

Gendered Dimensions of Food Systems in Nunavik, Quebec

By
Dorothy Beale

B.A.H., Queen's University, 2019

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
In the Social Dimensions of Health Program

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We acknowledge and respect the lək^wəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Food insecurity is a health equity issue that disproportionately impacts Inuit across Inuit Nunangat (the Inuit homelands) compared to the general Canadian population. Reduced access to traditional (country) food sources through hunting and fishing has paralleled increased consumption of market foods, including non-nutrient-dense foods. This dietary transition has led to a rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Inuit women specifically face disproportionately higher rates of food insecurity compared to Inuit men, which is attributed in part to colonially enforced gender roles, high levels of environmental contaminants (e.g., lead, mercury, and persistent organic pollutants) in country food sources, and social and cultural factors of prioritization of family needs at the expense of personal food security. Women play important roles in food systems; they are knowledge holders, provision both country and market food, and participate in hunting and fishing. However, due to the lack of disaggregated and qualitative data in Western academic resources, there is a gap in understanding the gendered impacts of food insecurity, country food consumption, and gender roles within food systems in Inuit Nunangat. Using a community engaged, Indigenist approach, this study documents the experiences of Nunavimmiut women to explore the role and impacts of gender in food systems in Kangirsuk, Québec. We used convenience and snowball sampling to recruit a diverse group participants, then conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants. We spoke with fourteen participants, including both women and men. Results show that gender roles have shaped and continue to shape women's experiences within food systems in Kangirsuk, QC. This is evident through various aspects, primarily the distinct experiences and perspectives related to hunting, fishing, cooking, food preparation, and engagement in traditional activities between men and women. There are also notable observations in individuals' differing perceptions of the distribution of household and food-related duties. This thesis contributes to a growing body of literature, which proves the need for a better understanding of how gender impacts food systems in Inuit communities.

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List of Acronyms

CIHR – Canadian Institutes of Health Research

CF – Country Food(s)

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

ICC-A – Inuit Circumpolar Council-Alaska

ICC – Inuit Circumpolar Council

ITK – Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

NGO – Non-governmental organization(s)

NCD – Non-communicable disease(s)

NND – Non-nutrient dense

NNHC – Nunavik Nutrition and Health Committee

NRBHSS – Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services

RNUK - Regional Nunavimmi Uumajulivijiit Katuqtiiginninga (or Anguvigapit)

UN – United Nations

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Food insecurity is a health equity issue that disproportionately impacts Inuit across Inuit Nunangat (the Inuit homelands) compared to the general Canadian population (Chan et al., 2006; Douglas et al., 2014; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2021). Reduced access to traditional foods (also known as country foods), such as seals, whales, caribou, birds, etc., has paralleled increased consumption of market foods, including non-nutrient-dense foods (Chan et al., 2006; Douglas et al., 2014; Healey & Meadows, 2007). This dietary transition has led to rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, heart disease and obesity (Chan et al., 2006; Kuhnlein et al., 2004; Little et al., 2021). However, there is an emerging consensus in the research on Indigenous food systems that highlights how engaging in local food and knowledge systems and country food consumption has been linked to higher rates of food security, positive health outcomes, and strengthened ties to culture (Armstrong, 2020; Coté, 2022; Schnitter & Berry, 2019). The impacts of oppressive colonial legacies, such as forced relocations and assimilative educational policies on food access and availability, continue to affect the lives of Inuit populations in Inuit Nunangat (Burnett et al., 2015; Panikkar & Lemmond, 2020; Healey & Meadows, 2007).

Inuit women specifically face disproportionate health outcomes compared to women elsewhere in Canada (Healey & Meadows, 2008). Inuit women also face disproportionate prevalence of food insecurity compared to Canadian women and Inuit men. Statistics Canada notes "...Inuit women aged 25 and over living in Inuit Nunangat had a significantly higher probability of living in a food insecure household – 56% versus 47% for Inuit men – even after controlling for factors such as living arrangements, educational and labour force status, income,

family ties and geography” (Statistics Canada, 2017, n.p.). This is attributed in part to colonially enforced gender roles and social and cultural factors, including the tendency of women to prioritize family needs at the expense of personal food security (Burnett et al., 2015; Healey & Meadows, 2007; Lambdon et al, 2006; Parlee & Wray, 2016).

Women play essential roles in food systems. They are knowledge holders, they provision both country and market food, and they participate in food preparation and sharing. However, due to the lack of disaggregated and qualitative data in Western academic resources, there is a gap in understanding gender¹ roles within food systems, as well as the gendered impacts of food insecurity and country food consumption in Inuit Nunangat. Indigenous women have been overlooked in many research contexts, including in the Arctic, due to the overarching patriarchal influences in research spaces (Parlee & Wray, 2016; Green, 2007). Through a community-engaged, Indigenist research approach², this research aims to document the experiences of Nunavimmiut women (Inuit women living in Nunavik) to explore the health and social impacts of gender disparities in food security and the role of gender in food systems in Kangirsuk, Nunavik, Québec.

Self-Location and Positionality Statement

I currently live on the unceded territory of the Ləkʷəŋən peoples; these include the Songhees, the Esquimalt and the WSÁNEĆ peoples. I am a white settler and my family has ties to England, Ireland, and The Netherlands. My mother’s family has been in Canada for many

¹ I will discuss in further detail how gender is defined in this thesis on page 12; as well as discussions of gender identity on page 39.

² An Indigenist framework creates space for non-Indigenous researchers to use existing research methodologies that centres Indigenous voices and experiences. I will discuss an Indigenist feminist approach in greater detail on page 49.

generations, and my father's side has only recently come to Canada in the last generation. I grew up in the city that is now known as Ottawa, Ontario, on the unceded territories of the Algonquin, Anishinaabec, and Mohawk peoples.

I have lived on Lək^wəŋən land for the duration of my studies at the University of Victoria. Living on this land as an uninvited settler has been a consideration as I have engaged in work related to Indigenous food systems. I often think about Indigenous food systems on the land where I live, and I have learned of their resilience in the face of human intervention, colonization of the land, and degradation. I see the local Indigenous food system in my day-to-day life; including the camas in the fields when I go on walks and the shellfish when I'm by the water. I reckon with living on this land, and I know the implications of being here.

Acknowledging the role that academic institutions have played in colonialism is vital, as my research is centred on the lived experiences of Inuit women who have been subjected to colonial forces. I also want to note the role that these institutions have had in my own learning experience. I have found myself unlearning and relearning much of what I have previously been taught as I learn more about Indigenous knowledge through self-guided reviews, courses, and discussions. Before my graduate studies, I perceived that academia had to be objective and depersonalized to be valid. My perspective has shifted as I learn more broadly about methodologies and Indigenous ways of knowing. Objective outputs are necessary and beneficial in some contexts, while in others, it is important to situate oneself in the work and recognize the subjective role we fulfill as researchers. In this case, we must ask why and how we come to this work and what we bring with us when we do.

Decolonizing my epistemological and ontological perspectives will continue to be a lifelong process. I understand that decolonization is also an easy word to write, but a much

harder practice to enact. I have had long conversations around dinner tables with friends about how to put our words to practice. As a student, I spend a lot of my time reading and learning about decolonization, but also understand the importance of action when thinking about decolonization. I have come to understand how I interpret and act upon decolonization in various ways. Learning how to do research within the span of a masters degree while enacting an Indigenist approach to research was difficult, as the master's timeline (e.g. completion of course and program requirements within a two year period), are not necessarily facilitators for building meaningful relationships, nor was I taught that relationship-building was *academic*. Applying decolonization in everyday life during this research looked like taking time to build relationships with those who I was doing research with, while understanding this approach may impact the timeline of my masters degree.

Within the research frameworks I am using, paired with community-engaged research, social location and the power relationships that derive from the systemic power structures must be understood throughout the research process.

I am a cisgender woman, and having worked in contexts studying women and gender, I understand that my identity has implications for what I bring to this work. I also understand that my position as a young researcher impacts how I show up in this work. My identity has been part of my analysis from the beginning of this project. I believe that being a woman and working in the context of understanding women and gender is helpful, both for me as a researcher and for the women I interviewed. My experiences as a woman might create a sense of familiarity, understanding, and mutual experience. Although I recognize that I do not share many of the experiences of the research participants, being a woman is a helpful place to create a sense of mutual experience. I bring these experiences that set me apart from a male researcher. However,

my identity as a woman may have introduced bias in the context of discussing gender with the participants, and particularly when speaking to men. I revisit this topic in the limitations section of this thesis.

I am a non-Indigenous researcher, and I recognize that I am an outsider while working on issues related to Indigenous health. My identity, intertwined with my interest in this research, led me to use an Indigenist research approach. I wanted to use this approach because as a non-Indigenous researcher, there is a risk of further privileging a Western perspective, regardless of intention. I used this approach in hopes of conducting research in a way that placed value on Indigenous knowledge and prioritized the voices of those who had lived experience. Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes "... research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise, but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions" (Smith, 1999, p.5). I recognize that in the context of this research, there is a shameful history of extractive research undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers in Indigenous settings, and that in using Western epistemological approaches, contributed to the ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples. In speaking with research participants in Kangirsuk, I learned that some of them had firsthand experiences of extractive research, and for that reason, were hesitant to speak with researchers from the South. With my knowledge of extractive research practices and hearing these experiences, I understood that my role as an outsider was even more pronounced, and undertaking this research required reflexivity of my role in this research.

Reflecting on positionality is an ongoing iterative process. As a result, I discuss my positioning in this research in multiple sections of this thesis. In particular, I revisit this in the methodology section, the discussion section, and the limitations section. Revisiting the topic of

positionality provides some opportunity to reflect on my growth and perceptions over the course of the research process.

Definitions

To establish a common understanding of the terminology used throughout this thesis, it is important to define recurring concepts that comprise important thematic elements throughout our research.

Food Security

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization established the following definition of food security at the World Food Summit in 1996: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." (FAO, 2006, p.1). In addition to the definition provided by the FAO, there are more Inuit-specific definitions of food security. The Inuit Circumpolar Council of Alaska (ICC-A) stated that the definitions presented by the FAO, and regularly adopted by research on food security "...are important, but not what we are talking about when we say food security." (Naylor et al., 2022). The ICC-A outlines the Inuit-specific approach to understanding food security, beyond the measures outlined by the FAO. According to the ICC-A, Inuit-specific definitions of food security must also consider the access to skills to obtain food from the land, access to tools to aid in hunting, fishing and gathering, and access to knowledge of how to prepare and store food from the land (ICC-A, 2015). Recently, Inuit organizations (e.g., Inuit Circumpolar Council and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami) have stressed the importance of food sovereignty in achieving and maintaining food security (ICC, 2015; ITK 2021). In the context of this thesis, it is essential to conceptualize food

security as more than just ‘access’ to market food. We must consider how the accessibility of food sources includes both physical access to food, capital to purchase food, power of food-related decision-making, and insulation against physical threats to food insecurity (such as climate-related shocks).

Food Sovereignty

While many published definitions exist, food sovereignty emphasizes agency and self-determination within food systems (Martens et al., 2016). Dawn Morrison explains Indigenous food sovereignty as providing ... “a framework for health and community development for both reclaiming the superior health once enjoyed by our ancestors and Indigenous voice and vision in decision making on matters affecting our traditional land and food system.” (Morrison, 2020, p.25). Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA) outline Inuit food sovereignty as the right to nutritious, locally sourced foods – referring to country foods. QIA justifies the use of food sovereignty in contexts of food insecurity alleviation because the term “...allows for a culturally and community-minded approach to food management. Food sovereignty incorporates Inuit knowledge, language, culture continuity and community self-sufficiency. Supporting food sovereignty shows a commitment towards reconciliation.” (QIA, 2019, p.7). The Inuit Circumpolar Council of Alaska defines an Alaskan Inuit-specific food security in the Alaskan Inuit Food Security Conceptual Framework as: “The right of Alaskan Inuit to define their own hunting, gathering, fishing, land and water policies; the right to define what is sustainable, socially, economically and culturally appropriate for the distribution of food and to maintain ecological health; the right to obtain and maintain practices that ensure access to tools needed to obtain, process, store and consume traditional foods.” (ICC, 2015). In this context, food

sovereignty has been cited as a necessary component to achieving food security in Inuit Nunangat (ICC-A, 2015).

Community food systems, country foods, and market foods

Inuit participate in a *dual* food system, comprising of a *traditional* country food system and a market food system (Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2014; Chan et al., 2006; Kuhnlein et al., 2004). Country foods are those foods that Inuit have harvested from the land, air, oceans, and intertidal zones since time immemorial. As defined by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Country foods are all animal, plant, and fish species that are harvested by Inuit, whether or not they are commercially harvested or sold.” (ITK, 2021, p.7). The importance of country foods for nutrition, cultural connectivity, and physical and mental health, is well-documented (Chan et al., 2006; Duhaime et al., 2004; Healey & Meadows, 2007; Pufall et al., 2010; Rapinski et al., 2018). Meanwhile, market foods, also known as retail foods, are imported foods sold in retail stores. Market foods have been available in Nunavik since colonial contact and have gradually comprised greater proportions of Inuit diets over the last several decades. Both country foods and market foods are important to meet the dietary and nutritional needs of communities.

Gender

When conducting research involving gender in any context, it is essential to understand the difference between sex and gender. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), and the American National Institutes of Health Office of Research on Women’s Health (NIH-ORWH) offer accessible definitions of sex versus gender. Sex, according to CIHR and the NIH-ORWH, refers to biological attributes of anatomy and physiology, genetics and hormones. By contrast, gender refers to socially constructed roles, identities, expressions, roles and norms,

relations, and power. Gender is recognized as a continuum and can change over time (CIHR, 2020 n.p.; NIH -ORWH, 2024, n.p.)³

The research in this thesis focuses on gender and socially constructed gender roles. However, our research is limited to those who identify as either men or women. Due to the nature of our recruitment methodology and small sample size, we did not examine perceptions and experiences of nonbinary and two-spirit identities. We recognize the need for further research that explores how diverse gender identities experience and interact with food systems. We will discuss the concept of gender diversity in further detail in the limitations section of this review.

Determinants of health

This research also focuses on determinants of health in the context of Inuit women. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, determinants of health are: “the broad range of personal, social, economic and environmental factors that determine individual and population health.” (PHAC, 2023, n.p.). Determinants of health include socioeconomic status, social support, and gender, which are all prevalent throughout this research. The 2017 Nunavik Health Survey, ‘*Qanuilirpitaa?*’ outlines how Nunavimmiut define determinants of health. Eight themes emerged as health determinants relevant at the community level: community, family,

³“Sex refers to a set of biological attributes in humans and animals. It is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy. Sex is usually categorized as female or male but there is variation in the biological attributes that comprise sex and how those attributes are expressed.” (CIHR, 2020, n.p.).

“Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society. Gender identity is not confined to a binary (girl/woman, boy/man) nor is it static; it exists along a continuum and can change over time. There is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience and express gender through the roles they take on, the expectations placed on them, relations with others and the complex ways that gender is institutionalized in society.” (CIHR, 2020, n.p.).

identity, food, land, knowledge, economy, and services (Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, 2017). ITK similarly outlined the social determinants of Inuit health in Canada in a 2014 document, outlining 11 key challenges: quality of early childhood development, culture and language, livelihoods, income distribution, housing, personal safety and security, education, food security, availability of health services, mental wellness, and environment (ITK, 2014, p.3-6). Inuit-defined determinants of health show, similarly to the conceptualizations of food security, that one must understand these definitions with an-Inuit specific lens, in order to address the challenges presented in an effective way. These Inuit-led frameworks were used as guidelines for understanding determinants of health in Nunavik, as well as the overarching understanding of health throughout this work.

Inuktitut terminology

To comprehend the context in which this work has been conducted, it is helpful to know certain Inuktitut words. This work was conducted in a community where Inuktitut is commonly the first language, followed by English and/or French. Further, there are many words in Inuktitut that do not have suitable translations. For these reasons, there were many words that were better communicated in Inuktitut than in English or French. I learned these words throughout my visits and will incorporate them into my thesis. The first term that I will use is Nunavimmiut, meaning the people of Nunavik. Kangirsimmiut refers to the people of Kangirsuk, specifically. The next term I will use is ‘qallunaat’, meaning a person who is not Inuk. When discussing this term with participants, they would say that it meant any white person. Another term that I will use throughout this thesis is ‘Anguvigaaq’, or ‘Anguvigapiit’, which is the Regional Nunavimmi Uumajulivijiit Katujiqatiiginninga (RNUK), also known as the Nunavik Regional Hunters and

Trappers Association and the Local (Kangirsuk) Uumajulivijiit Katujiqatiiginninga (LNUK) (Anguvigaq, 2023, n.p.). Dehydrated meat (typically caribou and beluga) is known as *nikkuk* and dehydrated fish is *pitsik*. *Mattaaq* is the skin and the fatty layer of the beluga.

Background of the Research Topic

Contextualizing Inuit food systems

It is important we understand the history, practices, knowledge, and gender roles of Inuit Nunangat to comprehend the various roles and importance of Inuit women in northern food systems. Over the past two centuries, colonialism has disrupted food systems and ways of living in Inuit Nunangat. Tuck and Yang note how colonialism is not a singular event but a structure; in their work, *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, Tuck and Yang refer to how Patrick Wolfe conceptualizes colonialism similarly – “In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property, and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward” (Tuck & Yang, 2012 p.5). Food has been used as a tool of colonial control throughout history (Daschuk, 2019; Dawson, 2020). Oppressive colonial policies have affected the Inuit food system in numerous ways. Prior to colonization, Inuit populations were semi-nomadic, following food sources based on weather patterns, climate, and animal movements. Colonial governments imposed policies that disrupted this lifestyle and forced Inuit to settle into non-nomadic, sedentary lifestyles (Burnett et al., 2016; Mead et al., 2010; Pufall et al., 2010). Forced relocations also impacted gender roles and marriage patterns among Inuit (Ready, 2018). Shifting gender relationships and perspectives underscore how colonial policies, explicit or not, imposed new gender roles on Inuit populations. Patriarchal

perspectives were introduced through colonial processes, and women's experiences and knowledge became inherently devalued as a result (Ready, 2018; Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2022).

Other detrimental policies that shaped the Inuit food system include the residential school system, the seizure of children from northern communities and placement into state care (i.e., the Sixties Scoop; although such practices continued well past the sixties), and forcible removal of individuals from communities for treatment of tuberculosis and other health concerns in the Indian Hospital system (Granzow, 2021). Such colonial violence led to the removal and relocation of individuals from their communities, with severe impacts on intergenerational knowledge sharing, language, and food practices (Dawson, 2020). Within Inuit communities, colonial systems also enacted assimilative educational policies, restrictive hunting policies, and subsidy programs that favoured market foods over country foods (Burnett et al., 2016; Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2015). Broadly, ongoing colonization has eroded Inuit sovereignty over food systems, with impacts on food accessibility, acquisition, sharing, and consumption.

Current food security landscape

Populations in the North are up to six times more food insecure than southern populations in Canada (Burnett et al., 2016; ITK, 2017; QIA, 2019), and as noted by Special Rapporteur on the right to food "...represented the highest documented food insecurity rate for any aboriginal population in a developed country" (De Schutter, 2012, p. 16). This striking statistic results from several factors, including locally determined and external stressors (Beaumier & Ford, 2010). Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) published a Food Security Strategy for Inuit Nunangat in 2021, which acknowledges that Inuit women (and children) are disproportionately affected by food

insecurity in Inuit Nunangat. Determinants of food (in)security in Inuit Nunangat include poverty, affordability of market food, cost of hunting equipment, the strength and existence of sharing networks, knowledge and education, environment and climate, addiction, and change in livelihood and social location (Beaumier & Ford, 2011; Chan et al., 2006; Little et al., 2021; ITK, 2021). Income, employment, and education are significant determinants of food security globally and play a prominent role in the food security landscape in Inuit Nunangat. Market foods are expensive due to transportation costs, which creates a financial barrier to food access. Chan and colleagues stress that the affordability of market food in the Arctic is a severe concern and attaining enough healthy market food is not viable for most families (Chan et al., 2006). In a qualitative study conducted by Beaumier and Ford, many women described poor living conditions that were characteristic of poverty, including “not being able to afford daily needs and pay bills, living in overcrowded housing, and having to liquidate assets to meet needs.” (Beaumier & Ford, 2010, p.198). Many studies highlight high unemployment rates and barriers to education and employment and how these factors exacerbate food insecurity (Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2015; Ready, 2016).

Research shows that participating in the country food system (i.e., harvesting, preparing, sharing, and consuming country foods) protects against food insecurity, strengthens ties to culture, and provides diverse physical and mental health benefits (Cote, 2016; Healey & Meadows, 2007; Pufall et al., 2010; Tester & Irniq, 2008). However, the proliferation of market economies across the north has replaced subsistence lifestyles and reduced the time available for harvesting country foods (Little et al., 2021; Ready, 2016). Limited income and time reduce one’s ability to participate in country food systems. One cannot overstate the rapid nature of changes to Inuit food systems due to colonization and its accompanying policies. However, there

have been recent movements to increase agency over food systems and engage in practices to reinforce food sovereignty. Goals of the ITK Food Security Strategy focus on country food access, programs to facilitate country food harvest and consumption, and, more broadly, food sovereignty (Healey & Meadows, 2007; ITK, 2021).

Historic Contexts

Throughout Inuit history, food has represented a means of connection to land, community, culture, sustenance, and health. Food has also been used as a tool of colonial control (Daschuk, 2019; Dawson, 2020), evident in the speed at which colonization has, through intentional policies and programs, greatly impacted food systems in Inuit Nunangat. Alongside its implications for food security in the north, colonialism has also significantly impacted gender roles in Inuit Nunangat. Situating Inuit women's experiences in the context of history allows for a richer explanation of their knowledge and perceptions of gender today. The following sections are intended to illustrate the historic and ongoing contexts that influence Inuit women's roles in food systems in Inuit Nunangat. Interwoven with each section is a contextualization of how culture and contexts informed gendered roles and experiences.

Pre colonization

Before colonization, Inuit populations practiced subsistence food harvesting, following migration patterns of animals, and thrived in the environment, and “were self-reliant, moving between seasonal camps to harvest food throughout the year” (ITK, 2021 p.4). They followed food sources based on weather patterns, land and ice travel conditions, climate, and animal migrations. Billson and Mancini write how Inuit gender roles were often “complementary rather

than conflictual" before colonial contact (Billson & Mancini, 2007, p.56). There was a clear gendered division of labour, but because of the harsh environments, gender roles were often flexible. Men and women would take on different roles as necessary. Standard practices included, "Reciprocity characterized the division of labour and the exercise of power." (Billson & Mancini, 2007, p.56). Historically, there are many accounts of Indigenous women and men enjoying social equality pre-colonization (Billson & Mancini, 2007; Quintal-Marineau, 2007). Some pre-colonization accounts include records of matriarchal Indigenous groups and individuals who were gender diverse and accepted as the norm (Leigh, 2009; LeMoine, 2021). Although we must be careful not to generalize such histories to all Indigenous peoples in North America, depictions of gender in pre-colonial societies underscore the stark contrast between the cultural norms of Indigenous versus colonizing nations. Without exception, colonialism has eroded Indigenous cultural practices, including those related to gender roles and experiences (Billson & Mancini, 2007; Ready, 2018).

Contact and Colonization

Colonization of the Canadian Arctic occurred in waves over several hundred years. First contact and early colonization were catalyzed by explorer expeditions, trading, and whaling. This evolved into policies of forced sedentarization of Inuit populations and assimilative education and healthcare policies in the 20th century (Burnett et al., 2016; Mead et al., 2010; Pufall et al., 2010). In the early stages of contact and colonization, the Europeans that arrived and documented their lives in Inuit Nunangat were primarily men. The male authorship of these early texts largely influenced perceptions and documentation of Inuit life and gender relations, both with colonizers and amongst Inuit (Parlee & Wray, 2020; Quintal-Marineau, 2017). As whaling and trading marked these earlier stages, so did the introduction of European goods to Inuit.

Healey and Meadows note that trading and exchanging goods had positive and negative consequences, "...from the exchange in goods and provisions to the introduction of alcohol, infectious diseases and lifestyle changes to Inuit communities" (Healey & Meadows, 2007, p. 201). This quote highlights the extensive impact of these relationships on Inuit in broad and complex ways. Undoubtedly, early contact with Europeans had important impacts on Inuit diets. Ford and colleagues make this connection, stating, "...many current concerns over Inuit diet stem from societal changes stretching back to the 1700s" (Ford, Beaumier & Tagalik, 2015, p. 243).

Forced settlement and relocation were one of several manifestations of colonial policies following the formation of Canada and its government(s) in the late-1800s. Relocations occurred for various reasons, including trading opportunities, access to services provided by governments, and/or necessity due to imminent starvation (Healey & Meadows, 2007; Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2015). For some Inuit, the choices to settle in a central village or hamlet was based on declining agency over food systems. Inuit were increasingly driven to rely on government resources due to hunger, illness, and centralized resources. Yet, to a large degree, relocation and settlement of Inuit into villages were involuntary processes, forced on them by colonial governments in an attempt to exert control over Inuit populations and establish Canadian 'sovereignty' in Arctic regions. The process of sedentarization was arduous and multifaceted. Governments provided healthcare and services to Inuit populations if they migrated to settlements. This process provided healthcare benefits but also imposed a reliance on government-sanctioned services (Billison & Mancini, 2007; Grey & Patel, 2015; ITK, 2021).

Relocations are one of the processes that comprised the enormity of changes due to colonization in Inuit Nunangat. There were many difficult decisions that Inuit had to make, and these changes influenced their cultural practices in a multitude of ways. An example related to

gender roles and migration is noted by Ready (2018). The sedentarization from a nomadic lifestyle altered the gendered division of labour, "...including a tendency for women, in particular, to shift away from traditional economic activities towards participation in the wage economy." (Ready, 2018, p.125). At the same time as policies of resettlement and forced relocation, other federal policies that influenced the Inuit food system took hold in the North. Assimilative policies in the 1950s until the 1980s targeting familial ties, education, and mobility detrimentally impacted Indigenous peoples in Canada broadly and in the North. The residential school system, the seizure of children from northern communities and placement into state care (i.e., the Sixties Scoop), and the forcible removal of individuals from their communities were implemented with the objective of assimilating Indigenous peoples into the broader Canadian population (Granzow, 2021; Tester, McNicoll & Irniq, 2001;. Further, a series of sled dog slaughters were undertaken by Canadian and Quebec government officials, including the RCMP, from the mid-1950s until the late 1960s (Makivik, 2024; Watt-Cloutier, 2015). The impacts of such policies on family and community cohesiveness severely impacted intergenerational knowledge sharing, language, and food access and practices (Dawson, 2020). This period of colonialism substantially eroded Inuit sovereignty over food systems in Inuit Nunangat. Choices became constrained, and agency over decisions related to food – whether hunting, passing down knowledge, freedom to spend time on the land, or sharing networks – was severely limited.

The transition from country foods and subsistence-based living to market foods in Inuit Nunangat is considered part of what's known as the nutrition (or dietary) transition (Kuhnlein et al., 2004). Before colonization, country foods comprised 100% of Inuit diets (Pufall et al., 2018). Successive health surveys in 1992, 2004, and 2017 conducted in Nunavik show a continued decline in country food consumption over the past 20 years. Notably, this decline in consumption

of country food meats is particularly pronounced amongst Inuit women (Nunavik Inuit Health Survey, 2017). In 2004, Kuhnlein and colleagues stated that Indigenous populations globally may be “among the most extreme for the extent of dietary change experienced in the last few decades.” (2004, p.1). Various factors influenced the nutrition transition, notably governmental policies that targeted Inuit transmission of knowledge, agency, and choice over food systems. As described above, policies of forced resettlement inhibited Inuit from following animals and hunting seasonally and drastically altered food consumption patterns (Burnett et al., 2016). Alongside this, Inuit have reported that the cost of equipment, the influence of climate change, and the decline in food-sharing networks are primary reasons for increased consumption of market foods (Sheehy et al., 2013). Climate change facilitates the transition to market foods by reducing access to country foods due to unpredictable weather, changing migration patterns of animals, and altering the taste of country food (Ford et al., 2014; Rosol et al., 2016). The impacts of the nutrition transition are wide-ranging and include an increased risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases (e.g., type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and stroke) due to the increased reliance on NND foods (ITK 2021; Kuhnlein et al., 2004; Little et al., 2021; McGrath-Hanna, 2003).

Colonialism is an ongoing process impacting Inuit food sovereignty, security, and systems. Yet, there remains very little information on the gendered impacts of colonialism within Inuit food systems. Rautio and colleagues highlight the need for more deliberate data regarding gender in the Arctic, stating, “Women and men should be informed and supported differently due to their different lifestyles, responsibilities, and access to information.” (Rautio et al., 2021, p.628). There is, therefore, an urgent need to synthesize existing research, identify gaps that

exist, and conduct primary research to characterize intersections of gender and food systems in Inuit Nunangat.

Research Questions/Objectives

This research focuses on women and gender within Inuit food systems in Kangirsuk, Nunavik, Quebec. I aim to explore how gender and gender roles influence Inuit women's food security, food consumption, and food sovereignty at individual and community levels. My research question addresses the lack of information on the gender-based complexities of food systems in Inuit Nunangat, which is a gap identified in the literature reviewed as part of this research. There is extensive research in other specificities (and generalities) related to food in Inuit Nunangat, including research that explores the intersections of gender and health (Healey & Meadows, 2007), gender and climate (Beaumier & Ford, 2010), and research that focuses on broader experiences of food security in Inuit Nunangat (Little et al., 2020). There is a lack of information on the intersection of Inuit women's experiences with food (in)security and their experiences and perceptions of gender roles within food systems in Inuit Nunangat. The primary research question guiding this work is:

What are Nunavimmiut women's views and experiences of gender roles and responsibilities in their community food systems?

Additional sub-questions were:

- How does gender influence Nunavimmiut community food systems?
- How do these roles intersect with and affect food security and health?
- How have gender roles in community food systems changed?

Consequently, the primary objectives of this research are:

- To better understand and identify how interpretations of gender influence decision-making and agency in food systems and contribute to food (in)security and food sovereignty.
- To incite conversations about the roles of gender within food systems, and to provide a space to speak and share experiences that may not otherwise have been discussed.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Literature exploring the urgency of food insecurity in Inuit Nunangat has grown substantially in recent years. However, there is a gap in research that explicitly differentiates gender-based impacts of food insecurity on Inuit women living in Inuit Nunangat, as well as research that characterizes how gendered social constructs affect food access, acquisition, preparation, and consumption in Inuit Nunangat. Most literature incorporating a sex and gendered approach focuses on biomedical topics (i.e., studies on breastfeeding or pregnant women and contaminants) as opposed to social dimensions of gender and its implications on food systems. Due to a lack of gender-disaggregated data relating to food systems in Inuit Nunangat, it can be challenging to understand and measure the scope of food insecurity and the status of food sovereignty of Inuit women, and how overarching systems have enforced gender roles on Inuit women. For this reason, prior to undertaking any primary research, it was important to conduct a literature review to identify specific gaps in the literature and inform our research methods. The primary research question guided this literature review was:

- What is the range, nature, and extent of existing research on the role of gender in food systems in Inuit Nunangat?

Search Strategy

Articles were selected from multiple academic databases, including JSTOR, Academic Search Complete, Database, and Social Sciences Abstracts. I used three main groups of search terms. The first group focused on identity factors (i.e., Inuit women), the second focused on food security and systems (i.e., food security or country food), and the third incorporated geographic constraints (i.e., Canada, Inuit Nunangat) (Table 1). Alongside the database search, I conducted a hand search using four ‘seed’ articles (Chan et al., 2006; Beaumier & Ford 2010; Healey &

Meadows, 2007; Little et al., 2021). Seed articles were chosen because they were recent publications and reflected the main themes of our research questions. I reviewed the references of each seed article source to maintain relevance to the review. I extracted and reviewed the references of articles identified using the web technique, and so on until I had an exhaustive list of articles relevant to the objectives of the literature review.

Search Strings

Table 1: Example search string to explore the range, nature, and extent of literature on the role of gender in food systems in Inuit Nunangat.

Population		Gender		Location		Food Security and Food Systems
Inuit* or Inuk or Indigenous or First Nations	AND	Women or woman or female* or gender*)	AND	Arctic, or Nunav*, or Canada	AND	Food security or food insecurity or country food* or traditional food*)
Inuit*, or Inuk, or Indigenous or First Nations	AND	Women, or woman, or female* or gender*)	OR			Food security, or food insecurity, or country food* or traditional food*
(Inuit*, or Inuk, or Indigenous or First Nations	OR	Women, or woman, or female* or gender*	AND			Food security, or food insecurity, or country food* or traditional food*

Inclusion criteria

I limited the search to work published from 1990 onwards, as that was around the time that the body of literature was growing around topics of Inuit women's health, food security, and social determinants of health and their interconnections (Healey and Meadows, 2007). Articles that focused on Arctic populations, gender, food systems, and/or food security were included in the review. Studies using any methodology (qualitative, quantitative, review) were included in the review, as long as they met the inclusion criteria. Only articles available in full text and those available in English were included in the review.

Exclusion criteria

As this search focused on Inuit women, the selection strategy aimed to identify research incorporating women and focused on understandings of gender. I did not intentionally exclude diverse gender identities from the search strategy; however, no articles discussed concepts of diverse gender identities related to food systems. Thus, due to the lack of a body of research (and to keep the scope of our review more succinct), diverse gender identities were excluded from this review. We excluded articles in languages other than English (e.g., French, Inuktitut), those published outside of the review period, and those that were unavailable as full text. Articles focusing on populations residing outside of Arctic regions were excluded.

Article review and analysis

If an article met the inclusion criteria, I read the article and extracted key themes, research methodologies, and geographic settings. I put each article into an NVivo file and

conducted a thematic analysis. Each article was coded using inductive and deductive codes, including food security (and smaller sub-codes, such as food security – country food), gender, health, and historical contexts, to name a few. Codes were refined into themes. The first iteration of the review was conducted in the spring of 2022. As the research progressed, I added additional articles to the review and conducted the same process of analysis (applied inclusion and exclusion criteria, conducted thematic analysis using NVivo software).

Results of the literature review

Methodological approaches and study characteristics

A variety of methodological approaches were used by articles included in our review, including epidemiological study designs (e.g., cross-sectional health surveys and cohort studies), qualitative study designs (e.g., interviews, focus groups, and community workshops), and reviews (e.g., scoping reviews). Although many studies took measures to incorporate Inuit voices, most studies failed to center Inuit knowledge and chose instead to situate Inuit perceptions and experiences within Western understandings of gender, health, and food systems.

Most of the research reviewed in this literature review was conducted in Arctic Canada (described by some articles as Inuit Nunangat, but more often characterized as the Arctic region of Canada or specified provinces/territories). Some articles focused on other regions of the Arctic, including Russia, the United States, and Greenland. Articles from other regions of the Arctic were included because they promoted the need to understand gender-based issues in the Arctic better and supported the existing work flowing from Canadian perspectives. Various geographic locations were included due to the relevance of the research topics (i.e., case studies that were area-specific). Although the articles offered relevant information that built on and answered (to some extent) the research questions, each case is specific to the research location. I

do not mean to oversimplify an issue to promote a pan-Indigenous lens; however, in cases where there are research gaps, one must piece together case studies and make inferences based on the available information.

Key Findings

Several themes were identified in the literature after the search and selection process. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process as a guide, I identified themes and organized them into groups. After initial coding, broad themes and sub-themes emerged.

The stressors on food systems in Inuit Nunangat fall primarily into two main categories: the physical impacts of a rapidly changing climate and the socio-cultural impacts of historically imposed policies, gender roles, and market-based systems that perpetuate poverty, inequality, and poor health outcomes. Each of these main categories are strongly related to Inuit women's consumption of country food, and the decisions made around food.

Country Food Consumption

Country food is an essential part of the food system in Inuit Nunangat. This has been reflected widely; for example, Pufall and colleagues articulate how "Traditional country foods are recognized as playing an important role in both physical and cultural nourishment in aboriginal communities worldwide." (Pufall et al., 2010, p.243). The consumption of traditional foods reinforces cultural traditions and strengthens sharing systems and communities (Little et al., 2021; Duhaime et al., 2004; Pufall et al., 2011). Country foods are nutritionally dense and provide the essential nutrients to maintain a healthy diet. Beyond consuming traditional foods, the practices around obtaining and sharing country foods benefit those involved. These processes strengthen cultural ties and intergenerational learning and are integral to Inuit culture (Chan et

al., 2006; Little et al., 2021). Country food is also vital to Inuit health; high nutrient consumption improves health outcomes and prevents noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease or diabetes (Rapinski et al., 2018; Healey & Meadows, 2007). This indicates that country food consumption can act as a protective factor for health among Inuit women by bolstering cultural connectivity and promoting good physical health. Inuit women are knowledge keepers and sharers within traditional food systems and take active roles in their community and household food systems. The roles of Inuit women within the traditional food systems are flexible, ever-changing, and diverse; for example, women work within the family unit to distribute food and within communities to distribute food and strengthen community ties and kinship bonds (Billson & Mancini, 2007; Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2015). Women have historically been primary caregivers, which leads to various roles in food systems; they work to bring food into the household and prepare and store it for future use.

Food Sharing

Food sharing in Inuit communities is an essential dimension of food systems. Sharing food has provided a security net for Inuit for thousands of years. Food sharing systems strengthen community ties and act as a means of achieving food security and equity in access to food. Sharing food is essential to Inuit culture and survival (Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2014; Chan et al., 2006; Naylor et al., 2022; Ready & Power, 2018). Quintal-Marineau speaks about the gendered dimensions of food sharing in Clyde River, Nunavut, arguing that "...women are at the centre of the Inuit mixed food system. Specifically, women's inter/intra household store-bought food-sharing practices highlight the continued importance of food in Inuit culture and social relations, as well as Inuit adaptation to the cash economy." (Quintal-Marineau, 2019). Women in this case spoke about their roles to provision food for their extended families, and

how women are key to sharing networks in their communities and beyond. Some women shared that, beyond provisioning food directly, they provided financial help to their family members to support food purchases. Despite their importance, however, sharing networks are changing due to various factors; voluntary food sharing is declining, and many people have begun to sell country foods due to socioeconomic pressures, changes in lifestyle, climate change, loss of knowledge, and harvest policies that constrain access to country foods (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2015).

Nutrition transition

The nutrition transition has had a significant impact on the food consumption patterns of Inuit across Inuit Nunangat. The transition away from subsistence harvesting can be attributed to various factors, but most notably governmental policies that targeted Inuit populations. Policies of forced resettlement inhibited Inuit from following animals and hunting seasonally and drastically altered food consumption patterns (Burnett et al., 2016). Alongside the policies of forced resettlement and a transition to a more sedentary lifestyle, Inuit participants in a recent longitudinal study reported the cost of equipment, the influence of climate change, and the decline in food sharing networks as primary reasons for increased consumption of market foods (Sheehy et al., 2013). Climate change also facilitates the transition to market foods for many reasons, such as reducing access to country foods due to unpredictable weather, changing migration patterns of animals, and differences in the taste of country food. The impacts of the nutrition transition are wide-ranging and include increased risk of NCDs due to consumption of NND foods.

Additionally, limited food literacy with market foods may be a barrier faced by Inuit women. As described by Beaumier and Ford (2011), “Health professionals have noted that

women have limited knowledge on store foods, which constrains their ability to make informed food choices and decreases the number of food options in the store” (Beaumier & Ford 2011, p.199). Kuhnlein and colleagues point to how the transition is more pronounced for younger generations and women (Kuhnlein, 2009).

Climate change

Country food systems of Inuit Nunangat rely on the natural environment. The natural environment is rapidly changing in Northern ecosystems, which puts traditional food systems at risk. This risk can manifest in many ways. Hunters have noticed less predictable weather patterns caused by ice melting, increasingly irregular migration patterns, and changes in the taste and quality of country food sources (Bunce et al., 2015; Schnitter & Berry, 2019). Climate change can create unsafe conditions for hunters and may force hunters to travel greater distances to access food sources. Unsafe hunting conditions can be caused by a variety of climatic factors including the thickness, stability and coverage of sea and lake ice (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2014; Harper et al., 2015). Climatic shocks, such as blizzards, fog, or unpredictable ice also affect market food access, as store foods are often reliant on air or sea freight to be transported into communities (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Schnitter & Berry, 2019). As such, climate impacts the ability of Inuit communities to access, consume, and prepare country foods (Beaumier, Ford, & Tagalik, 2014; Bunce, Ford & Harper, 2016; Dowsley et al., 2010). These changes, paired with the compounding factors of inflation, unemployment, and market food systems, create an environment where individuals may be more vulnerable to loss of agency and choice over food and at risk of becoming food insecure (Ford & Beaumier, 2011). One of the

critical priorities of the ITK food security strategy is to “[r]educe the climate vulnerability of Inuit and market food systems.” (ITK, 2019, n.p.).

Contaminants in food systems

Another pressing issue related to the changing climate in Inuit Nunangat is the presence of environmental contaminants in country foods (Bjerregaard et al., 2004; Van Oostdam et al., 1999; Duhaime et al., 2004). Contaminants, including heavy metals (e.g., methylmercury, chlordane, toxaphene, Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)), and organic pollutants of emerging concern (e.g., per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) accumulate in country foods (especially large fish and marine mammals) through long-range transport (i.e., in air and ocean currents) and biomagnification in the food chain. Many of these contaminants have health implications and have been associated with neurodevelopmental deficits, reduced immune function, and cardio-metabolic health outcomes (Van Oostdam et al., 2005). The presence of contaminants in traditional food sources may act as an invisible barrier to consuming country foods. Public health agencies must promote messaging on the risks of exposure to environmental contaminants while recognizing that country foods continue to play an important role in nutrition and food security across Inuit Nunangat. It is important to gather and disseminate evidence on which country foods pose the highest risk using a gendered lens. Consuming country food and contaminants in country foods is a highly gendered issue; for example, pregnant women may consume food that presents a risk to the mother and the child’s health. Duhaime et al. highlight some possible strategies to mitigate the consumption of contaminants in food systems while maintaining country food consumption. One strategy includes a program that provides Arctic Char (a culturally appropriate country food that is relatively low in contaminants and high in nutrients) to pregnant women in four communities in Nunavik (Duhaime et al., 2004).

Income, employment, and education

Income, employment, and education are significant determinants of food security globally and play a prominent role in the food security landscape in Inuit Nunangat. Market foods are expensive due to transportation costs, which creates a financial barrier to accessing food. Chan and colleagues stress that affordability of market food in the Arctic is a severe concern and attaining enough healthy market food is not viable for most families (Chan et al., 2006). In a qualitative study conducted by Beaumier and Ford, many women described poor living conditions that were characteristic of poverty, including “not being able to afford daily needs and pay bills, living in overcrowded housing, and having to liquidate assets to meet needs.” (Beaumier & Ford, 2010). This theme was echoed throughout the literature; many studies highlight high unemployment rates and barriers to education and employment, and how these factors exacerbate food insecurity (Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2015; Ready, 2016). Proliferation of market economies can have conflicting impacts on food access and security. On the one hand, employment economies have replaced subsistence lifestyles and reduced time available for harvesting (Little et al., 2021; Ready, 2016). On the other hand, employment can provide financial support for obtaining the resources needed to harvest country food and fund market food purchases. Gender roles intersect with employment and household finances in different ways. According to some studies, Inuit women are often the primary income earners in the household (Dowsley et al., 2010; Ready, 2018). Because of this, they do not have as much time to spend doing traditional activities related to country food, which may create a pattern that reduces women’s involvement in country food systems (Ready, 2018; Bunce et al., 2015).

Subsidy programs

Subsidy programs in the north were created to make market food more affordable and country food more accessible. Nutrition North Canada (NNC) was introduced in 2010 as a replacement subsidy program to the Food Mail Program, which was developed in the 1960s (Burnett, Skinner & LeBlanc, 2015). Subsidy programs are intended to alleviate the burden of high market food prices and the cost of hunting. NNC provides a retailer subsidy and has recently developed a Harvester Support Grant. This grant was created to decrease reliance on market foods by financially supporting hunters and increasing local country food consumption and sharing (Government of Canada, Nutrition North Canada, 2022). Despite these efforts, Nutrition North Canada has received criticism for its limited effectiveness in alleviating food insecurity in the North. According to community consultations conducted by NNC, there is a need to improve awareness regarding how the subsidies work and what suppliers are eligible (Government of Canada, Nutrition North Canada, 2017). Some authors have criticized NNC's lack of accountability to ensure subsidies are in place, poor reporting mechanisms, and limited resources allocated to building food literacy skills as components of the subsidies (Galloway, 2014; St. Germain et al., 2019; QIA, 2019). Subsidy programs do not take a gender-specific approach, nor do they explicitly acknowledge how gender may influence the accessibility or effectiveness of the program. Subsidy programs that do not consider women's unique roles in country food and market food systems may not function effectively and efficiently. Further, Galloway states that NNC does not consider the realities of personal finances in the North, primarily because the function of 'personal ordering' requires access to a credit card. Beaumier, Ford, and Tagalik note that many women in their study do not have a credit card, and further, there is limited knowledge of how to access the individual ordering program (Beaumier, Ford &

Tagalik, 2014; Galloway, 2014). According to the 2018–2019 Departmental Results Report, NNC’s education initiative did not include any form of financial planning education that might support Inuit women tasked with shopping for food (Government of Canada, Nutrition North Canada, 2020).

Inuit women’s health related to food systems

Physical health

Physical health is directly related to food acquisition and consumption across Inuit Nunangat, and especially country food consumption (Chan et al., 2006; Rosol, Powell-Hellyer & Chan, 2016). Country foods are replete in many important nutrients. Inuit who regularly consume country foods have significantly higher intakes of protein, calcium, niacin, iron, zinc, magnesium, selenium, vitamins C, D, and E, and many other micronutrients compared to those who eat country foods less frequently. Many of these nutrients (e.g., iron) are particularly important for women. Marine mammal and fish consumption are protective against coronary heart disease, likely due to the long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) found in these foods (Rapinski et al., 2018; Chan et al., 2006). Meanwhile, many articles identify the physical health risks of overconsuming non-nutrient-dense market foods, such as non-communicable diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and obesity (Chan et al., 2006; ITK, 2020; Kuhnlein et al., 2004; Little et al., 2020; McGrath-Hanna et al., 2003).

Much of the literature addressing the impacts of food systems on Inuit women’s physical health is related to the impacts of exposure to environmental contaminants through country food sources on pregnant or breastfeeding women. The objectives of these studies focus on pregnant Inuit women’s country food consumption to better understand how it may impact their

pregnancies related to contaminants present in their food systems (Caron-Beaudoin et al., 2020; Muckle et al., 2001). This research has been helpful to better understand how consumption of country foods can impact Inuit women in many ways. However, aside from studies on pregnant or breastfeeding women, literature does not seem to consider the broader need for a gendered lens when analyzing the physical health impacts of food insecurity.

A recurring theme in the literature was that Inuit women struggling with food insecurity were willing to sacrifice their food intake to feed their families by drinking more water or tea, reducing meals, or skipping them entirely (Ford & Beaumier, 2011). However, there is very little research on how such decisions affect nutrition and physical health outcomes and contribute to health inequities among women.

Another theme related to Inuit women's physical health is connection between land and body. Relating food, physical health, and bodies of Indigenous peoples in her work, Cote quotes "The integrity of indigenous [sic] peoples' food systems is intimately connected with the overall health of the environment. Recent declines in many aspects of environmental quality, from loss of biodiversity to environmental contamination, have combined with social, economic, political, and cultural factors to threaten the health and well-being of indigenous [sic] peoples." (Turner, Plotkin & Kuhnlien in Cote, 2022, p.82). Physical health is embedded in land and food systems, and the intersection between land and body is powerful, particularly amongst Indigenous feminist literature. Inuit are inherently connected to the land and the food system in every facet of life. For example, Caughey and colleagues look at the impact that country food has on health and well-being for Inuit women (Caughey et al., 2024); Cunsolo- Willox and colleagues write about affective implications of climate change on Inuit health and well-being (Cunsolo-Willox et al., 2013); and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes about the intimate connection between

Indigenous peoples and their homelands, languages, through a Nishnaabeg perspective (Simpson, 2014).

Mental health

When considering mental health related to food security, it is essential to understand the complexity of contributing factors. Healey and Meadows articulate this point by noting that we must consider health as more than just the absence of disease or sickness. Instead, Inuit conceptualizations of health are broad and holistic, incorporating mental, spiritual, and cultural dimensions (Healey & Meadows, 2007; ICC-A, 2015; ITK, 2014; Karetak, Tester & Tagalik, 2016). Country food harvesting, sharing, and consumption have been linked to improved mental health outcomes. For example, in a study assessing determinants of Inuit youth mental wellness in Nunavik, Gray et al. found that harvesting, sharing, and consuming country foods was associated with better mental wellness and lower suicidal ideation (Gray et al., 2016). There is increasing evidence of the linkages between time on the land and positive mental health experiences (Petrasek et al., 2015). Women interviewed in one study reported feeling upset when discussing the declining availability and accessibility of country food. As stated in the article by Bunce and colleagues, “[t]he majority of interviewees reported that they ate less country food today than they did during their childhood.” (Bunce et al., 2015, p.1433). Such sentiments align with evidence from other studies identifying the positive feelings associated with country food consumption and concern for reduced accessibility (Lambden et al., 2007; Rapinski et al., 2018; Pufall et al., 2011).

Women may be differentially and/or disproportionately impacted by the financial stress of food acquisition for their families. As previously mentioned, Dowsley and colleagues explain that Inuit women are likely to be the wage earners in their families; through this, their wage

supports the family unit while also contributing to the subsistence practices (Dowsley et al., 2010). Such responsibilities may further exacerbate the stress of already limited resources and increase pressure on women as wage earners (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Dowsley et al., 2010; Ford & Beaumier, 2011). It must also be noted that psychological and physical health inform each other – for example, physical stressors that prohibit women from being out on the land can impact mental health in many ways (Bunce et al., 2015; Healey & Meadows, 2007).

Discussion and research gaps

This review provided insight into the past and current intersections between gender and food systems in Inuit Nunangat. The literature provides rich information regarding food security, gender, health, climate, and socio-cultural and economic changes in Inuit Nunangat due to colonization. However, there remain considerable gaps in research related to gender and women in Inuit Nunangat related to food systems. Due to a lack of gender-specific data, it can be challenging to discern the impact of gender roles on Inuit women in food systems in Inuit Nunangat. Various authors reiterated this point. For example, Healey and Meadows note, “These publications study culture, disease and risk for poor health without acknowledging the role of gender, social and physical environment and other determinants of health as playing a role in Inuit wellbeing.” (Healey & Meadows, 2007, p.203). The intersection of gender and food systems in Inuit Nunangat is of the utmost importance. Many authors state the significance of women’s roles in food systems, including how they prepare foods, hunt and gather, and ensure the needs of their families are met. Despite the recognition of the importance of understanding gendered impacts within food systems in Inuit Nunangat, there remains a gap in research that focuses on this intersection.

As discussed earlier, most early research in Inuit Nunangat was conducted by white male authors. Although these perspectives offer some insight into the histories of Inuit Nunangat, skew perceptions of reality as they convey their experiences through the privileged positions held by the authors at the time. LaRocque describes this in her work, *Métis, and feminist-ethical reflections on feminism, human rights, and decolonization* by emphasizing that most discourse in northern Indigenous studies focuses on men's roles (e.g., hunting) and not community life. This male bias in research in the Arctic has omitted women's experiences and led to a significant gap in understanding women's roles and experiences (Kafarowski, 2005; LaRocque, 2007). Donna Haraway notes that perceptions of objectivity in male-dominated research spaces often create a skewed sense of reality. Harding's standpoint theory states the need for the perspectives of marginalized voices for research to reflect a more accurate (and thus theoretically more objective) reality. The lack of women's perspectives in the existing literature is reflected in an Arctic context by Karla Jensen Williamson in *Living on the Land - Indigenous women's understanding of place*, "most literature on peoples of the Arctic was written by males whose writings have yet to be analyzed through a non-patriarchal, non-colonial frames of perception. The strong male bias about the Arctic has led to a situation where relatively little is known about Arctic women's roles" (Williamson et al. 2004, 188). St. Denis, in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, states, "I believe that a critical reading entails understanding how inequality and unequal social, political and economic relations have been justified, rationalized, and practiced within European institutions and part of this critical reading entails understanding feminist critiques and analyses of western patriarchy." (St. Denis, in Green, 2007 p.43). Although research exists highlighting Inuit women's experiences centred in Inuit feminist perspectives, there is a relative lack of literature compared to the broader theory of Indigenous feminist theory.

The majority of research on Inuit food systems, nutrition, and food security is grounded in anthropological, archaeological, or medical theory. Such research often ignores the issue of gender and therefore enforces existing gender stereotypes, norms and expectations.

Challenges and Limitations

This literature review showed a need for further research explicitly highlighting the experience of Inuit women within food systems. However, our review was subject to several limitations. Some themes were poorly supported due to a lack of available relevant literature. We did not explicitly search for discussions on gender diversity and non-binary gender roles in food systems, a topic that bears further investigation. If the scope of this paper were larger, it would be pertinent to search for diverse perspectives on gender and food security, as seen in Ready's work, in which the authors collect male perspectives to infer the gendered impacts (Ready, 2018).

Most articles reported on studies that were grounded in Western conceptualizations of knowledge and research study designs. As such, we risked excluding Inuit knowledge and perspectives that remain underrepresented in the academic literature. As explained in Karetak, Tester and Tagalik's work, it is best to gather Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit knowledge; IQ) orally to align with Inuit systems of knowledge transmission and better facilitate learning on both ends of research (Karetak, Tester & Tagalik, 2017). The oral nature of knowledge is difficult to capture in a literature review, as we only included written works. Despite this, some published works provide an appropriate discussion of oral histories and testimonies, including *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: What Inuit Have Always Known to Be True* by Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik, and *The Qaggiq Model* by McGrath. These works provide insight into how IQ is an ethical framework, that guides ways of knowing, and connects all aspects of life that cannot be isolated.

Karetak, Tester and Tagalik speak about the juxtaposition that this offers to Western European knowledge often tends to divide knowledge into isolated pieces. Oral knowledge has the ability to convey aspects beyond the written, such as intent, emotion, and relationship, which is why when written, pieces may be interpreted differently than if spoken. Shukla and Settee explain the link between Indigenous oral history and food systems, “Like many other forms of Indigenous knowledges, Indigenous food systems knowledges are transmitted through oral history in the form of systematic instructions and stories, observations, and apprenticeships that include participation in actual practices on the land, often in local Indigenous languages.” (Settee & Shukla, 2020, p.273).

Conclusion

This literature review confirms a gap in current academic literature related to qualitative research explicitly involving Inuit women, gendered roles in food systems, and gendered aspects of food security in the North. The review outlines how factors of a changing climate, socioeconomic factors, and colonial policies and programs all implicate gendered dimensions of food systems in Inuit Nunangat, and how Inuit women’s health might be impacted by this diverse range of factors. The gendered gap noted in this review, alongside various sources pointing to Inuit women’s interconnectedness in food systems and vulnerability to food systems, highlights the need for further research in these areas.

CHAPTER 3: Justification for Research and Geographic Context

Prevalence of food insecurity is very high across Inuit Nunangat. ITK's 2021 Food security states that according to the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples' Survey, 76% of Inuit aged 15 and over living in Inuit Nunangat are experiencing food insecurity (ITK, 2021). The *Qanuilirpitaa? 2017 Food Security Report* provides statistics related to food security in Nunavik, showing that 78% of Nunavimmiut reported experiencing some level of food insecurity in the year prior to the survey (National Regional Board of Health and Social Services, 2021). Due to this critical and long-standing issue, food (in)security has come to dominate academic research in Inuit Nunangat (Chan et al., 2006; Douglas et al., 2014; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2021). This body of research has underscored the historical and ongoing colonial processes that have had wide-ranging impacts on Inuit sovereignty, cultural practices, and social structures, leading to large changes in food systems across the Canadian north. Meanwhile, a separate but connected body of research explores connections between food and health outcomes, including exposure to environmental contaminants (especially among pregnant women) through country foods (Duhaime et al., 2004; Muckle, 2001). Such research comprises an important starting point for understanding food systems and inequities in Inuit Nunangat. Yet, this body of research rarely explicitly explores intersections between gender and food. While it is widely recognized that gender is inextricably linked to food production, acquisition, preparation, consumption, preferences, sovereignty, and security, there remain significant gaps in understanding exactly how gender intersects with food systems in Inuit Nunangat. As Beaumier and Ford (2010) note, "[f]ew studies have assessed how multiple stressors operating at different spatial and temporal scales affect food security, particularly of Inuit women. This knowledge gap has been identified as limiting intervention to reduce food insecurity at a local, territorial, and federal level" (Beaumier & Ford, 2010, p.196).

If we look outside of Inuit Nunangat, there is a range of literature from South Asian, South American, African, and Pacific contexts that explicitly connects gender and food (Agarwal, 2018; Bali Swain & Floro, 2013; FAO 2013; Kaler, Njuki, & Parkins 2016). Research conducted in different geographic settings provides insight into how food system, food security, and food sovereignty issues are inherently gendered. However, this body of research tends to focus on agrarian economies and has limited relevance for Inuit economies and food systems. Inuit food systems are vastly different from such contexts due to the continued importance of hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering, and other forms of subsistence harvesting in Inuit society, the remoteness of Inuit communities, historical and ongoing colonial structures and forces, and the unique cultural and traditional histories and practices of Inuit. Because of such differences, literature from other contexts provides limited insight the gendered components of food systems in Inuit Nunangat.

There are relatively limited resources that speak to Inuit women's experiences from a feminist – or even a gendered – perspective. In addition to a relatively limited body of literature specific to Inuit women's experiences of food security, there is little consideration of gender in food-related research. Ferreira and colleagues highlight this gap in their work *Indigenous women's worldview in food-related research: Rematriating food, bodies and lands*: “The under-representation of women in food-related research points to the systemic ways of rendering women's knowledge, bodies, and roles in food systems invisible and/or erased.” (Ferreira et al., 2020, p.211). The omission of gendered perspectives in food-related research reflects the patriarchal colonial nature of mainstream research funding and institutions. Historical research conducted in Inuit Nunangat has focused either on anthropological inquiry that essentializes Inuit communities for their cultural characteristics, or on biomedical research that characterizes and

investigates the nutritional epidemiology of Inuit. Such research inherently values western science over Inuit knowledge and leaves little room for critical studies of food systems using Indigenous feminist perspectives (Parlee & Wray, 2020; Quintal-Marineau, 2017). Billson and Mancini note that the majority of historical research conducted in Nunavut was by non-Inuit men, who “...had no interest or access to the female domain” (Billson & Mancini, 2007, p.xiii).

Considering these substantial research gaps, this work aims to improve understandings of how gender plays a role in food systems and household food security in Kangirsuk, Nunavik, Québec. This work will help close research gaps by looking at the intersection of food and gender in Inuit Nunangat and promote a gender-inclusive approach to food research. By seeking an enhanced understanding of the gendered dimensions of food systems in Inuit Nunangat, we will ensure that future research, policies, and food security programs are better informed about how gender plays a role in food (in)security and food sovereignty. Our hope is that such research can improve efforts to combat food security by ensuring policy and program initiatives are reflective of the needs of those impacted by gendered dimensions of food systems.

Geographic Context

The primary research for this Master’s thesis took place in Kangirsuk, Nunavik. Nunavik is the northernmost region of Québec and consists of fourteen Inuit communities along the Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait, and Ungava Bay coastlines. This village was chosen, as the overarching project, *Piujuit ('The Good Stuff'): Country food access and preferences in Nunavik*, had preestablished connections with key community members in the village, as a result of previous research projects. In Inuktitut, Kangirsuk means “the bay”, and it is so named because it lies on the north shore of a long bay that comprises the estuary of the Payne River (also known as the Arnaud River), which flows into Ungava Bay. Kangirsuk was known by colonial settlers

as Payne Bay, and has a population of 561 (Statistics Canada, 2022a). Kangirsuk is well-known for its abundant access to fish, and primarily Arctic Char. As is consistent with other communities across Nunavik and elsewhere in Inuit Nunangat, retail (i.e., market) food and other goods are expensive due to the cost of long-range shipping. For this reason, the cost of living in Nunavik is extremely high compared to southern regions.



Figure 1: *Map of Nunavik’s communities.* Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, 2024.



Figure 2: *Topographic map of Kangirsuk. Esri Canada, 2024.*

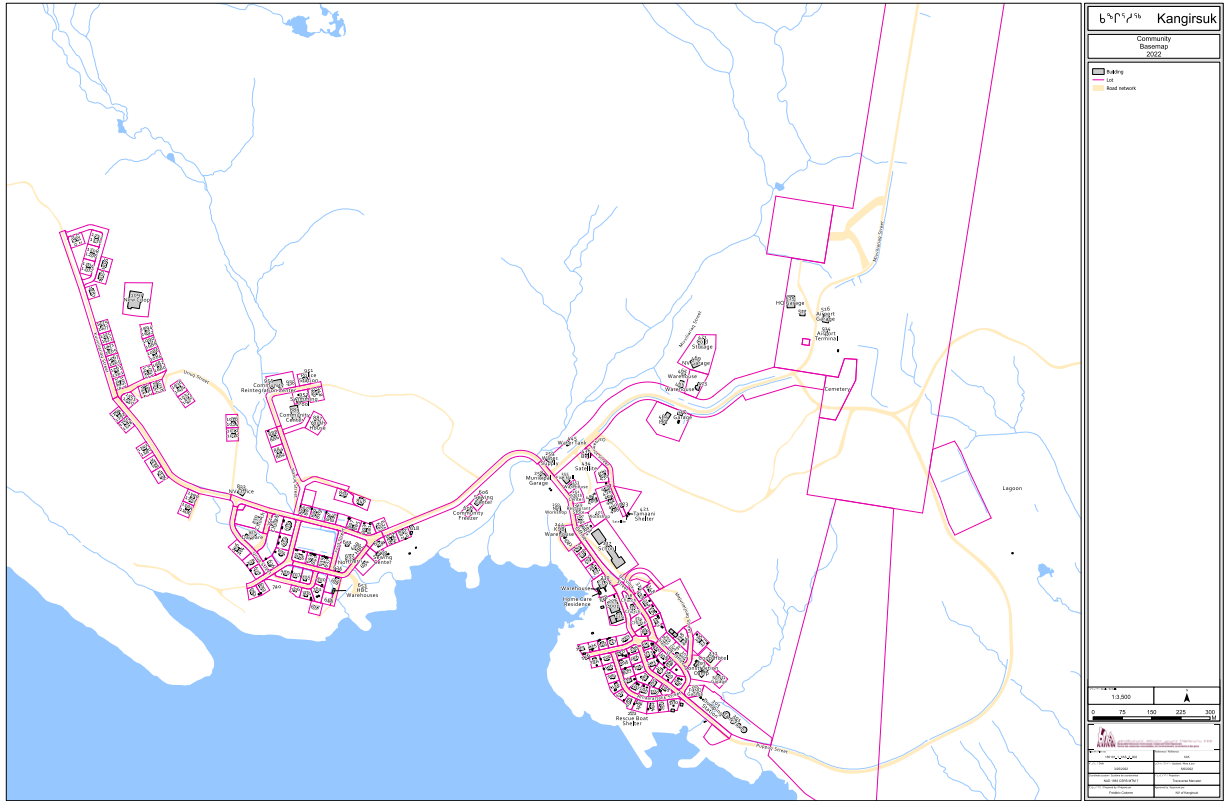


Figure 3: *Community Base map, Kangirsuk.* Kativik Regional Government, 2022.

CHAPTER 4: Research Methodology and Methods

This research was guided by an Indigenist theoretical framework (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014; Snow et al., 2016; Rix et al., 2019; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). I use the term ‘Indigenist’ as opposed to Indigenous because I am a non-Indigenous researcher and a white settler. Rather than drawing on experiences of Indigeneity (as is often the case with Indigenous research), an Indigenist framework allows space for non-Indigenous researchers to use existing research methodologies to privilege voices of Indigenous people by focusing on their “lived, historical experiences, ideas, traditions, dreams, interests, aspirations and struggle” (Rigney, 1999). This approach, popularized in the Canadian context by Shawn Wilson, is a research methodology grounded in prioritizing Indigenous perspectives and knowledge that is accessible to non-Indigenous researchers, decolonizing research approaches, and promoting self-determination of Indigenous people. To further exemplify this distinction, Wilson presents the analogy of feminism – just as one does not have to be a woman to be a feminist, one does not have to be Indigenous to engage in Indigenist research that is guided by Indigenous worldviews, centres Indigenous voices, and privileges Indigenous perspectives. Rix and colleagues explain that an Indigenist methodology “...respects and honours Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, through methods that are informed by, resonate with, and are driven and supported by Indigenous peoples.” (Rix et al., 2019, p.254). This paradigm is based on relationality, building relationships, and understanding that the research must be grounded in kindness, honesty, and compassion (Wilson, 2007). An Indigenist research framework requires researchers to be constantly reflexive of personal and academic biases (Datta et al., 2015; Peltier, 2018). Rix and colleagues articulate the application of an Indigenist perspective from a non-Indigenous background, “...researchers from non-Indigenous backgrounds must firstly examine their

worldview(s) to enable them to understand that their view of the world is different than that of the Indigenous peoples with whom they are working.” (Rix et al., 2019, p. 254). This approach also deconstructs the hegemonic Western approach to knowledge production (Altamirano-Jiménez & Kermoal, 2016).

Indigenist and Indigenous research methodologies are informed by (and often incorporate) elements of other theoretical frameworks. In planning and carrying out this research, I drew on several complementary frameworks. Specifically, I incorporated Indigenous feminism and community-engaged research. I will describe these in order and how they contributed to the research process.

Indigenous feminism is an intersectional theory that focuses on decolonization, Indigenous sovereignty, social equity, and empowerment of Indigenous women and their families (Green, 2017; Million, 2009; Starblanket, 2018). Indigenous feminism recognizes that, in the process of establishing and maintaining patriarchal colonial power, colonizers actively dissuaded and eroded Indigenous cultural practices and perceptions, including those related to gender and gender roles. Forced settlement, residential schools, law enforcement, and other colonial processes were designed by a patriarchal system to assimilate Indigenous (including Inuit) populations to Western conceptualizations of gender hierarchies and roles. Indigenous feminism aims to subvert such conceptualizations by drawing on core elements of Indigenous cultures – in particular, the nearly universal connection to land, which is often framed as a sacred responsibility – as a means to empowerment and self-determination. In my research, I incorporate Indigenous feminist perspectives by exploring and critically evaluating the ways in which colonial processes have informed gender roles and responsibilities in Kangirsuk, and how

women's agency and self-determination is enacted in their relationship to food, including food acquisition, preparation, and consumption.

Indigenist research requires researchers to establish relationships with Indigenous communities and respond to their priorities and needs. As such, Indigenist research frameworks often draw on the principles of community-engaged participatory research approaches. Brydon-Miller et al. articulate this tenet of participatory research: "Theory is really only useful insofar as it is put in the service of a practice focused on achieving positive social change." (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p.15). I wanted this work to be community-engaged in hopes of fostering a better understanding the priorities of those most intimately connected to the issues of food in Nunavik currently. This project was conducted in partnership with the Nunavik Nutrition and Health Committee (NNHC) as a component of the larger project *Piujuit ('The Good Stuff'): Country food access and preferences in Nunavik*. Working within a more extensive project helped me build relationships and consult with a wide range of community leaders, including the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, the Nunavik Anguvigaq, the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board, the local Anguvigaq representatives in Kangirsuk, the mayor of Kangirsuk, and community members. This consultation process allowed us to explore community priorities and decide on appropriate research methods. Data collection was accommodating to minimize the burden on participants. For example, we allowed participants to choose where and when they wished to conduct the interview, and we allowed participants to attend to children if needed. During interviews, I often explored what participants wanted to discuss in further detail and endeavoured to be responsive to their suggestions regarding the research. At the end of each interview, I asked about community priorities and allowed these priorities to inform our interview guide. Following participants' priorities in the interviews

allowed them to guide where the interviews went and thus guide the themes that eventually emerged in the thematic analysis process.

Eve Tuck outlines damage-centered research in her work ‘*Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*’, in which researchers have acted to reinforce oppressive narratives to prove research findings. With this in mind and acknowledging the oppressive structures that have led to the food environment in Inuit Nunangat today, I attempt to shift narratives from a deficit-centered approach to this research toward a more desire-based focus.

This Master's thesis aims to contribute not only to academic scholarship but, more importantly, to the well-being and empowerment of Inuit communities. By adopting an Indigenist research framework that incorporates Indigenous feminism and community-engaged research, I seek to provide a nuanced understanding of the gender dynamics within the intricate web of Inuit food systems. Through this research, we hope to shed light on the resilience of Inuit communities, challenge existing stereotypes, and contribute to the development of culturally sensitive policies and interventions that promote gender equity and food security in Nunavik and beyond.

Research Methods

Research Process

The research process began in the fall of 2021 when I started my Master's in the Social Dimensions of Health program at the University of Victoria. This project began as a proposal, and throughout the following year, I conducted background research. The background research culminated in a literature review and final thesis proposal, which I defended in the fall of 2022. In October 2022, I travelled from Victoria, BC, to Nunavik, QC, on a scoping trip to visit and

consult with communities with my supervisor and a postdoctoral student. We travelled to Kuujjuaq, Kangirsuk, and Tasiujaq over the span of a week. In Kangirsuk, we presented our proposed research to the local Anguvigaq, community leaders, the town manager, and the town mayor. The proposal was well received and we discussed their concerns, needs, and expectations related to the research. After confirming that the community wished to take part in the research, I finalized my research proposal and defended it to my committee in early November. In the meantime, I connected with researchers from Laval University – a partner university on the overarching *Piujuit* project – who were traveling to Kangirsuk in late November 2022, and they invited me to join them. These two researchers conducted workshops on Arctic char monitoring, and I sat in and helped with the group interviews and workshops. I spent the next months preparing for my own data collection visit to Kangirsuk in May 2023. During this time, I created an interview guide and kept in touch with the town manager and contacts in the village. My visit began with some meetings, where I reconnected with those people I had met the year before. I also met with new community members who had taken interest in my project. After getting set up, I presented my research to the town board of directors. I spoke with them before seeking research participants, as I wanted to hear their input and take any extra consideration into account before proceeding with data collection. They did not have any requests, so I went ahead with my project and advertised on the radio. For the next week, I commuted daily to the local Anguvigaq office, stayed in the boardroom to conduct interviews, and talked and had coffee with people passing through.

Participants/Recruitment

I used convenience sampling techniques as a recruitment method. As mentioned in the literature review search strategy, when researching impacts on gender, it is essential to include

diverse perspectives. I interviewed fourteen participants, including five men and nine women, aged 19 years old to Elders. Some of the participants were community leaders, including four members of the Village Board of Directors. Most of the participants were experienced in either hunting or fishing. I conducted recruitment in various ways. The primary recruitment source was the FM local radio station. I spoke with the town manager and visited the local radio station to advertise the research project in both Inuktitut and English. I presented an outline of my research to the board of directors for the local Anguvigaq and proceeded to interview three of them. The other sampling technique was snowball sampling, based on word of mouth. The radio advertisement and word of mouth after presenting to the board of directors were successful in attracting those who wanted to participate. Based on the rate at which the participants showed up, I decided I did not need to take further recruitment measures. The first interview I conducted was a group interview, with three members of Kangirsuk's board of directors. They requested to be interviewed together, and as the first interview, they helped with feedback for the following 11. The rest of the 11 interviews were one-on-one, semi-structured, conversational tone interviews. After speaking with fourteen participants, I was able to discern the recurrence of certain themes within the interviews. As the interviews were conversational in tone, they would range from brief conversations of around thirty minutes, to upwards of an hour and a half. Each participant was offered an honoraria according to preestablished decisions determined by the board of directors. Each visit I would bring gifts for the townspeople I interacted with day to day in the Anguvigaq.

Data collection

Interviews were conducted in the local Anguvigaq office. This setting provided a good place for a neutral, less hierarchical research space – I was new to the setting, and those who

visited were comfortable there. Most interviews were conducted in the board room, although some took place in the basement, either to accommodate children and childcare or while there were other meetings occurring in the board room.

Interviews were semi-structured and based on Kovach's conversational method (Kovach, 2010). Conversational interviews create a less formal, more personal interview that is responsive to the needs, priorities, opinions, and conversational cadence of research participants. Kovach notes that the use of a conversational method is a way to honour orality as knowledge transmission (Kovach, 2010, p.127). I began each interview with 'small talk' to build rapport with participants before introducing the research and seeking informed oral consent. Following this, I turned on the recorder and began the interview.

Due to the conversational nature of the semi-structured interviews, there were instances of laughter, sharing of anecdotes, and discussions of topics that were not directly related to the research. There were also moments when participants did not have much to say, and I would use the interview guide to move things along. However, in my opinion, the conversational interviews were helpful to build rapport, establish a casual and trusting environment, and minimize the power hierarchy between researcher and participant. Further, since I visited the local Anguivigaq office daily and had frequent casual conversation with office employees and community members, I was able to build rapport and create a more trusting environment. I believe that my young age established a non-intimidating presence. Conversational interviews allowed me to better understand what was important to those I spoke with. As I wove gender into each question, participants led the discussion to topics they felt were important to them, and I would follow. This eventually shaped the interpretation of my research question. I went into the interviews with a loose research question and I came out with specific research questions that were shaped by

what the participants felt was important to them. This approach to data collection promoted a safer, trusting environment, with less emphasis on formalized procedures and a greater focus on relationship building and knowledge sharing.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, recordings were transcribed and analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcriptions were analyzed using Nvivo 12 (Version 12, 2018; QSR International) and 14 (Version 14, 2023; QSR International) software. Throughout the coding process, I strived to achieve transformational validity, defined by Cho and Trent as ‘...a deeper, self-reflective, empathetic understanding of the researcher while working with the researched.’ (Cho & Trent, 2006, p.322). Our thematic analysis was conducted in multiple iterations. We developed the emergent themes because of the background literature review and familiarity with the topics discussed in the interviews. Using Braun & Clarke’s framework involved multiple stages of coding and analysis and multiple iterations of the coding framework.

The analysis process occurred in stages. As I transcribed the interviews, I began identifying potential codes in my mind. After multiple stages of coding in NVivo software, I created a physical concept map to connect all the codes into overarching themes. Following this, I constructed my findings section of this thesis, which led to further coalescing of concepts into more prominent themes. This process was conducted over the course of several months.

Ethical considerations

This research was conducted under the auspices of a larger project that was reviewed and approved by the University of Victoria research ethics board (#22-0183). We followed the ethical principles laid out in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS-2), including those related to respect for persons (e.g., free, prior, and informed consent), concern for welfare (e.g., minimization of risks and data confidentiality), and justice (e.g., fair and equitable treatment of research participants). Due to the specific context of the research, additional ethical considerations were guided by several published articles and frameworks, as described below.

Article 9.2 in TCPS-2, *Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada*, states the importance of collaborative research: “The nature and extent of community engagement in a project shall be determined jointly by the researcher and the relevant community and shall be appropriate to community characteristics and the nature of the research guides how to ethically research within and amongst Indigenous communities.” (Government of Canada; Panel on Research Ethics, 2021, n.p.). Ensuring Indigenous voices are centred within this research was an essential ethical consideration. Using Indigenist theory ensured that I, as a non-Indigenous scholar, undertook research that was informed and led by Indigenous perspectives. Works that helped guide these approaches include Shawn Wilson’s ‘*Research is Ceremony*’ and Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s ‘*Decolonizing Methodologies*.’

Before conducting the interviews, there were processes to ensure that participants could provide informed consent. As noted in the TCPS:2 CORE 2018 Policy Statement, a key aspect of information is that power dynamics and lack of sufficient information can influence personal autonomy. I considered this statement in planning and obtaining both community and individual consent. I visited the village on two separate occasions to build a relationship, discuss my

research before collecting data, and take the time needed to build trust and mutual understanding. Measures for the participants to provide informed consent included space for discussion and questions before being interviewed, research handouts, and a research presentation. The available information was accessible in plain language, and I ensured the participants knew I could answer any questions they had. After reading through a consent script, there were multiple opportunities for the participants to decline to participate if they did not feel that the project (or the interview) was serving their needs.

Other core principles of the TCPS 2: CORE include respect for persons and taking precautions to ensure no harm to participants or communities. The ethical principles in the TCPS:2 CORE present some similarities with principles of Indigenist research, including relationality and mutual respect. Taking steps to ensure participants have sufficient information to exert agency over their decision to participate requires flexibility on the part of the research team to provide a comfortable and safe environment for participants, as well as offer as much background information as necessary for them to provide informed consent. Throughout the data analysis phase of this work, we ensured measures were taken to keep participants anonymized throughout the process. Steps taken included password-protected files, safely destroying contact information records, and secure storage of files.

I frequently referred to *The National Inuit Strategy on Research* (NISR) published by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK, 2019) during the research planning process. I used the NISR by ITK to help guide this work because I wanted to follow an Inuit-led framework around ethics and ethical components to research. After reading the NISR, I understood the five priority areas of

the strategy⁴, and within that, I also kept in mind aspects of how to incorporate a gender dimension to these priority areas.

Positionality is a central component of the ethical considerations of this research project. Working as a non-Indigenous researcher in Indigenous contexts requires reflexivity. Snow and colleagues (2016) highlight principles for researchers engaging in research that privilege the voices and goals of Indigenous populations, one of which is journaling (Snow et al., 2016). I kept a journal and wrote down my reflections, prompts, and experiences throughout the research process. The journaling process facilitated transformational validity and drew from Cho and Trent's work (Cho & Trent, 2006). In this work, instead of focusing on validity as an outcome, the authors stress the importance of achieving validity through process. Cho and Trent posit that validity as a process can be facilitated using a research journal: "This process view moves the concept from an application of 'the right criteria at the right time' to a process of 'thinking out loud' about researcher concerns, safeguards, and contradictions continually. In other words, validity becomes ever-present and recursive as opposed to either a 'step' in a linear sequence or an over-reliance on subjectivity." (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 327). As I journaled throughout my research process, I structured each heading based on a prompt based on a reading, an experience I had during the research, or something I wanted to think deeper about.

In their exploration of approaches of non-Indigenous researchers to Indigenous research, Kilian and colleagues (2019) highlight four core principles that non-Indigenous researchers need to follow: "Relationships, trust, humility and accountability"⁵ (Kilian et al., 2019, p.E504). I kept

⁴ The five priority areas, as outlined by The National Inuit Strategy on Research are: (1) Advance Inuit governance in research; (2) Enhance the ethical conduct of research; (3) Align funding with Inuit research priorities; (4) Ensure Inuit access, ownership, and control over data and information, and (5) Build capacity in Inuit Nunangat research (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2019).

⁵ "1) relationships with communities are foundational to the research process, 2) non-Indigenous researchers experience a personal self-reflective journey grounded in reconciliation, allyship and privilege, 3) accepted knowledge frameworks in

these considerations in mind when building relationships within the community during each visit. Owning one's limitations was (and will continue to be) a central part of the work. I wove this into my process by engaging in journaling processes, discussions with peers, and working collaboratively with my colleagues, who were both involved in the research and colleagues from outside of this research.

I used the NISR as a guideline for the overarching work and a personal guideline for myself. This document speaks to the experiences of Inuit being over-researched for the researcher's benefit. In my case, as a Master's student, I hope to obtain Master's degree because of this research, and I kept that in mind as I was undertaking this work. The pursuit of a Master's degree, although important, is not the sole reason I am engaged in this work. I came into my Master's degree hoping to better understand the gendered components of Indigenous food systems. As my work progressed, I used this research to broaden my understanding, contribute to the research field, and hopefully enact change.

Indigenous research are familiar to most but are inconsistently applied and 4) institutions act as barriers to and facilitators of ethical conduct of Indigenous research." (Kilian et al., 2019 p.E505).

Chapter 6: Research Findings

This chapter explores the themes that emerged from the interviews during the transcription and analysis stages of the research. Themes include gender roles and how they may have changed, household structure, gender roles in harvesting country foods, food preparation, country food consumption and practices, knowledge transmission, and climate change.

Historical and changing gender roles

When discussing food with the participants, it was clear that country food systems were very important for a range of reasons. Participants spoke to how eating country foods gave them strength and kept them warm during the cold months, and others said engaging in hunting and preparing country foods brought them closer to Inuit culture. Participants perceived a diet with increased country food consumption to be protective against negative health outcomes, both physically and mentally.

We asked participants, “How do you think gender roles have changed in your community in recent years?” As the interviews were semi-structured and conversational, the discussions varied and covered both household and community gender roles. In their responses to this question, participants fell into one of two categories: those who have perceived and experienced tangible change, and those who have not.

Historically, women’s roles in country food acquisition, preparation, sharing, and consumption were fluid. Some participants reported that before colonization, gender roles tended to be more egalitarian, with women and men sharing tasks based on their survival needs in the harsh environmental conditions, “to the point where, well they shared the responsibility. The

husband and the wife. My parents, they shared responsibility”. (Elder woman). Despite this, however, some participants also described distinct gender roles: “The father [...] was the hunter. But the mother was a sewer. She had to sew the clothing.” (Elder woman). Another participant told us: “From outside village [when out on the land], the women mostly cook. They do like dishes or something. Men go hunting.” (Young man). Yet another participant said, “The gender roles were as it was. The men were out hunting. It was mostly to feed the children to make sure that children were fed. If it had to come to it, the woman went hunting.” (Elder woman). She spoke about how women were capable of hunting, but may hunt only out of necessity, as men usually hunted and women took care of their families. One participant referred to ‘rules’ related to gender roles that existed in the past: “There used to be rules like [...] women do sewing and cleaning. And now we mix it.” (Middle aged man). One participant, speaking about how her family used to divide tasks based on gender related to hunting, noted explicitly that girls did not hunt: “In my family, the girls did not go hunting” (Elder woman).

In general, “household” tasks were performed by women, whereas hunting and fishing were seen as a man’s domain. However, such roles were also seasonal since country food harvesting was entirely dependent on seasonal animal migrations and access. Participants described extended seasonal hunting trips undertaken by men, during which women cared for children and fulfilled other household duties: “Sometimes, most times, the husband, the man of the house will be out hunting for caribou. Because caribou was never around this area that time ago. He would be gone for a month or more and leave the mother behind to fend for the children in herself.” (Elder woman). This was confirmed by another participant, who told us, “And then

[the men] just go out hunting, especially in the springtime. So it's the woman mostly who take over [in the household]" (Older woman).

Such roles were not always framed as egalitarian, and some Elders shared their perceptions on power hierarchies that existed within households. One participant described how, in the past, the social value of women was considered "smaller" and "lower" than men: "Because long ago, the man used to make the woman smaller than what they do. Lower...woman lower. Men high..." (Middle aged man).

Participants described the drastic changes that Inuit have undergone since colonization and settlement, with a particular emphasis on the influence of 'southern' economic processes and cultural norms: "Yes, I noticed the changes today. We shop for food in a store now. And we live in a village now." (Elder woman). Such changes have driven sedentarization and an overall reduction in land-based activities. As described by one participant, "Some people are like different people. [...] Some people don't even go camping. Some people just stay in this community." (Young woman). The majority of participants believed that such societal changes have catalyzed shifts in gender roles: "Some gender roles have changed. Like a man will go to a store instead of going hunting, some changes like that." (Elder woman). This participant spoke about how men were taking on tasks such as grocery shopping or cooking. In this perspective, the 'domestic' tasks were shared between men and women as a result of societal changes. Several participants described that roles have become less rigid and women have gained agency to participate in food harvesting: "The gender roles. In the past they, only the men used to go hunting, fishing. And they were not allowed to do dishes or whatever. And now today, it's

different. Now, the women can go fishing all by themselves when they and the men can also do dishes and laundry. In the past they never did that.” (Middle aged woman). This comment was echoed by another participant, who insisted that women are increasingly participating in hunting and fishing activities: “More women, they go hunting [and] fishing. Nowadays. Things change.” (Middle aged man). Many women participants expressed their love for harvesting country foods and spending time “out on the land”. One participant told us, “No woman wants to be left behind when they're going fishing. Like we are really happening now. [Women are] out there”. (middle aged woman).

However, some women expressed that expanding roles create additional household burdens for women: “Yeah, I have seen it change. Women are taking more roles, in the household. Men are not working as much anymore, like supporting the family.” (Older woman). This may be exacerbated by women increasingly getting jobs, working in the market economy, and earning money for their families.

When participants were asked *why* gendered roles existed within food systems, most participants described long-standing traditional cultural norms around gender roles. Often, such sentiments were framed as, “that’s just how it was”, or “that’s just how it is”. For example, following a discussion about how women were often responsible for “drying out” harvested products (e.g., dehydrating meat to produce *nikkuk* and fish to produce *pitsik*), I asked, “Do you think there’s a reason why women tend to dry things out?” The participant responded, “That’s just how it was, I guess. I guess that’s how they do it” (Middle aged woman). Responses like this one were common. I would often follow up on participants’ comments to learn more about the

reasons behind certain decisions or changes, and participants would say that is “how it has always been done”.

Some other participants perceived that there were *no* changes in gender roles over the previous decades. For example, when I asked one participant, “Do you think that men and women have changed what they do with hunting, fishing and cooking?” they responded, “Nothing I know, just the same”. Among participants who perceived no change in gender roles, some described distinct roles of men and women that had persisted, while others viewed gender roles as “flexible” and insisted they had always been ‘that way’, meaning gender roles were based on the task at hand, and that men and women would simply do what was needed, regardless of their gender. Such responses portray differing opinions among participants around the way that broader societal changes have impacted gender roles within food systems specifically.

Household structure

Household structure was a distinct theme influencing food consumption patterns throughout the interviews. Participants noted the diversity of familial structures when discussing food preparation. Notably, families did not need to be immediate biological relatives to be considered ‘family.’ Adoption is common, and gender roles and food access and consumption tended to reflect the household structure. As described by one participant: “some [community members] don’t have fathers or mothers. Some don’t even have parents” (Middle aged man) and were raised by extended family members or adopted parents, with impacts on country food access. This same participant told us, “[I ate] macaroni and cheese [laughs] growing up. I did not have a father, so we depended on our big brothers or other men to donate food. That's it, it

wasn't bad. I grew up with half and half of store-bought foods, junk food. And some country food." (Middle aged man) Participants commonly described food sharing within communities and extended families to provide country and retail foods to those who were in need.

The presence of a hunter in the household was a strong determinant of access to country foods. Generally, in this context, 'hunter' referred to a man who had access to equipment (e.g., skidoo, motorboat, guns, etc.), regularly hunted and/or fished, and provided harvested foods to other household members. As described by one participant, "If they have a skidoo or canoe, they can go hunt. But if they don't have any, they got no [country foods]. But people share." (Middle aged woman). This statement indicates that those who lack access to a hunter obtain country food through other means. Sharing country foods is a theme that we will revisit in greater detail later.

Some participants noted that women's involvement in food harvesting differed depending on the physical ability and personal preference of the individuals. When speaking about women's involvement in the more physically arduous tasks of hunting, one participant said: "[It's] limited, right? [My wife] can't do everything, but she can manage. Only certain women can do that." (Middle aged man). This comment speaks to the common perception that while many women "help out" with various harvesting tasks, only some women are physically strong enough to fully participate in hunting and butchering.

Gender roles in harvesting country foods

Although harvesting country foods was generally perceived to be a ‘man’s job’, it was clear that women also harvest in many contexts. The reasons for this appeared to vary. For some participants, hunting and fishing was a source of pride and served a fundamental characteristic of their identity. For example, one participant introduced herself as a “hunter fisherwoman”, which implied her identity was strongly linked to being a hunter. In her interview, she noted the gendered dynamics and expectations of women in hunting: “My mother taught me how to be a hunter. Because she saw the potential in me. She raised me like a man. I have brothers. But she said my little brother is the office man. She saw that.” (Middle aged woman). Although this participant identified as a harvester, her perception that her mother “raised [her] like a man” indicates that she felt she adopted a ‘man’s role’ rather than transforming harvesting into a ‘woman’s role’ as an act of subversion. While it was clear that women are increasingly participating in harvesting activities, this trend is not always a welcome one and women may face discrimination and ostracization when hunting. One participant told us that, when she was a young woman, hunters told her hunting was “not for women or girls”, and that “the [sea]shore was not a space for women” (Middle-aged woman). She indicated that there was a lack of mentorship associated with women’s agency to go hunting. She spoke about how social media is increasingly used as a tool to share knowledge in a way that is accessible to youth, specifically young women, and encourage engagement with harvesting on the land.

Other participants viewed women’s participation in hunting and fishing as a matter of preference. As described by one participant, “Sometimes women go. But they prefer to stay home and take care of the children and the house” (Older woman). Some participants also spoke

about regional differences. For example, there was a common perception that in villages that were “further North”, women were more likely to participate in country food harvesting. One participant specifically mentioned a nearby village where women like to hunt: “I know Aupaluk women will go beluga, whale hunting, caribou hunting...” (Middle aged man). When asked why he thought more women were hunting in Aupaluk, he responded: “I don’t know...because they like meat so much. They like hunting.” (Middle aged man).

Many responses highlighted the barriers that prevented women from participating in harvesting activities. Barriers included financial challenges, employment, staying home to take care of children and the household, and lack of access to mentorship. As exemplified by one participant, “Some women, they don’t have someone to help them [harvest country foods]. They don’t have a skidoo or canoe. So, it’s hard for them”. (Middle aged woman). Following this comment, I asked if access to such equipment would lead to greater participation in harvesting, and she said, “Yes, very much.” (Middle aged woman). There was a common perception that hunting was becoming prohibitively expensive, and that gas and equipment were sometimes unaffordable. Such financial constraints act as barriers to hunting, particularly for women. When asked if they would be more likely to go hunting if there were fewer financial constraints, all participants responded that they would.

The varied roles and responsibilities of women can be burdensome and constrain time available for food harvesting and preparation. For example, one participant spoke about the expectation (and in some cases, necessity) for women to seek paid employment: “It’s mostly the woman who goes out to get a job. Supports the family, in some families. But its more common

now for a woman to go work than they did before.” (Older woman). Employment was often considered a barrier to country food hunting and preparation. One participant described how she no longer has the time to prepare and eat foods while out on the land: “Like we’re always busy now working, we need money. We just go there to go catch it and then bring it back home to prepare it. But we used to do it in the land. So we don’t do it anymore.” (Middle aged woman). In addition to pursuing employment, women also bear large familial and household burdens. Women are often tasked with child-rearing, caring for relatives and family members, retail food shopping, cooking, and cleaning.

Finally, pregnancy can also create a gendered barrier to harvesting country foods. I spoke with a young mother, who told me that her pregnancy prevented her from hunting the previous season. Another Elder research participant told me that it is common for pregnant and young mothers to stay home to care for children.

Gender roles and food preparation

Country foods are prepared in a variety of ways prior to consumption. While some are eaten raw, fresh, and frozen, country foods are also often boiled, roasted, or turned into a soup or stew. Sometimes meat and fish are air dried to make *nikkuk* (jerky typically made from beluga or caribou meat) or *pitsik* (dried fish). One participant spoke about how women tended to be more likely to prepare the dried meat. Meanwhile, beluga fat is often fermented to produce *misaraq* (a liquid sauce often used for dipping other country foods) and beluga or walrus meat and skin are occasionally fermented to produce *igunak*. While most country food preparation and cooking is done by women, fermenting is often considered a “man’s task.” For food preparations that require cutting or scraping, women use an *ulu*, a knife with a curved blade and a handle that is

ideal for multiple purposes. *Ulu* means “women’s knife” in Inuktitut and it is used explicitly by women. *Ulus* are different from the straight knife that is used by men to butcher animals.

Some participants noted physical strength as a barrier to certain preparations. For example, “...If a family is going to be eating frozen raw fish on the floor [...] the men will cut it up with an axe or whatever, because its frozen solid [...] Because the man is stronger. And will cut it up for the family” (Older woman). However, gender roles around food preparation also depends on the household structure. For example, one participant told us, “I do the cutting because I don’t have a man in the house [...] It depends on the family. Like, if they’re married, and the husband and wife. Yeah, the husband will help prepare. But if a woman is single, she will do it.” (Older woman). An Elder spoke about how food preparation was always the mother’s task, and how her mother did not teach her about fishing because she was busy taking care of the household.

Country food consumption and preferences

Overall, participants agreed that country food consumption has declined in recent years, while market foods have become increasingly popular. One participant described their personal experiences with this, “I ate a lot of country food when I was growing up. But now, I eat more Co-Op store or Northern [retail] store food.” (Young woman). Despite this, country food consumption remains popular, with people consuming different foods depending on access, preferences, and socio-cultural traditions and norms.

It is common for women and men to consume different country foods. Specifically, certain animal parts are consumed more frequently by women compared to men. Participants

mentioned that women tend to prefer caribou bone marrow, *tunnuq* (caribou fat), *kitsautiq* (caribou stomach lining), fish heads, and seal livers. Seal blood was also primarily consumed by women as a source of iron and to keep warm and “gain strength”, especially prior to going out on the land, hunting, or fishing. Several interviewees mentioned that fish eyes and seal eyes were reserved for women only. One participant told us, “And then men should not eat eyes. Fish eyes or seal eyes.” (Middle aged woman). This comment was corroborated two others, who said, “I don't let my son or men in my family eat eyes still.” (Older woman), and “Little girls were given seal eyes. Because the men couldn't eat them.” (Older woman). They spoke about how because men were hunters, some people did not want them to eat seal eyes, because if consumed, the seal might be able to watch them hunt. When I asked other participants about seal eyes, some participants were aware of this practice in Kangirsuk, while others told us it was more common further north.

Another consistent example of gendered country food consumption is related to beluga whale tails. Following the successful harvest of a beluga whale, the tail of the whale is separated from the rest of the carcass and provided to women (typically, the female partner of the successful male hunter and extended family and friends) and consumed fresh, raw, and all at once in a social setting. Consumable parts of the beluga tail include the *mattaaq* (skin and thin fatty layer), meat, and cartilage. This practice is often called the “women’s feast”.

When asked why this cultural practice exists, participants provided several conflicting responses. One participant mentioned that women eat the beluga tail due to its tenderness and taste, saying, “It's more of because it's the tail is easier to be cut by a woman it's more

delicious... The blubber is light.” (Elder woman). However, a male participant disagreed, saying “I don't really eat that tail because it's really hard.” (Young man). Others did not know the reason for such practices but mentioned that it was due to “tradition” and “it’s the way it’s always been”.

Expanding from the beluga tail, one participant said that women are provided certain types of food based on taste. She spoke about how women were given the best-tasting part while men were given parts that were harder to chew: “[Division of foods between genders] was not so much for a health benefit. It was more for how delicious it was, how better tasting it was, and how a woman should have [the] better tasting [foods]. Like for example, the filet mignon of the caribou – I finally found the name for it [laughs] – on the back is a softest, [most] delicious part. And it was more reserved for a woman as well. I think it was more [...] dependent on the fact that a man was stronger to chew the [other] meat, which was harder.” (Elder woman) Similarly, participants suggested that women simply prefer the taste of certain country foods, including seal blood and caribou bone marrow.

In addition to the “women’s feast”, some cultural traditions existed that dictated which foods are consumed by which individuals. For example, a hunter’s godmother (*arnaliaq* for girls, *arnaqutik* for boys), who is responsible for cutting their umbilical cord as an infant, is entitled to the hunter’s the first catch of any animal species. Some noted the existence of cultural ‘rules’ around eating country foods: “They used to have a lot of rules on like, women eat this part, men ate this part, children ate this part...” (Middle aged woman).

While participants believed that the taste for country food was declining in younger generations, it was clear that Nunavimmiut continue to crave country foods. People seemed to prefer the foods they were accustomed to eating as children and adolescents. Meanwhile, there are clear gender preferences and traditions that dictate food consumption habits that have persisted over time despite reduced access to country foods in recent years. Participants spoke about how practices of accessing country foods were healthy and beneficial for them, and how they wanted their children to eat country foods.

Country food sharing

Participants spoke extensively about country food sharing. Historically, country food sharing between families was very important to maintain kinship ties and prevent famine. Food sharing networks can be considered a core aspect of community resilience, as they strengthen relationships and act as a protective factor against country food shortages. Some participants mentioned that sharing foods has declined in recent years. While the reasons for this were varied, sharing may be constrained by reduced access to country foods. For example, one participant mentioned that declining population abundance and harvest restrictions placed on beluga whales (i.e., the harvest quota system that exists in Nunavik) limits the overall beluga whale harvest in Nunavik and restricts harvesters' willingness to share. Despite this, country food sharing does still occur frequently. All participants had received food as a result of networks and/or provided food to those who may not have had the opportunity to go hunting. Participants spoke about how country food sharing has changed in recent years. Specifically, it is increasingly common to sell country food rather than giving it away for free. "Not long ago, we used to give them [community members without access to country foods] fish or caribou meat to others for free, but they never do that anymore, they only sell it for money now." (Middle aged man). Another

participant spoke about how sharing has been reduced to an activity that occurs only within the hunter's family.

Sharing occurs through a variety of mechanisms. Kangirsuk has a community freezer, run by the Hunter Support program, that will purchase country foods from and distribute it for free to Elders and other community members. Others rely on neighbours and local family members to provide country food, especially if one lives in a household with no hunter. Inter-community food sharing occurs as well, with participants shipping country foods via mail, or traveling to other communities with country foods to share. One participant spoke about the process of sharing with Elders in Kangirsuk when she received food from her family in Quaqtq "Every time I get something walrus or beluga fermented from Quaqtq I cut them up, portion them and give them to the Elders." (Middle aged woman). Many participants, especially Elders, relied exclusively on sharing networks for their country foods.

Knowledge Transmission

Knowledge of country food harvesting, preparation, sharing, and consumption was shared in a wide range of ways. Several participants noted how knowledge transmission was being undertaken in new ways, through social media, radio, and formal school education programs. Each participant spoke about their ways of learning through their family networks and how learning was essential to continuing food security and food sovereignty.

As the interviews progressed, it became clear that gender roles were also interwoven with processes of knowledge transmission related to food. As we discussed hunting, fishing, and food preparation practices, participants frequently spoke about how they learned these practices.

Many participants noted that their learning process came from watching their parents rather than learning in a more structured way: “I learned how to cook by watching my mother cooking and her two older sisters. And they were not exactly teaching me, or telling me what to do, but I was learning from looking at them.” (Elder woman- through interpreter).

Participants noted that they often learned how to hunt and fish from men: “When the father, when they [are] about five, when they’re able to understand the language...when a kid is able to talk, men can start to teach how to hunt.” (Middle aged man). By contrast, women rarely taught hunting or fishing skills to children. During one interview, a participant told us that her “mother did not teach her to spear a fish because she was not fishing as much because she had to take care of the household.” (Elder woman). On occasion, if a man was not available, women did teach hunting and fishing skills. One participant, when asked how she learned how to hunt, responded, “My mother, mostly my mother and my grandparents. I learned by watching them do it. And then I married a hunter, so I had to learn fast.” (Older woman). It was common for women, often mothers and grandmothers, to teach female children how to prepare and cook country foods.

Some participants lamented that Inuit knowledge of harvesting and preparing country foods had been lost over the past decades. Some spoke about changing patterns of consumption, about how they ate less country food than they used to, and others spoke about how they saw that knowledge had been lost over recent generations. They would speak about younger generations’ taste differences, “...The younger generation, they don’t take fermented beluga meat. I mean

mattaaq. They don't like it." (Middle aged woman). Many spoke about wanting to pass knowledge on to the next generation, which stood out as a prominent theme.

Participants noted that limited knowledge sharing was a barrier to hunting and fishing and, thus, consumption of country foods. As described by one participant, "Some men don't even go hunting anymore. They don't know how to anymore" (Middle aged woman). This quote indicates that a lack of knowledge is a substantial barrier to hunting and underscores that there may be fewer opportunities to learn to hunt in Kangirsuk compared to in the past. Limited opportunities for knowledge transmission was also a concern for hunter safety. One participant elaborated on the gendered dimension of knowledge transfer and then continued to speak about dangers while learning how to hunt. She spoke about how she would go on the FM radio to encourage women to hunt. In the same discussion, she spoke about when encouraging women to hunt it was important to consider the dangers of hunting, speaking about ice melting and knowing how to keep safe. Considerations of safety while hunting reiterate the necessity of knowledge transfer, especially in a changing environment.

Climate change and environmental concerns

Participants showed a strong connection to their local natural environment. When talking about gendered impacts of food consumption, I asked one participant how her identity as a woman might impact her decisions around consumption, and she stated that being a woman did not impact her relationship with food, but rather, it was the natural environment that had the most impact on her decisions.

Throughout the interviews, concerns about climate change were a common priority for Kangirsimmiut. The topic of climate, as related to country food, came up in many of the interviews. Climate change poses several challenges to the country food system. Participants spoke of shifting population dynamics and migration patterns of animals due to climate change. For example, participants blamed climate change for caribou population declines. Climate change also poses new challenges for land- and sea-based travel due to the unpredictability of weather patterns, ice thickness, and timing of freeze-up and break-up of river and sea ice. Finally, some participants spoke about the impacts of climate change on food safety. Specifically, due to warm summer temperatures, participants expressed concern about fermenting country foods (i.e., to make *misaraq* and *igunaq*) since this process requires consistent cool temperatures to prevent spoilage and to reduce the risk of botulism. One Elder said about such concerns:

“With the weather changing, getting warmer, if I’m going to make oil [*misaraq*], like turn the blubber into oil, I have to be very careful nowadays, very, very careful about it. I have to make sure I’m constantly watching it to make sure it's not going to go bad or dangerous for other people. Due to global warming. And it's a lot different nowadays than before. And the reason I’m here today is because my grandparents, people before me, were preserving the food, learned many ways how to preserve the food” (Elder woman).

Participants also expressed fears related to pollution and the impacts on their food sources. Environmental contaminants (either from long-range transport or local industrial activity, such as mines) were a common concern. When asked about their understanding of

contaminants, participants were aware that they existed, but were not sure of the names of the contaminants. One participant spoke about this topic with specific reference to beluga:

“We have to be cautious of everything we consume nowadays, right? Because of the environment, the climate change, and all these things. These facts, these factors to the meat of the beluga, that could be affecting it, or we have to be careful all the time now. Our food from what I started consuming as a child, or food our country food now has a bit of a different taste as well.” (Older woman).

Conclusion

These interviews provided insightful information to better understanding experiences of gender related to food systems in Kangirsuk. It was clear that gender is integrated into the mixed food system in Kangirsuk in many ways. Historically, women’s roles in country food acquisition, preparation, sharing, and consumption were fluid. While participants provided mixed – and sometimes conflicting – views on how gender roles have changed, it is clear that women are more likely to participate in certain food harvesting and preparation activities (e.g., drying country foods to produce nikkuk and pitsik and cooking country foods). Women are also increasingly participating in hunting and fishing – activities that were previously considered a man’s domain. Gender roles also extended to food preferences and allocation. Specifically, women tended to prefer caribou bone marrow, *tunnuq* (caribou fat), *kitsautiq* (caribou stomach lining), fish heads, seal eyes, fish eyes, and seal livers. Certain preferences were strongly grounded in historical traditions, such as the “women’s feast”, during which women gathered to consume the beluga whale tail from a freshly-harvested beluga.

Meanwhile, country food access was strongly affected by a variety of factors, including income, the existence of a hunter in the household, and possession of harvesting supplies (e.g., ATV, snowmobile, vehicle, guns and ammunition, etc.). Country food sharing and trading is also a strong determinant of access. While sharing networks have served as a means of maintaining kinship ties, preventing famine, and equity, country food sharing has declined in recent years due to shifting values, harvest restrictions, and an increasing tendency for harvesters to sell, instead of sharing or trading, their harvests. Finally, participants stressed the importance of transmitting knowledge about country food harvesting, preparation, sharing, and consumption. Recent lifestyle changes (including colonial processes and the adoption of social media) have disrupted and shifted the way that knowledge is shared. Knowledge transmission is a gendered process and people tend to become teachers to younger generations according to the role they play in food systems. Finally, climate change is impacting access through country foods by affecting the abundance and accessibility of country foods. Overall, these results point to the way that gender roles are enacted in the food system in Kangirsuk.

CHAPTER 7: Discussion

Summary

This research aimed to better understand Nunavimmiut perceptions and experiences of gender in the Inuit dual food system. Despite its modest contributions to overall caloric intake, country food remains very important in Nunavik and is a focal point of food systems across Inuit Nunangat. Country food is very important to Inuit for a range of reasons, including its mental and physical health benefits, its role in maintaining and strengthening Inuit culture, and its importance for food security of both individuals and families (Chan et al., 2006; Kuhnlien et al., 2004; Little et al., 2021; Duhaime et al., 2004; Puffall et al., 2011). The significance of country food was reflected in our interviews as well as many sources in the literature review. In interviews, participants spoke about the numerous benefits of country food for themselves and their communities. Specifically, interviewees spoke of how country food gave them strength for hunting and daily life, kept them warm in the cold winters, and kept them satiated. They spoke about how participating in hunting and being out on the land gave them the opportunity to continue to practice important traditions and pass on knowledge, which fortified their mental health and wellness. These sentiments have been reflected in a large range of literature relating to country food consumption in Inuit Nunangat. For example, Caughey and colleagues note, “Feelings associated with eating country food and sharing country food were described using words such as “beautiful,” “rich,” “happy,” “stabilizing,” “connection,” and “comfort.” (Caughey et al., 2023). Guided by research questions aiming to understand how perceptions of gender and food might impact and intersect with food security, and how gender roles in food systems might have changed, the interviews and literature reviewed provided rich grounds for analysis. Results from interviews underscored how colonial history and modernization have

impacted gender roles within food systems; how climate change and climatic events may influence decisions around food consumption; and how Indigenous knowledge and knowledge transmission is key when discussing resilience and strengths in the food system.

Colonialism, modernization, and changes to gendered roles in food systems

Interviews underscored how gender roles influence decisions related country food harvest, preparation, and consumption. Speaking to Elders provided insight into their experiences of gender and gender roles growing up. Many older interviewees grew up “on the land” with little influence from *qallunaat* culture until they were older. In general, traditional gender roles described by participants aligned with those reported in the literature (Bunce et al., 2016; Pufall et al. 2010). Specifically, men were responsible for hunting and women were responsible for child-rearing duties, country food preparation, and household chores. This theme was reflected in the literature as well, and many articles note that women, despite having agency and capability to go out on the land, were (and continue to be) constrained by underlying gendered expectations in the household, responsibilities to childrearing, food preparation, and taking care of the household (Ford & Beaumier, 2010; Healey & Meadows, 2007). However, these roles were not always rigid; instead, they were fluid depending on household needs. Men and women often took over each other’s roles when needed, and could do so relatively seamlessly. This flexibility points to a certain form of egalitarianism – while distinct gender roles were common, they were not strictly enforced and tended to be interdependent and complementary. Some authors attribute this to the harsh climate experienced by Inuit, which necessitated role-shifting and reciprocity (Billison & Mancini, 2007; Ready, 2018). Todd highlights the interdependence of gender roles in Iñupiat (an Indigenous population in Alaska), by emphasizing that, “[w]hereas Western conceptualizations

of gender turn on a binary opposition of male to female, Inūpiat whale hunting emphasizes the interdependence of men and women, each of whom possess certain knowledge and skills that, while complementary, are inseparable from the whole.” (Todd, 2020, p.199).

The focus on perceived changes in gender roles in each interview provided grounds for fruitful discussions regarding gender across spatial-temporal contexts. Our initial question regarding how gender roles had changed created an ongoing discussion point to touch on for the duration of the interview. As noted, there were generally two opposing perceptions among interviewees: some participants perceived a change in gendered aspects in their community, and some did not. The participants who did notice a difference had reflections that were similar to those found in the literature. Specifically, participants felt that gender roles had changed in the past few decades because of shifting lifestyles as a result of colonization, while also maintaining gendered division of tasks related to food (Billison & Mancini, 2007; Ready, 2018). Graburn, as written in Ready’s work, attributes shifts in gender roles to increased sedentism and interactions with Euro-Canadians among Nunavimmiut (Ready, 2018). Participants spoke about this increased sedentism as a consequence of colonialism in their community, noting that younger generations tended not to spend as much time on the land as before.

Those participants who felt gender roles had changed often perceived changes as unfolding relatively quickly. Such perceptions align with the general pace of change across Inuit Nunangat in the past decades due to colonization. Since the 1950s, Nunavimmiut have shifted from nomadic to sedentized, settled into communities, become incorporated into the wage economy, and experienced the influx of Western food, media, and culture (Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2015; Rautio et al., 2021; Ready, 2018). Our results underscore how gender and gender roles are implicated in changes such as the nutrition transition, increased reliance on market

foods, and changes in dietary patterns. Those participants who spoke about changes in dietary habits often related it to hunting and fishing, how increased reliance on market foods is relatively new, and many participants could remember not eating much (if any) market food while growing up.

Several interviewees attested that shifting gender roles have led to women's empowerment in food systems. Such empowerment manifests in multiple ways. Women are often the primary earners within households and thus possess decision-making responsibilities around retail food purchasing and investing in equipment for fishing and hunting (Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2014; Bunce et al., 2016; Quintal-Marineau, 2019; Ready 2018). Many interviewees also suggested that women are increasingly participating in harvesting activities, and especially hunting, which was traditionally a man's role. Specifically, participants spoke about how, at present, women have more agency to go hunting alone, with men, or with each other. As an example, one participant introduced herself as a *hunter-woman* and described her important contributions to country food harvesting for her family and community. The title of *hunter-woman* highlighted that hunting was part of this participant's identity, that she showed pride in this identity, and that she wanted to distinguish that she was not just a hunter but a hunter-woman. In her interview, she spoke about her experiences as a woman learning to hunt, learning such skills by watching others complete certain tasks, and how she paved the way for other women hunters in Kangirsuk. This discussion indicates aspects of how mentorship affect women's ability to spend time learning how to hunt and harvest. The experiences of this participant highlight the resilience and shifting agency of women to pursue roles that may not align with traditional gender constructs. Such findings align with those previously reported by

Little et al. (2023), who indicated that women frequently participate in beluga harvesting in Nunavik despite traditional norms of this being a man's role.

While gender roles may have changed in favour of increased agency for women hunters, it is still more common for men to fulfill the role of hunter. There are a variety of factors as to why most hunters are men. Some participants spoke about how it was physical strength that allowed men to be the primary hunters of the family. Others brought up household structure, explaining that women fulfill specific roles in terms of paid employment, child-rearing, and taking care of the family, which frees up men's time for harvesting. This gendered division of labour is commonly discussed in the literature, notably by Quintal-Marineau, who argues that "...by sharing their wages, women support male relatives' hunting activities which provide access to country food for a large number of individuals. In other words, Inuit women's economic role is instrumental in local food production." (Quintal-Marineau, 2017, p.586).

Gendered economic and financial factors had an impact on food security and participants' experiences acquiring food. Notably, harvesting country foods is an expensive activity. Harvesting equipment (e.g., vehicles, guns, ammunition, nets, fishing equipment, gasoline, etc.) and opportunity costs (i.e., time spent not earning money) all present barriers to hunting, fishing, and gathering (Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2014; Hillemann, Beheim & Ready, 2023; Little et al., 2021). Economic barriers are present regardless of gender; however, when asked if they thought women would be more likely to go hunting if they had access to skidoos and other expensive hunting equipment, participants said they would. Our interviews confirmed findings reported by Beaumier and Ford, who reported that economic changes in Inuit Nunangat have led to women increasingly taking jobs in the market economy, which sometimes allows men in their household to engage in hunting full time (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Bunce et al., 2016; Dowsley et al.,

2010). As noted in the literature and by some participants, this financial freedom may hinder other facets of Inuit women's lives. In our research, women felt that employment came with opportunity costs and limited their time for harvesting country foods. Paid employment may therefore result in a reliance on other (often male) harvesters or sharing networks for country food. This dynamic offers insight into the ongoing tension faced by Inuit women – financial stability may come at the cost of the ability to harvest country foods. This tension highlights challenges associated with some of the main tenets of the ICC-A food security frameworks, including the necessity of access to hunting equipment and free time to take part in these activities (ICC-A, 2015).

Gendered food consumption, preferences, and sharing

Country Food Consumption Patterns

Certain cultural practices and traditional food preferences may lead to different consumption patterns between genders, which may have further implications on the health and wellbeing of both men and women. For example, women tend to have higher blood levels of marine food nutrients (e.g., n-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids and selenoneine) and environmental contaminants found in country foods (e.g., MeHg), and mechanisms for these differences are currently poorly understood (Lemire et al., 2014; Little et al., 2023). Lemire and colleagues note the importance of “considering the interconnections between local ecosystems and dietary habits to develop recommendations promoting country foods benefits while minimizing the risk of MeHg from beluga meat, especially for childbearing-age women” (Lemire et al., 2014, p.248).

Therefore, qualitative information on country food access, preferences, and consumption is important for public health efforts to improve health and reduce the health risks of women.

Based on information from the literature review and speaking to community members during each visit, I came to understand the significance of beluga to the community of Kangirsuk and all Nunavimmiut. Following a successful harvest, hunters provide the tail of the beluga to women (often the female partner, mother, or *arnaqutik* (godmother)). Women gather to eat the tail in a traditional and culturally important event that is often called the ‘women’s feast’. This practice has been previously recorded in Nunavut and Nunavik, and may explain differences in certain nutritional biomarkers (e.g., selenoneine and n-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids) between men and women (Caughey et al., 2023; Little et al., 2023). We wanted to better understand the factors influencing decisions related to consuming beluga and how gender might be an influencing factor.

When questioned about the reasons for this practice, some participants said it was due to personal preference (related to taste and texture), some said it was because others did not want to eat it, and many said it was because it was common practice or tradition. One participant said that the flippers and the tail were too chewy and that women were given these foods because no one else wanted to eat them, which would perhaps indicate that the ‘less desirable’ foods are provided to women, perhaps reflecting power differentials between men and women. However, there is little evidence that Inuit women are provided ‘less desirable’ foods elsewhere in the literature or in broader discussions during our research. To the contrary, participants frequently mentioned that women were provided the more favourable country foods. Indeed, several participants spoke about how this practice highlights the strength, agency, and value of women in Inuit culture. For instance, one participant noted that women ate the tail because it was the most

delicious part of the beluga. These women believed they were provided the tail as an honour because it was the most flavourful part of the beluga. The conceptualization of eating the beluga tail as a sign of respect was reflected when another participant relayed the common practice of giving the tail to the woman who cut the umbilical cord of the hunter (known as the *arnaqutik*) as a sign of respect. Indeed, the *arnaqutik* is often honoured through country food gifts, including the first of each animal species harvested by a male hunter.

Regardless of the reason, it was clear that women consistently consumed the tail of the beluga whale, and this practice was well-known and widespread. Muckle and colleagues write about how consumption of beluga, in particular, is related to women's cultural values, "Beluga consumption is [...] more likely to be determined by a woman's cultural values, participation in social activities, and belonging to a beluga hunter's family, which may explain why married, older women tend to eat more beluga meat during pregnancy" (Muckle et al., 2001, p.961). Although no one spoke specifically about increased consumption of beluga while pregnant, some participants described how women, children, and Elders are often prioritized when distributing beluga meat and *mattaq*.

The health benefits of specific country foods were recognized and occasionally linked to gendered country food consumption patterns. For example, some participants noted that women primarily consumed seal blood because it gave them strength. Borré's work reflects this sentiment, with Inuit of Clyde River, Nunavut stating that seal blood is the "rejuvenator of human blood" (Borré, 1991). Sheila Watt-Cloutier also reiterates this sentiment, "We the Inuit of the Arctic have a profound understanding that this blood offered to use by wildlife will keep our own blood warm and fuel us from the inside as we, along with our wildlife, spend hours in the deep cold – a deep cold that in all life, including the flora, fauna, and Inuit, depend on in order to

remain healthy and vibrant” (Watt-Cloutier, 2016, p.247). This sentiment was reflected by participants in our study who noted that the dark blood was rich in essential nutrients and helped them stay warm.

Seal blood, meat, intestines, eyeballs, and other by-products are known to be rich in many nutrients, including iron (Government of Northwest Territories, 2017). The prevalence of anemia in Nunavimmiut women, according to Plante and colleagues in 2010, was comparable to women in non-industrialized countries, and should be treated as a major public health concern (Plante et al., 2010). The 2017 *Qanuilirpitaa?* Health Survey indicated similar concerns, with women of childbearing age having the highest prevalence of iron deficiency among those who participated in the survey. In studies related to iron deficiency in Nunavik, it was noted that consumption of and access to country food acted as one of the main protective factors to counter iron deficiency (Lavoie et al., 2023). Corroborating these findings with the discussions throughout the interviews underscores the importance of promoting country foods high in iron to prevent iron deficiency and anemia, particularly among women

Indigenous feminism and power hierarchies in food systems: Contributions to theory and practice

Understanding that food systems are inherently situated in power hierarchies is necessary when analyzing food systems through the lens of Indigenous feminism. As there are relatively limited resources related to the topic of Inuit women and feminist theory, especially regarding food security and food sovereignty, the theory that I lean on in my analysis draws from diverse perspectives. The lack of focus on women and gender within the context of Inuit food systems has been noted by various sources, where authors have stated that research has largely been done by men in these settings and thus, intentionally or not, omitted diverse gendered perspectives

(Billson & Mancini, 2007; Quintal-Marineau, 2017). Parlee and Wray note, “[m]ost literature on peoples of the Arctic was written by males whose writings have yet to be analyzed through non-patriarchal and non-colonial frames of perception (Parlee & Wray, 2020, p.172).

Using the pre-existing frameworks allows some insight into how gendered analyses have been undertaken in contexts of food security; however, discrepancies emerge due to the temporal-spatial contexts in which they are undertaken. An example is the UN Food and Agriculture Organization document, *Gender Equality and Food Security*. This document asserts that women are often less likely to have access to capital or employment. Literature in the contexts of gender in Inuit Nunangat contests this generalization. Indeed, recent research, including ours, indicates that Inuit women are more likely than their male counterparts to have jobs in the market economy (Bunce et al., 2016; Quintal-Marineau, 2019). For this reason, we must use Inuit-defined understandings of food security, supported by Indigenous feminist theory, to conduct and analyze research on Inuit food systems.

Inuit food security is strongly interconnected with food sovereignty. Indigenous food sovereignty emphasizes agency, self-determination within food systems, and the right to access, and harvest nutritious and locally sourced foods (Martens et al., 2016; QIA 2019). Gender equity has been embedded in food sovereignty conceptualizations since the movement was created (Portman, 2018). Despite the focus on agricultural perspectives in La Via Campesina, a food sovereignty approach should always consider the inherently gendered nature of all food systems (Grey & Patel, 2009). Colonial processes and policies have systematically reduced the sovereignty that Inuit have over food systems in ways that may intersect with gender roles and relations. For example, Grey and Patel (2009) outline how colonization, including forced relocations, led to the loss (and obsolescence) of Indigenous women’s knowledge on food

harvesting, preparation, and consumption. The authors note how this intentional de-skilling of women specifically was detrimental to the food sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. Inuit women often bear a disproportionate burden of labour under the colonial capitalist system by assuming roles as primary earners in addition to their household and childrearing responsibilities, which limits time available to spend on the land harvesting country foods and acquiring associated skills (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Bunce et al., 2016; Dowsley et al., 2010). Participants often expressed a desire for improved access to country foods and lamented their reliance on expensive and non-nutrient dense retail foods. Such desires may be partly grounded in the hope of improved agency over food systems, in addition to the cultural and health importance of country foods. Grey and Patel write “(Re)asserting Indigenous food sovereignty is thus a part of the long, unbroken historical transit of anti-colonialism in Settler states” (Grey & Patel, 2009, p.442). Caughey and colleagues also discuss the necessity of a food sovereignty framework related to Inuit women’s country food consumption, stating, “[t]he centering of research in Indigenous community concerns and worldview (Smith 2012) is of particular importance for environmental health, nutrition, and food sovereignty focused research with Inuit communities, where country food is central to cultural identity and holds a unique place within Inuit food systems.” (Caughey et al., 2024).

Throughout our research, we pursued a community-engaged approach to ensure that research priorities and methods reflected the needs and desires of local and regional community partners and residents. This research emerged following conversations with community and government leaders, including the Nunavik Nutrition and Health Committee, the Nunavik Board of Health and Social Services, the Anguvigaq, and local community members in Kangirsuk (including the local school principal, the Anguvigait board of directors, the town mayor, and the

town manager). In this way, we honoured best practices in community-engaged research and Indigenous feminist research methods as described in Gina Starblanket's work, *Complex Accountabilities: Deconstructing "the Community" and Engaging in Indigenous Feminist Research Methods*. Starblanket's work deconstructs the ideas of community-based research to highlight the necessity of speaking to community members rather than solely those in positions of power. She critiques how Western researchers often interpret community as a homogenized whole and stresses the need to incorporate a diverse range of perspectives into the research process. Further, I took Starblanket's work into account while conducting analysis and writing by taking steps to ensure that each participant individually had their voices heard and avoiding the homogenization of their experiences.

Our research attests that Inuit women are strong, capable, and have agency in their roles in food systems. Inuit women are therefore crucial to the struggle for food sovereignty and food security across Inuit Nunangat. Despite this, however, it is important to recognize that the myth of over-and-above strength may place a disproportionate burden on Inuit women to be the leaders of, and advocates for, this movement. This argument aligns with the arguments regarding the idea of the 'Strong Sami Woman' made by Rauna Kuokkanen in Joyce Green's *Making Space for Indigenous Feminisms*. A similar concept was introduced by Arvin, Tuck and Morrill, wherein the authors discuss that Indigenous women do not need to be "saved" from heteropatriarchy or heteropaternalism – "they have already, and have long been, working toward decolonization within and beyond their own communities' boundaries." (Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, 2013, p.15). This perspective also recognizes that decolonizing efforts (which includes Indigenous food sovereignty) is the responsible of everyone involved in upholding current capitalist patriarchal societal systems, not just women.

The ongoing challenge of climate change to country food access and household food security

Climate change is a pressing concern for Inuit. Impacts of climate change on Inuit livelihoods and health is a well-researched topic and was clearly an important concern for Kangirsimmiut. The Arctic is warming at a faster rate than the rest of the world, which has drastic implications for the Inuit food systems (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Bunce et al., 2016; Ford et al., 2014; Rosol et al., 2016; Schnitter & Berry, 2019; Canosa et al., 2020; Little et al., 2021 Power, 2008; Schnitter & Berry, 2019). This is an issue of climate justice since Inuit are bearing a disproportionate burden for the implications of climate change despite not being complicit in the primary drivers of greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change has serious implications for Inuit. For example, changing sea ice, unreliable weather patterns, and thawing permafrost creates difficult or dangerous hunting access. Schnitter and Berry highlight this concern, stating, “observed climatic impacts related to reduced duration and thickness of sea and lake ice, thawing permafrost, more unpredictable weather, freezing rain and wildfires, shorter winter seasons, and hotter summers can threaten food safety and security, for example, by challenging hunting and gathering activities and traditional food storage practices (Schnitter & Berry, 2019, p.4). Climate change has made some people wary about what animals are safe to consume due to disease or parasites that can be exacerbated by warm weather. Warming weather also creates challenges for traditional food preparation techniques (e.g., fermentation, smoking, and dehydrating foods), which leads to substantial food safety concerns (Ford et al., 2014; Martinez-Levasseur et al., 2020). Participants in our research explained they used outdoor sheds for fermenting, relying on the outdoor temperature to provide adequate, and safe temperatures to ferment. Martinez-Levasseur and colleagues’ work also explores country food consumption and potential health risks related to

botulism⁶ and trichinellosis⁷. They note that fermenting walrus meat to produce *igunak* must be done in the fall when the temperature is not too hot and not too cold (Martinez-Levasseur et al., 2020). This was reflected in Little and colleagues' work, which highlighted the dangers associated with botulism in their communities due to improper fermentation of country foods, including beluga (Little et al., 2023). Participants in our interviews spoke about experiences of those who ate meat that was not safely fermented, which resulted in community members being air-lifted to receive treatment for their conditions. As country food preparations often require very specific climatic conditions to ensure food safety, climate change uncertainty is a concern for Kangirsimmiut. Bunce and colleagues explain how culturally defined gender roles influence human-environment interactions, which then affects many factors, including time out on the land, access to and consumption of country of food, which are seen as protective factors to climate change stressors (Bunce et al., 2016). Beaumier and Ford explain how climate change impacts Inuit women differently in their case study in Igloolik, "Women's food insecurity in Igloolik is the outcome of multiple determinants operating at different spatial-temporal scales. Climate change and external socio-economic stresses are exacerbating difficulties in obtaining

⁶ Botulism, as defined by Government of Canada's *The Science of Health* blog "...is caused by eating food and drinks contaminated with botulinum toxin, a potent toxin produced by bacteria called *Clostridium botulinum*. Symptoms typically include blurred and double vision, drooping eyelids, and difficulty swallowing and speaking... Foodborne botulism may occur in environments that have no oxygen, such as canned foods. This type of botulism can also be found in other foods such as garlic stored in oil, carrot juice, salted fish and traditionally prepared seal, whale and walrus meat. (Government of Canada, 2023, n.p.)

⁷ Trichinellosis, as defined by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency as "...a disease that can affect both animals and humans. It is caused by small nematodes (roundworms) of the *Trichinella* species. Infective larvae are transferred (from host-to-host) by the consumption of raw or undercooked infected meat." (Government of Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2013, n.p.)

sufficient food" (Beaumier & Ford, 2010). Cases like this are a reminder for how gender should be a consideration in every facet of the food system.

The importance of food sharing

The importance of food sharing to Inuit food systems, food security, and food sovereignty is well-documented (Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2015; Chan et al., 2006; Ready & Power, 2018; Quintal-Marienu, 2019). Historically, country food sharing between families was very important to maintain kinship ties and prevent famine. It strengthened relationships and built resilience amongst Inuit. Presently, country food sharing occurs within and between communities, and is important for food and health equity. Typically, providers of food are younger, able-bodied, male harvesters. Food sharing often prioritizes those that otherwise may lack access to country foods, households headed by single women and Elders. Sharing occurs through a variety of mechanisms, including the community freezer, informal sharing through neighbours and local family members, inter-community food sharing, food trading, and country food purchasing (often over social media).

The historical and continued reliance on sharing networks is a theme strongly reflected in the literature. For example, Chan and colleagues note how participants in their focus groups in Nunavut spoke about how increasingly they were reliant on sharing networks outside of their nuclear or extended family to have adequate access to country food (Chan et al., 2006). Ready and Power speak about sharing networks with the added perspective of gender and how Inuit women are impacted by sharing. As aligned with our interviews, Ready and Power note that single female-headed households and Elders are preferred targets for giving (2018). Sharing networks have shown to improve food security, and strengthen food sovereignty, as they act as means for support beyond simply food, they strengthen community and cultural ties.

Reflecting on the numerous health benefits of country foods, and the health challenges associated with food insecurity, sharing networks may act as a protective factor to women's physical and mental health food (Beaumier, Ford & Tagalik, 2014; Chan et al., 2006; Naylor et al., 2022; Ready & Power, 2018). Further, across Inuit Nunangat, sharing networks are often used as a coping strategy for the impacts of climate change on country food access and consumption, supporting stability within the food system (Ford et al., 2014). 'Stability' is an important dimension of food security as per the ICC-A framework.

Interviews and literature suggest it is becoming less common to share foods across Inuit Nunangat. The reasons for this are multiple. Animal abundance (especially of caribou and beluga whales) and harvest restrictions may limit harvesters' willingness to share (Little et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic limited intra-household gatherings and resulting food sharing (Horlick & Chatwood, 2023). Harvesting is increasingly expensive due to gas and equipment costs, so harvesters may be more likely to keep their harvest for themselves or sell country foods to recuperate some of the costs. Social media, and especially Facebook, may facilitate both the sharing and selling of country foods.

While the practice of food sharing among Inuit communities has historically and continues to play a vital role in fostering kinship ties, preventing famine and promoting food security and sovereignty, contemporary challenges such as dwindling animal abundance, harvest restrictions, economic factors, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to a decline in the prevalence of sharing networks. It is clear that sharing networks continue to be important in Inuit food systems and provide a mechanism for those who may not have otherwise had access to country food to country food consumption.

CHAPTER 8: Limitations, Opportunities for Further Research, and Conclusion

Limitations

This study had several limitations. A primary challenge throughout the research process was my identity. As a woman, I am well positioned to explore gender and women's experiences. Still, I often reflected on my gender identity as I was conducting interviews. I was conscious that my identity as a woman may afford certain privileges and access when speaking to women in comparison to men. My identity as a woman might have may have introduced some preconceived ideas regarding my own expectations, opening the door for social desirability bias. I also come to this work as a white settler, and my position as an outsider in Kangirsuk may impact the willingness of participants to share their perspectives honestly and openly. In addition to my gender and ethnic/racial/cultural background, I also considered the role of age in my identity as a researcher. I am 27 years old, and during my stay in Kangirsuk, I realized that my age impacted how I interacted with participants and community members. As I am relatively young, I believe my age (and relative newness to research) may have helped create a more casual environment for interviewees. A less formal environment may aid in removing bias by reducing the likelihood that participants were intimidated by the research process. Creating a casual environment facilitated a conversational tone to the interviews. While this tone may have cultivated a sense of comfort, it is possible that it may have also introduced bias if interviewees did not take the interviews seriously.

One overarching consideration throughout interviews, transcription, and analysis was the relatively limited discussion of foraging, berry picking, and mussel picking in these interviews. These tasks are generally gendered tasks regularly undertaken by women (Bunce et al., 2016; Dowsley, 2010). Bunce and colleagues write about how berry picking does not always require

access to a vehicle or time away from work or childcare duties, and as a result, anyone can take part (Bunce et al., 2016). These discussions, paired with the conversations I had with women who said they might not have time or resources to take part in hunting, may point to berry picking as an avenue for access to traditional foods. However, throughout the interviews, the focus was primarily on fishing and hunting. A few participants briefly spoke about berry picking or mussel foraging, but these discussions were limited. This could be a limitation in understanding the diversity that exists in the Kangirsimiut food system. Some participants spoke about making tea as medicine with berries they had foraged, underscoring the potential health benefits of berries.

An additional consideration is the social perception of food insecurity. Food insecurity is often stigmatized and may be a point of shame. It may be a vulnerable topic of discussion for research participants, and as a result, interviewees may have not been forthcoming regarding experiences of food insecurity or gender roles in households. Although the consent script included a note describing the risks associated with the interview (which we considered ‘minimal risks’ in line with risks met in everyday life), it is worth noting that discomfort with the subject matter may have been a factor that participants negotiated while engaging in discussion. Among participants, there was, at times, little consensus regarding specific ways that gender roles have shifted within food systems over time. It is possible that mixed knowledge on this topic is related to the cultural disruptions caused by colonization and associated processes and policies. This was a topic that, although important, was beyond the scope of this thesis. As a limitation, the understanding of conceptualizations of changing gender roles is a recommended area of future research.

As noted in the literature review, when discussing gender and gendered components of health, we must also consider diverse gender identities. However, due to the relative lack of resources and research in this area, there remains a gap in understanding how those who identify beyond the gender binary experience and interpret Inuit food systems. As a result of this, my work was limited to the gender binary.

Opportunities for further research and recommendations

Based on themes that emerged from the thematic analysis, opportunities for potential future research became apparent. This research highlights a gap that needs to be explored in much greater depth; specifically, the gap in gendered dimensions of food systems research in Inuit Nunangat. This work highlights the importance of a gendered perspective when looking at food systems in Inuit Nunangat. Both literature and data from the interviews show that women hold specific and important knowledge, which must be taken into account in research settings.

The need for more research on Inuit women's health and well-being has been reiterated by a range of researchers (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Healey & Meadows, 2007; Ready, 2018). Existing research focuses on quantitative aspects of Inuit women's health, which must not be discounted. However, a qualitative or mixed methods approach further strengthens the quantitative results. Looking at social aspects of how gender influences health is critical in these contexts. Qualitative research that explores and analyzes the social factors of gender in Inuit Nunangat (related to food or a more diverse focus) must continue. These studies will strengthen existing data about women breastfeeding, exposure to contaminants, and health outcomes for women. Indeed, qualitative or mixed methods approaches will provide in-depth answers for quantitative results.

We echo the calls of Rautio and colleagues (2021), which provided a list of recommendations related to how to integrate more gendered analyses into work occurring in Arctic communities. They have three recommendations. First is the need for an ‘umbrella’ network for gender perspectives in the Arctic, with collaboration of a variety of stake holders including government, researchers, NGOs. Next, they recommend a broader gender-equity perspective in all projects, activities and decision making in the Arctic Council (specific to dealing with human health and sustainable development). Last, they recommend that there needs to be more funding available for broader gender research in the Arctic (Rautio et al., 2021, p.628). To add to this list, there is a need for research regarding how gender is experienced, how gender roles are enacted outside the context of food, and what gender equality means according to Inuit knowledge.

Based on the ICC-A framework and supporting literature, we recommend that future studies related to food security in Inuit Nunangat frame their work using Inuit-determined approaches, thus incorporating food sovereignty into their research. Dawn Morrison notes how food sovereignty “...provides a framework for Indigenous and settler relationships as many are coming to realize themselves as more fully in the narrative of social and environmental injustices that is unfolding” (Morrison, 2020, p.25).

As I progressed through the process of analysis and writing my thesis, I kept notes on how this work could create tangible change and how to enact it. I recommend research of this nature continue and expand into a larger context. As noted earlier, understanding how social aspects of gender influence health in Inuit food systems is valuable yet largely unexplored. With this knowledge, there will be many opportunities to bridge the gendered gap in food insecurity. Importantly, there is a need to research how those who do not fit into the gender binary

experience food systems in Inuit Nunangat. Within this, we must be sure to conceptualize and understand gender as a construct, with different constructions based on temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts. As explained by Todd (2020), "...precisely because gender is socially constructed, it is not universally constructed in the same way. Rather than impose our own frames of reference, we must respect other ways of knowing as seek, as far as possible, to understand the relational aspects of Indigenous philosophies, cosmologies, and legal orders. (Todd, 2020, p.200).

There are also opportunities to include more extensive research that focuses on different intersecting factors in Inuit food systems. Within the context of this thesis, this includes research to understand youth and incorporate youth voices in relation to gendered aspects of food systems. It also includes the potential to study broader interpretations of gender, focusing on intersections of age, ability, and geographic location and gender. Within this, there are opportunities to focus this research on Inuit men and understandings of masculinity. Something that should not be forgotten is the staggering statistics of cases of violence against women in Nunavik (Statistics Canada, 2022b) indicates that this is an ongoing and troubling gendered issue that must be considered when discussing issues of gender in Inuit Nunangat

Learning from the literature exploring gendered health dimensions in Inuit Nunangat, there is abundant evidence of women's support groups being beneficial for women in many ways. As seen in Beaumier and Ford's work, women have built a robust knowledge-sharing system through social supports. A space for women to connect, learn about food together, and spend time in these spaces would be highly beneficial. Integrating food into social programming has also improved community health outcomes. Food knowledge promotes food sovereignty, agency, and informed decisions related to food and bolsters food security.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research underscores the indispensable role that gender plays in shaping Inuit food systems, food security, and food sovereignty in Kangirsuk, revealing its pervasive influence across various dimensions of food systems. From hunting and fishing practices to food preparation and the evolving landscape of food distribution, gender dynamics emerge as fundamental determinants of food access, sharing, preparation, and consumption. Despite this contribution, there remain significant gap in comprehensively understanding the gendered nuances within Inuit food systems across Inuit Nunangat.

As Todd (2020) writes, “[i]f we wish to arrive at a more than partial understanding of household provisioning and the environmental knowledge on which it relies, we will need to set aside our expectations and pay greater attention to women.” (Todd, 2020, p.209). To overcome this this gap requires a concerted effort to prioritize understandings of women's experiences and perspectives in food-related research in Inuit Nunangat. My thesis echoes this sentiment. Perceptions of country food consumption and access, jobs in the market economy, and climate change highlight the gendered nature of food systems and underscore the inherently gendered nature of access to country food. Such dynamics give rise to complex contradictions in gender roles, exhibiting both fluidity and stability in roles and divisions of labor.

Moving forward, it is important that the growing body of literature on gendered aspects of food systems in Inuit Nunangat adopts Inuit-led frameworks that prioritize Inuit food sovereignty. By centering Inuit voices and perspectives, future research can contribute meaningfully to addressing the systemic omission of women and gender in food-related discourse. Contributing to the growing body of literature, my thesis highlights the need for continued exploration and understanding of the gendered dimensions of food security in Inuit communities. By acknowledging and addressing these dynamics, we can strive towards more

equitable and inclusive food systems that uphold the principles of Inuit food sovereignty and promote the well-being of all community members.

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Appendix

Interview Guide/Conversation Prompts

- How old are you? Where were you born?
 - Have you ever lived anywhere else?
 - Do you have any children?
 - Do you harvest and/or prepare country foods? If so, which ones?
 - o If you do harvest, who did you learn from?
1. Can you tell me about a memory of yours related to country food?
 2. Tell me a little bit about the food you grew up with. What did you eat as a child? Who prepared the food for you, and what do you remember eating?
 - a. Possible prompt: *Did your parents teach you anything about food? E.g., how to prepare a certain dish, eating habits, traditions, hunting/fishing techniques*
 3. Gender roles are always changing and are different depending on what we're looking at. Would you say gender roles have changed in recent years? (community, or generally?) this can be related to employment, household tasks, hunting... anything.
 - a. Can you explain some of these changes to me?
 - b. If yes, why do you think they have changed?
 - c. If not, why do you think they haven't?
 4. Who prepares the food in your household?
 - a. Are there certain foods that men prepare and certain that women prepare? What are they?
 - b. *Possible Prompt: why do you think this is?*
 5. Can you tell me about why country food is important to you? (*Or what role country food plays in your life*) (this can be in terms of consumption, preparation, hunting, fishing...etc.)
 - a. Do you think that your gender influences this perception?
 - b. Do you think that being a woman influences your relationship with food? (*again, through cooking/preparation, hunting, fishing, or sharing*)
 6. Do you think your gender (*or gender generally*) influences your (*or people's*) decisions to eat certain foods?
 - a. *Maybe certain foods are consumed based on what you think should be eaten for health (like biological needs – for example: eating certain parts of animals – like the head of char or the tail of a beluga;*
 - b. *or maybe preparing certain foods; buying/shopping for food from the store; or even hunting)*
 7. Do you have any suggestions for the future of this work – work related to gender and food in your community?

8. Is there anyone that would be important for me to talk to as part of this project?

Do you have any final input or comments you didn't have a chance to share that you feel are important for me to know?

(Potential) Additional questions

- Are there any other challenges that come to mind as it relates to food? E.g. not enough fresh produce, availability of certain items, lack of options for where to buy
- (If they have kids) What food traditions or habits do you hope to teach your kids?

Questions to add in for larger project data:

<p>For each of the following animals: caribou/ringed seal/walrus/beluga:</p>	<p>Can you tell me which parts of the animal you prepare to eat, and how you prepare them? (<i>Use the following as prompts if unmentioned</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Fat (from all regions)o Meat (from all regions)o Flipperso Livero Intestineso Kidneyso Stomacho Lungso Hearto Boneso Head and braino Tail <p>Have you ever changed which parts of the [animal] you prepare to eat, or how you prepare each part to eat?</p> <p>Do you ferment or render any part of, or add to a preparation for fermentation? If so, which part, and how is it done?</p> <p>Do you dry any part of the animal? If so, which part, and how is it done?</p> <p>How do you store the parts of the animal you do not intend to eat fresh? Do you freeze or smoke any part of the animal?</p> <p>How do you ensure preparations that are fresh, fermented, dried, or frozen that it is safe to eat?</p>
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	<p>Are there any parts or preparations that are reserved for specific people? Like Elders, women, children, or men?</p> <p>Do you think the knowledge of how to prepare [animal] is being passed on to future generations? Has any knowledge been lost since you were a child?</p> <p>Have you changed your preferences for [animal] since you started eating [animal]? If so, how?</p> <p>Have you noticed a difference between generations in who prefers [animal] and what parts or preparations of [animal]?</p> <p>Are there any differences between men and women and how they usually prepare and eat [animal]?</p> <p>What do you think are the benefits of eating [animal]?</p> <p>Are you aware of any dangers or concerns from eating [animal]? If so, are some people at more risk than others?</p> <p>Are you aware of any nutrients that exist in [animal] that are good for you? If so, which nutrients and how/why are they good for you?</p> <p>Are you aware of any metals or other contaminants in [animal] that are not good for you? If so, which contaminants and how/why are they bad for you? Can you do anything to avoid this?</p> <p>Are you aware of any bacteria, viruses, or other pathogens in [animal] that might be harmful to you? Can you do anything to avoid this?</p>
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