to describe and discuss the sociocultural process of learning and teaching the domestic culinary skills of Brazilian western Amazonian women. Our research highlights that as women learn and teach cooking they subtly but deeply reproduce women’s subordination. In addition, we suggest that they resist subordination by refusing to teach their daughters, teaching their sons, or developing culinary skills not appreciated by their relatives (such as buying ready-to-eat meals).

Methods

Study design

This study is part of the “MINA-Brazil Study: Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition,” a birth cohort study that aims to identify early determinants to promote proper growth and development in early childhood (see Cardoso et al. 2020). As a sub-study of this cohort, we developed a descriptive qualitative research program (Sandelowski 2000) that enabled us to elucidate a comprehensive picture of the process of teaching and learning domestic culinary skills. Our research took place at the two-year follow-up of the MINA-Brazil Study, whose cohort retention was 69,9% out of 868 eligible individuals. The Research Ethics Committee of the School of Public Health of the University of São Paulo (Number 010143/2018) approved all procedures involving research study participants.

Study location

We conducted our study in Cruzeiro do Sul, a city in the state of Acre, Brazilian Western Amazon. This municipality is located 636 kilometers (≈

380 miles) from the state capital of Rio Branco. It is Acre's second-largest city, with an estimated 87,673 inhabitants in 2018 (IBGE 2019). Women and girls comprise half of the municipality's population (43,366 people). Human Development Index (HDI)² of this municipality is 0.664, characterizing average development. The national Brazilian average is 0.759 (IBGE 2011).

Additionally, Pessoa (2004) and Woff (1999) have suggested that gender relations in Cruzeiro do Sul are unequal because the municipality was primarily formed by men (who migrated from other Brazilian regions) to live and work in rubber extractive reserves (during the years of 1942–1945). Some women (who migrated with their partners or were native to the region) were responsible for agricultural work and taking care of the family. Consequently, the municipality has a patriarchal and authoritarian culture regarding the treatment of the family, remaining relatively the same, despite the increasing participation of women in the world of paid work. It is important to underline that this conclusion is related to our presence in the field and that, to our knowledge, there is no observational research in other Brazilian states or municipalities regarding this relation.

Selecting participants

We focused on a subsample Mina-Brazil Study³ of 16 self-identified women, self-identified heterosexual, aged between 18 and 41 years old, who cooked at home at least once a day and were mothers of at least one child aged 2+ years old⁴. To define our sample size, we followed Kuzel's (1992) recommendation to achieve heterogeneity and maximum data variation with a sample between twelve and twenty informants. We conducted participant selection by stratifying MINA-Brazil Study pool eligible individuals by educational level: until completed elementary school; until completed high school; and or above undergraduate education. Seven women from each level of education were randomly selected and invited to participate in our study and subsequently contacted by telephone. The first five women from each stratum who agreed to participate made up our sample of interviewees, totaling fifteen participants. One participant in the main study, who was interviewed to pretest the interview script, was included in the subsample of this qualitative study, totaling a sample of 16 participants. The participation of women was voluntary and confidential after signing the Free and Informed Consent Form specific to this phase of the study.

Data production

The first author conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with the 16 participants from April to May 2018. Each interview addressed sociodemographic characteristics, women's life trajectory; the domestic culinary practices of their maternal figures; the domestic culinary practices of their

paternal figure; the participants' domestic culinary learning process; and the process of teaching domestic culinary practices to their children. All interviews were conducted in Brazilian Portuguese, recorded, transcribed verbatim, and later translated into English. All names were changed to pseudonyms for anonymity purposes. On average, interviews lasted 90 minutes.

Data analysis

We conducted an in-depth analysis of all 16 interviews. The first author employed cutting and sorting techniques to code the data. She selected relevant excerpts related to teaching and learning culinary skills in each interview and grouped them according to the meanings they shared with others, helping to identify the codes. She constructed different codes applying Hesse-Biber (2014) approach, first constituting descriptive codes (label for participants' words and organize data into topics, e.g., "something every woman has to do"); second, developing categorical codes (descriptive codes grouped into a more general category, as "maternal figure's domestic culinary practices"); and last doing analytical codes (comprising a wider range of meanings, e.g., "learning contexts of domestic cooking skills").

Results

Women who participated in our study were on average 31.8 years of age; they had 2.4 number of children (aged between 2 and 17 years); 46.2% were self-reported unemployed or housewives⁵; 31.2% were in the poorest wealth index⁶, and 43.8% received the monetary benefit of the Bolsa Familia program⁷.

Sociocultural processes related the learning and culinary teaching skills became prominent in three analytical codes. The first analytical code, called domestic culinary skills learning contexts, expresses the women's learning contexts that highlight family arrangements that allow or limit individuals' development of domestic cooking skills. The second analytical code, called the inheritance of women's responsibility for domestic cooking is related to the learning culinary skills process as compulsory for girls and constrained by gender norms. The last analytical code, called teaching domestic culinary skills for children, expresses the recognition of women's demands, difficulties, and freedoms to develop practices of teaching culinary skills to their children.

Domestic culinary skills learning contexts

Our interviewees indicated that the maternal figures (e.g., mother, step-mother, grandmother, or aunt) were primarily responsible for domestic culinary labor, performing these activities alone or with the participation of other women (especially older daughters or housemaids). Twelve

maternal figures were housewives responsible for housework and agricultural work (e.g., agriculture, flour production, fishing, among others). That happened mainly for those maternal figures living in "Seringal" (rubber plantations) who had access to few forms of work outside the home (e.g., be a rubber tapper or housemaid). Diversely, the other four maternal figures were employed outside the home, and their income was used to support the family. That mainly occurred for those who lived in the city and were single or lived with other women related by consanguinity (e.g., sister). Both perspectives suggest maternal figures were subject to a restrictive sociocultural norm that considered culinary housework a female activity. Bertha (nurse, 24 years old) expressed her vision of her mother's culinary housework:

We see it as a natural thing. It is something that every woman must do, according to the culture and society we live in. For me, it is a normal thing to see her [mother] cooking at home. Doing housework was normal.

Only two interviewees identified maternal figures who were not responsible for cooking at home, as they had not developed their culinary skills at the time, or the level expected for adult women. Our interviewees indicated that these women worked outside the home and left the meal preparation activities to other women or their husbands. Although these women engaged in other activities of culinary work (e.g., shopping for food and cleaning dishes), the fact that they could not cook was considered a situation of dependence on another person or less power or influence in food decisions. Ercília (housewife, 24 years old) addressed the relationship between maternal figures with diminished culinary skills and other people who knew how to cook at home:

He [uncle] cleans the house, does the laundry, and makes the food. He treats my aunt like a baby. He is a husband that every woman dreams of. You have to see to believe. For example, he arrives at home before her, makes lunch, does the dishes, and tidies the house. When my aunt comes from work, he has done everything.

Regarding paternal figures (e.g., father, stepfather, grandfather, or uncle), they were defined as the family's principal providers, dedicating themselves exclusively to economic or extractive activities that guaranteed the material support of the family (such as planting, harvesting, hunting, or fishing). In this scenario, the interviewees naturalized the performances of their paternal figures, considering them as "old-fashioned men who just put food on the table" (Rose, housewife, 33 years old). According to the last statement reported above, a single informant presented a paternal figure that switched domestic gendered activity and carried out daily domestic cooking.

While discussing their childhood, the interviewees mentioned that the responsibilities of domestic activities were allocated differently according

to the sex category of children. Boys were required to do the "men things," that is, the same activities performed by their paternal figures and that took place outside the house. Boys (especially older ones) were required to work outside the home to raise financial resources for the family. Participants highlight the absence of their brothers or cousins in the domestic environment as a justification for their diminished culinary skills. Also, they suggested that those boys who remained at home would be more likely to learn some culinary and other domestic activities considered feminine. We recognize that women's narratives suggest that these boys who developed culinary skills were deviants from hegemonic conduct. Interviews also emphasize that these boys could feel ashamed of doing housework and fear being undermined or stigmatized by other males. Laudelinda (nurse technician, 33 years old) talks about her brothers' responsibilities in the domestic environment:

When mom arrived here [in Cruzeiro do Sul], my older brother wanted to work outside the home. He was always independent. My younger brother did everything at home. Nowadays, he is married, and he does things at home. He even does the cooking and laundry. He used to say, "don't you go around saying that I do this [housework]." He is like that, but he is a man, a great son, and father.

The interviewees mentioned that they were required to perform the same domestic cooking activities as their maternal figures, especially older daughters. It is noteworthy that girls' noncompliance with domestic culinary activities was liable to reprehension or punishment by other family members. Carlota (housewife, 31 years old) exemplifies this situation:

My father charged us, said that we had to do things [culinary housework]. We must do it! Moreover, it was like this: [he] left the responsibility to me, when he arrived and found that nothing was done, he scolded me.

In this warning and charged context, all interviewees mentioned that they understood these activities as part of the responsibilities to support maternal figures and meet the gender norms imposed on them (cooking as female duty). In this retrospective view, some interviewees expressed indignation related to the mother and sister being overwhelmed with housework and the father and brother being less involved in these activities. Lacerda (teacher, 30 years old), spoke about her feelings when helping her stepmother in domestic activities:

I enjoyed [helping my stepmother]. I did not accept that men don't do things [housework] because I believe that we are all the same. They have to do it too if I must cook, clean, iron, and sweep what I dirty. I do not agree with it very much [housework as a woman's duty], but this is a traditional thing that came from my father.

This section shows that women experienced gendered divisions in culinary and other domestic work in their childhood or adolescence. In this experience, interviewees learned and internalized notions of what is normative or expected for their gender in terms of skills and duties related to domestic cooking. We also emphasize that the interviewees who expressed disagreement with the restrictive gender norms were the same ones who subsequently taught their sons cooking skills. These interviewees' central purpose, to teach boys, is to prevent the overload of other women who would come to live with their sons during the upcoming stages of life — as we will see in the following sections.

Women's responsibility for domestic cooking inheritance

Three categories stand out: (a) being taught by women who have a generational, gender, and social class demarcation related to the learning of domestic culinary skills considered suitable for girls, women, or housemaids; (b) a natural process for girls that presents a relationship between domestic cooking and an understanding of femininity and knowledge necessary for individuals to be seen as girls or women; (c) husband teaches his wife to cook as they saw their mother figures cooking (gendered demarcated practices) or as they cooked before getting married.

Most respondents received their first lessons on domestic cooking skills between 10 and 16 years old. The exceptions were two participants who reported cooking since the age of five and two others who learned culinary skills when they got married (as adolescents). Ten participants mentioned that they were taught culinary skills by their maternal figures or female employers (who hired them as housemaids). Another six interviewees reported that they learned to cook by observing other women preparing meals, alone through cookbooks, trial-and-error processes, or with their husbands' help.

Concerning the being taught by women, the participants mentioned a different role of the maternal figures and their female employers. The maternal figures were responsible for teaching domestic culinary skills appropriate to the sociocultural norms of their origin places, what they called learning to cook "Comida da Mata" (Rainforest Foods). They reported that the "Comida da Mata" was game meat (e.g., monkey, deer, armadillo) prepared with little or no seasoning (only salt and pepper), cooked over a bonfire or wood-burning stove, and consumed with rice, beans, or manioc flour. Thus, our participants suggest a relationship between female culinary skills and the maintenance of traditional knowledge of a sociocultural group (rubber tappers or forest peoples). In this sense, developing "Comida da Mata" culinary skills represents women's duty to achieve the sociocultural demands of their families in this non-urban context.

Meanwhile, female employers were responsible for teaching how to prepare "Comida da Cidade" (City Foods). Interviewees reported that "Comida da Cidade" was different from "Comida da Mata" because it had a greater variety of ingredients (meats, pasta, and vegetables), was prepared with more seasoning (natural herbs and spices) and was cooked on a gas stove. Participants understood that learning culinary skills to cook "Comida da Cidade" was necessary to meet the demands of domestic paid work and the socioeconomic standards of their employers. Dandara's (unemployed, 37 years old) speech illustrated the culinary skills taught by mothers and female employers:

Cooking like the tradition here [in the city], my mother did not teach me. Just as I said, it was only game meat in the pan with water and salt ["Comida da Mata"]. There were no vegetables at all, solely water, salt, and meat. When I came to town, the food was made different. It has the seasoning, and it has everything. Things were different. Then, I started to learn from my [female] employers, working in several houses here, and each one taught me a different thing, then I would learn [to cook "Comida da Cidade"].

The interviewees highlight three rationalities associated with learning domestic culinary skills from their maternal figures: (a) learning culinary skills is a compulsory process for girls because participants described their unwillingness and never asked to be taught to cook; (b) there is a "feminine essence" that predisposes girls to develop the innate cooking "gift;" and (c) girls' obligation to learn to cook reflected women's responsibility to care for their families. Mietta (nurse, 35 years old) expressed the reason that led her to learn to cook:

I do not know. I think it is natural. It must be instinct. I cannot have an answer to that question. I was not like, "ah! I wanted to learn to cook because I wanted to be a great chef." I wanted to learn because I saw my mother doing it.

Notably, Mietta (as other participants) underscores the idea of inheriting women's responsibilities for domestic culinary work, expressing her observations and her mother's teachings. In general, interviewees learned culinary skills through verbal instructions, practical experience, or observing their mothers' culinary practices. Likewise, the participants understood maternal culinary practices as part of femininity and women's duties to the family and learned that they were charged socioculturally to maintain these restrictive gender expectations. Laudelinda (nurse technician, 33 years old) presented this conception in her motivations for learning to cook:

When we are born a woman, the girls are going to play tidying up the baby, making food. We grow up with that!

Laudelina's speech expresses that marriage presented the most significant demand for housework and required some women to expand their

competence. In this context, husbands demanded an adjustment of conduct and behavior so that the woman fit into a rigid structure of gender norms related to a married woman's identity. As expressed by Luiza (snack producer, 41 years old) when describing her process of learning culinary skills:

After getting married, I learned the hard way, seeing others, and learning. It was not easy! When I put one thing there, then another was missing. Eventually I learned fast. When I did [the meal], my husband said: "pepper is missing," "You forgot to put oil." Nevertheless, I learned the trick. However, sometimes, when I was going to do it, he would say, "put the ingredients on the table, so you do not forget anything." Oh my God!

Luiza's husband expressed an unusual male attitude of teaching his wife to cook through a verbal expression of what he does not consider right in the woman's cooking practice. Teaching the wife to cook reinforces a gender hierarchy and the women's lowest power in the family environment. The culinary skills developed by women before marriage may not match the husband's expectations in terms of his individual food preferences. Then a woman must learn to prepare food to meet her husband's food tastes and insert these foods into her diet. That contrasts with the moment when women were single (living alone or with other women in their family) when they could suit their culinary practices to their own food preferences, exercising self-governance and power.

In this section, we demonstrated that the women interviewed developed their culinary skills throughout their lives. They learned eating patterns ("Comida da Cidade," "Comida da Mata," or husband's food) and the demands of jobs and the individuals for whom the food was intended (family, employers, or husband). Also, the ingredients and cooking technologies were instrumental in developing culinary skills, thus delimiting women's knowledge of their localities' or sociocultural groups' practices. Our participants were subjected to the hierarchies of class and gender that conditioned their development of domestic culinary practices within labor or marriage relationships. We believe that participants have lesser powers when they are housewives or housemaids when they must change their culinary practices and learn new skills to meet the demands of their employers or husbands.

Teach domestic culinary skills to children

Here, three codes stand out: (a) mothers should teach domestic culinary skills to their daughters; (b) not wanting to teach daughters to cook, respondents present their wishes to teach less restrictive work activities to girls; and (c) boys are more difficult to teach domestic cooking skills, participants suggest that boys are "naturally" less interested in cooking.

Our interviewees showed a mother's responsibility to teach children domestic cooking skills. That implies that they must identify the

appropriate culinary skills to teach their children based on their sex categories and age. Consequently, husbands criticized participants when their children did not develop the appropriate culinary skills, as Celina (housewife, 34 years old) expressed when asked if she teaches her daughters how to cook:

Daughters must learn for when they grow up. Some children do not know how to do anything, even how to fry an egg. My husband says, "that girl's mother did not teach her to fry an egg." She does not know and will grow up without knowing how to do housework. She must grow up knowing a little something, people say that they did not know because we [mothers] did not teach.

Our interviewees also expressed that children should be taught different domestic activities according to sex categories. They reported that the girls were taught to do collective household activities (e.g., preparing food) to help their mother as well as to be prepared for "the wedding" or for when they would "live alone." On the contrary, boys were taught to do some individual household activities (e.g., clean up their bedrooms), aimed at taking care of their objects and spaces, which should only be done when they need it (e.g., when their mother or future wife was not at home). For example, when asked about the activities she intends to teach her children, Patricia (pedagogue, 34 years old) expresses:

I want to teach him [son] that if there is a need for him to do it, he has to wash clothes. That will not change his gender, that does not influence. Nevertheless, there are tasks [that] I think are more for the girl, [than] for the boy. It is more for the girl washing and ironing, cleaning up the house and cooking. Not that he cannot do it. He can do it because his father does it.

Similarly, other interviewees showed an understanding that boys are more difficult to teach, understanding that the "male nature" predisposes boys and men to be less interested or not to have the "gift" for domestic culinary skills⁸. Thus, although some interviewees express the desire to teach their sons domestic culinary skills, they understand that this can be a difficulty as they go against the restrictive norms of masculinity. When teaching their children, they verbally reinforced that doing domestic culinary work would not alter their gender, seeking support from cisgender and heterosexual male figures who perform this housework. For example, Carlota (housewife, 31 years old) expresses how she approaches housework with her son:

Sometimes he [eldest son] does not like [learning culinary skills]. He says, "Oh mom, I am not a woman." I say, "my son, it is not just the woman who does things; the man also has to do things. Don't you see your father? He makes everything, and he did not turn the other way [be gay]." People have this prejudice: the boy who does things at home becomes gay. There is no such thing! The persons must have equal responsibility. You have to show that you have to be responsible from an early age.

Carlota's speech and other women's stressed a conception of domestic culinary work as a responsibility of all family members. Besides, it also spotlights a restrictive gender system that lists heterosexuality as one of the expressions of masculinity. That is a perception shared by several other women when they mention that boys need to learn culinary skills to unburden women, especially their future wives. For example, as Mietta (nurse, 35 years old) puts it when talking about the household activities she wants to teach her boys:

They [two sons] have to learn about the organization and perhaps know how to cook because cooking is not just for women. If I, as a woman and a wife, think it is good to have my husband helping me [her husband cooks an ordinary meal at home], why shouldn't I train my children to do the same with their wives? I want to teach them how to cook, wash their clothes, for a day that they need to know [when they get married]. What I want, in fact, [is] they be ready for life.

Mietta, similarly to other interviewees, also recognizes that women are socioculturally charged with carrying out domestic culinary activities. Because of this, some interviewees expressed difficulty in managing their gender perspectives in teaching culinary skills to their daughters. Various participants did not want to teach their daughters how to cook because they considered that women should not be limited to the domestic environment and should have other social activities. However, they considered that in heterosexual relationships, women were charged with being primarily responsible for domestic culinary work and meeting the food demands of their children and husband. Moreover, domestic culinary skills were necessary to increase the girls' food autonomy while studying or working outside their hometown. As Bertha (nurse, 24 years old) reports, when asked if she would like to teach their daughter to cook:

I do not know if I want to teach her to cook. I want to teach her other things, such as to be more dedicated to studies, to try to do a good college. However, I do not know if cooking is something I would teach her. But of course, I will [teach her to cook] over time. But I do not want to say, "today I am going to teach you how to cook". I have not thought about it yet.

Bertha and some other interviewees would like to encourage their daughters to develop skills that promote work outside the home environment and the best professional positions. Others thought it was important to teach girls culinary skills to achieve the demands of gender and marriage, and their independence. As Nisia (unemployed, 25 years old) reports, when asked if they would like to teach their daughter how to cook.

I will teach Monica to study; we will prioritize this. I will teach housework too because sometimes I need to go out [of the house]. I remember when I lived with my mom, my mom went out. So, if we were home, we had to do it [housework]. I want Monica to do that too. Even for her future, she will know how to do it, for when she gets married [and] has her children, [she] will not be surprised.

This section presents that women feel socioculturally charged to teach or transmit their culinary skills to children, especially their daughters. However, some women try to do it on their terms. They recognize the existence of a sociocultural norm about which domestic activities should be taught to boys and girls, but they choose to distance themselves from these norms. Consequently, some women seek to teach their boys some collective culinary skills (such as preparing meals). Also, they sometimes decide not to teach culinary skills or only to share skills to meet the girls' own needs or food tastes.

Discussion

In this work, we advance the discussion about the sociocultural process of learning and teaching domestic culinary skills. Notably, we have focused on gender issues that can undermine a family's aims about sharing domestic cooking skills between male and female individuals.

Our results suggest that the women interviewed developed their domestic culinary skills throughout their lives. Our data differ from previous studies that suggested that individuals (both women and men) learn most of their culinary skills in childhood (rather than as teenagers or adults) (Lavelle et al. 2016; Oleschuk 2019; Wolfson et al. 2017). However, we cannot say whether our participants developed most of their culinary skills at any specific time in their courses of life. Our research did not have this focus.

Our participants highlighted the situational character of learning culinary skills, mainly focused on the opportunities offered in their sociocultural contexts where learning processes differed in terms of sociocultural norms learned through parents' or female employers' culinary practices and the ingredients, tools, and technologies used in the development of cooking. For example, in childhood, the participants learned about the culinary skills necessary to prepare the "Comida da Mata," using the foods and culinary technologies present in that region. Participants' narratives highlighted the process of learning culinary skills as a moment of development for cultural adaptation (Contreras, Hernández, and Arnaiz 2005), where women are required (or held accountable) to maintain traditional knowledge of culinary techniques to produce socioculturally located preparations or meals.

Culinary work is essential for maintaining and enhancing the sociocultural system in which food has considerable prominence (e.g., Rainforest Food). Cooking has an emotional particularity, but it has a social character of material production important for the family and it promotes the survival of identities, languages, and other sociocultural elements of the social group (Fischler 1995, 1985). Consequently, we understand that the teaching process of domestic culinary skills causes pressures in women's lives because women could socialize their children in the Rainforest Food and still need to prepare daily city food.

On the other hand, the concentration of domestic activities on women is an obstacle to improving the female socioeconomic situation, as the time dedicated by women to domestic tasks prevents their access to education and better job opportunities (FAO and ADB 2013). Counihan suggests that in Italy, the home remains a zone of unequal division of labor falling heavily on women whose “naturalness” is rarely questioned. It is reinforced by laws covering childcare, old-age care, and pensions that uphold women’s responsibility for unpaid family work, hampers their ability to achieve paid work, promotes their participation in “precarious” employment, and undermine their economic and political power. Similarly to Italy, in Brazil, the Bolsa Familia program has considered women a priority focus because they are considered more careful in the administration of the benefit, using it in the family’s favor, thinking about the family’s future and allocating care to their children and the daily life (Rubalcava, Teruel, and Thomas 2009). Nevertheless, Bolsa Familia Program positively impacted women’s socioeconomic conditions. National Studies show that it enables women to decision-making about the use of money, promotes a reorganization of the domestic space, and increases self-esteem, empowerment, and women’s access to the public space (such as community and school councils) (Mariano and Carloto 2013; Moreira et al. 2012; Mariano and Carloto 2009). In our data, women beneficiaries of the Bolsa Familia program sometimes have better socioeconomic conditions (sometimes having the highest income in the family) and get some (financial) power in the family. Nonetheless, those women struggle to manage social norms related to the division of culinary work. In this sense, participants placed the category “housewife” as a class-neutral position, as despite their financial power, they still need to learn to cook properly for their families.

Considering the arrival in the cities and the need for a job to support themselves, the participants had to develop other domestic cooking skills to meet the demands of paid work in domestic spaces (as a housemaid). Thus, they were required to adapt their culinary knowledge and practices to work resources (food and culinary technologies) and to socioeconomically differentiated eating patterns of employers. Here, we suggest that the process of being taught by female employers about domestic cooking skills was based on a relationship conditioned by gender and social class (Anderson 2000). First, the process occurs among women (employer-housemaid), showing domestic culinary work as a female duty. Second, this employer-housemaid relationship denotes a social hierarchy based on social class differences, which predispose individuals to differentiated food tastes and knowledge (Bourdieu 1984), requiring an adjustment of behaviors and practices to suit the job. Finally, women who worked as housemaids reported coming from poorer regions, where opportunities for study and

work were limited, so domestic work appears as the only opportunity to change their lives or stay in the city. Our participants understood that women could work outside the home and sometimes earn more than their husbands. However, they needed to develop their culinary skill and teach children to cook to identify, account for, or have their feminine identities and status recognized.

In this sense, Oleschuk (2019) spotlights a "food ideology" that disproportionately overwhelms women with the moral imperative to teach children to cook. Similarly, our interviewees considered this a "traditional thing." We add that this is especially the case for girls, who need to be ready for heterosexual marriage and the responsibility of taking care of the home, husband, and children in the future. However, some women suggest modifying these traditional gender concepts, and they seek to teach their sons culinary skills to prepare ordinary meals and their daughters to increase their food autonomy. It seems to be a process of "doing gender" that challenges the maintenance of heteronormativity.

Finally, our results highlight that the interviewees developed the gender conceptions related to cooking from the opportunities offered in their sociocultural contexts (Hochschild and Machung 1989). For example, when stressing that their paternal figures were "old-fashioned men," the interviewees expressed a change in the contemporary normative model to accommodate the engagement of men in culinary activities carried out within the family environment, even if only in special situations (such as a wife with fragile health). Consequently, they demonstrated that they did not accept this "model of old-fashioned men" by expressing their indignation about only their mothers cooking or by encouraging their boys to develop domestic cooking skills. Here we understand this non-acceptance as a "driving force" to enhance their son's domestic cooking skills. By doing this, they redid gender in their terms, allowing themselves to develop different or unusual social practices for themselves (e.g., being late with dinner, cooking food people do not like) and questioned the places assigned to them by others (like women being a "housewife").

However, the development of domestic culinary skills teaching practices did not depend only on the gender conceptions of the interviewees, but also on their partners' understanding of the sex categories of their children and the hegemonic gender norms. In this sense, the development of a more egalitarian gender perspective is only possible when women and men are jointly oriented toward the identical spheres (whether at home, paid work, or both) and each partner desires and supports a balanced power relationship in the family (Hochschild and Machung 1989). That is evident in the interviewees' statements who stressed that their partners and society as a whole charged them to teach their children domestic

cooking skills according to their age group or gender category — especially their daughters. Regarding this, they were required to transmit gender-restrictive scripts to their children. In addition, the women interviewed were asked to plan their actions to teach domestic cooking skills to allow other family members to recognize the compatibility of their actions with the social norms of femininity.

Faced with this great responsibility to teach children, the interviewees presented a dubious thought related to their conceptions about culinary skills. They exhibited a transitional conception of gender, which, according to Hochschild and Machung (1989), refers to the conception that women can occupy different spaces in society. Women do not need to be solely responsible for culinary work, and men can perform domestic cooking. However, they conceive that they should teach domestic culinary skills to girls and less often to boys. Within this perspective, male culinary work is seen as a kind of "help" for the mother or wife (Beagan et al. 2008), similar to the practices of their paternal figure. Then, we highlight that, in the interactions of women and men around the development of domestic cooking skills, individuals accommodate, resist, challenge, blame, excuse, justify, coerce, flatter, and conspire in their efforts to create, negotiate, confirm and deny their gender identities (Thompson 1991).

Limitations

The limitations of this study are related to the number of women interviewed. For future studies, we suggest a larger sample and research approaches that include or combine observations of women teaching cooking; and data provided by women at different stages of life (or at least teenagers, adults, and the elderly). These approaches can favor a concentration on the experience of a large number of individuals as a source of critical knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon (Riessman 2011; Clandinin 2013). Nevertheless, our approach allowed us to identify the situational interactions through which the participants perform gender during actions to learn, develop and teach their domestic cooking skills.

Practical implications

Studies suggest that better levels of domestic "cooking skills" can favor an increase in the consumption of fruits and vegetables, reduce the consumption of ultra-processed foods, reduce the risk of overweight and obesity, and even strengthen the cultural identity of individuals (Wolfson and Bleich 2015; Mills et al. 2017). However, the development of an individual's culinary skills can be constrained by gender norms, and men could have lower culinary skills than women. In these terms, we estimate that the scientific evidence produced here can foster theoretical discussions

regarding gender issues that permeate the development of domestic culinary skills.

Our results suggest that individuals do, and potentially undo, gender in the interactive processes of teaching and learning the domestic culinary skills throughout their lives. Regarding family environments, the teaching and learning of domestic culinary skills are developed from the understanding of the generic sex categories of each of the family members, which allows or restricts the construction of more equitable male and female attitudes and behaviors associated with home-cooking (Oleschuk 2019; West and Zimmerman 1987; Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009).

The development of domestic cooking skills by all family members is part of a political, economic, and cultural restructuring that enables more equalitarian gender systems. Whereas an individual "transgression" of gender norms has little effect on women's available opportunities, there is the need for a "policy of transformation" of power structures between men and women (Deutsch 2007). Based on that, we suggest that the teaching of culinary skills must occur in different institutions (schools, jobs, health services, Etc.), cover different age groups (children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly), and be mandatory for all genders. Furthermore, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations suggest that to reduce the effort and time spent by women and girls on housework and to care for family members and the community; we may offer public transport, water and energy services, childcare services, and institutional care for the sick and elderly and maternity and parental leave (FAO and ADB 2013).

Conclusion

Our results suggest that when teaching and learning culinary skills, individuals perform gender. In this section, we are dedicated to answering our initial study questions.

How do women learn and teach domestic cooking skills? The activities of teaching and culinary learning skills were situated in a patriarchal system that regulated that girls should develop their culinary skills to meet the demands of the family or employment in compulsory processes. Female figures were primarily responsible for teaching girls to cook appropriately related to their sex categories and sociocultural gender norms. Thus, adult women with lesser culinary skills were required to adjust their conduct to meet the demands of their husbands or other male family members.

What sociocultural norms are related to culinary skills' teaching and learning processes? Our interviewees highlight the gender norms related to developing culinary skills as practices for taking care of the family or meeting the demands of extra domestic paid work. In other words, gender

construction took place by teaching girls to perform culinary activities for other family members and instructing boys to perform domestic activities reserved for self-care. In this sense, consciously or unconsciously, women reinforce the differences and inequalities between men and women that impact gender oppression.

When and how do social interactions around domestic culinary work become less gendered? Social interactions related to learning and teaching domestic cooking skills become unequal when women recognize sociocultural gender norms as restrictive and unequal. In this context, they taught their boys to develop domestic cooking skills to lessen the overburden on other female figures who would come to live with them in the future. In addition, they seek to teach girls that they can perform other activities in society and that domestic cooking skills are necessary for their independence.

Finally, the results presented here show that men and women actively dispute an individual's responsibility to develop more excellent culinary skills or teach children to cook. Individuals struggle to implement gender models and organize these culinary activities in ways consistent with their current life situations. Thus, the scenario presented in this article is complex, showing that individuals reinforce some restrictive norms while undoing others in the light of sociocultural structures rooted in gender and social class differences.

Notes

1. Gender schema theory suggests that a child learns his or her society's cultural definitions of femaleness and maleness through specific sex-related content (e.g., division of labor). In sum, children learn to encode and organize information arising from a network of associations of masculine and feminine attributes and behavior (Bem 1983).
2. The HDI is a composite statistic of education, income, and longevity indices calculated to measure social and economic development within countries.
3. Cardoso et al. (2020) highlight that the women who participated in the two-year follow-up of the MINA-Brazil Study had on average 27.5 years of age; 10.9 years of schooling; 46.7% received monthly assistance from the Bolsa Familia government cash transfer program (BFP); and 40.5% were paid workers.
4. At the public health level, there is a strong emphasis on teaching individuals to cook from an early age. Based on scientific evidence, eating habits are integrally, and domestic cooked meals have better nutritional quality (Engler-Stringer 2010; Mills et al. 2017; Wolfson et al. 2016). Thus, cooking skills must be taught in compatibility with the child's development. For example, children under three can wash vegetables, sprinkle flour, crack eggs, or spoon ingredients into scales.
5. Participants called themselves "unemployed" when they worked in the recent past. However, those who never worked or chose not to work after the birth of their child called themselves "housewives."
6. According to Pirani (2014), the Wealth Index is a composite measure of the cumulative living standard of a household. It is calculated using data on a household's

ownership of a selected set of assets, such as televisions, bicycles, and cars; dwelling characteristics, such as flooring material; type of drinking water source; and toilet and sanitation facilities.

7. The Bolsa Familia Program (BFP), implemented in 2003, is a social income transfer program for poor or impoverished families. The amounts of money that each family receives depend on the composition and the income of the beneficiary family. It could range from R\$41.00 (≈US\$8,33) to R\$89.00 (≈US\$18,09) per person.
8. Some interviewees suggested that domestic cooking skills are a personal "gift," and some men are gifted with this. The "gift" leads men to seek training or information about cooking tastily and proper foods.


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