

## What's in a Game?

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What is a game? What is in a game? Based on Huizinga's theory of play, we recognize whether an activity is a play from an absolutely new perspective. In my opinion, cooking is a play, a significant play that almost everybody does every day. Why is cooking considered a play? Because it has rules, it needs time and space, and it is somewhat non-serious and separated from life. So what aspects of cooking are considered play and what parts are not? Let's do some analysis.

I cook for myself every day. Every ingredient and every dish has its own rules. Almost everyone who cooks regularly has to follow these rules in order to make a tasty dish. For example, we need the proper tools for cooking: stove, pan, kitchen knife, cutting board and all different kinds of kitchenware, utensils, and tools. We also need ingredients such as meats, vegetables, eggs, rice, water, and so on.

However many times we do not simply follow the recipe ("rules") to make the dishes but we also explore, change, create, and improve the current "rules" based on our taste preference, time and budget etc. Rules in cooking are varied, though most rules relate to the key factors: time, color, temperature, and experience. For instance let's look at the time factor. To make a boiled egg we need to put a raw egg in cold water. After the water is boiled let the egg stay in the pot for about 5 – 8 minutes, then the boiled egg is ready for your breakfast. What about color? A simple example would be raw shrimp turned to red tells us that it is cooked. To cook a delicious dish, follow the rules is important.

So how can cooking be seen as a play? Cooking is non-serious. That is to say, cooking will not influence other things whether it is successful or not. The activity of cooking is relatively independent. An individual can choose whether to buy or cook a meal when he/she is hungry. Cooking absorbs attention. Cooking dishes requires people's attention, time and energy. When a person is cooking, he or she is paying attention to and spending time and energy for the cooking process. When the finished dish is successful, he or she will enjoy the dish or share with friends. Therefore, the activity of cooking can be enjoyable, encouraging, positive and yields results to the participant. Which means he or she has "won" the play.

Huizinga defined play as follows. A play is a voluntary activity; Play is not "ordinary" or "real" life and distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration. Based on Huizinga theory we can conclude cooking can be considered a play because people voluntarily engage in cooking and cooking can be relatively independent from daily life. An individual who chooses not to cook can always outsource the activity (i.e. buy lunch instead of making it yourself), and the activity likely will not impact other aspects of that individual's life. Cooking can be enjoyable if an individual instinctively loves to cook or he/she feels encouraged and receives positive feedback from this activity. If a person loves to cook, the kitchen can be considered his or her stage, field or playground. He or she will enjoy the time in the kitchen. And during that time period the kitchen belongs to this individual. A temporary sphere is established that only for the activity of cooking.

Huizinga also indicated that play is a pre-human activity. Play is older than human culture. Animals eat food to survive. And eating is a natural instinct to all species on the earth. Human eats food, but human uses cooking to make their food more tasty and nutrient. Cooking has a longer history than human culture. Ash relic and animal debris fossil left by Homo sapiens provide evidence that cooking was an ancient activity that happened before any traceable human culture. Cooking also helped push forward human culture. Rituals were established around food such as harvesting celebrations. For example, people pray for more rainfall to have good harvests every year or for less earthquake that harms farming.

We can also look at whether the activity is considered seriousness or non-seriousness to determine if it is a play or not. When cooking is in telic state or when the activity is serious, cooking is not a play. For example, a person is starving and he or she has to cook in order to eat. In this state, cooking is not a play, because it is likely not enjoyable or playful. Cooking in this case concerns an individual's life and essential needs. Another example would be when a child takes a kitchen knife when his parents were not paying attention and tries to cut vegetables, we cannot say this is a play. Because cooking in this situation could be dangerous to this child.

In the other hand, cooking is definitely a play when it is in paratelic state or we say non-seriousness is dominant in the activity. When people enjoy the cooking process and follow the rules of the recipes to make different dishes, and when they enjoy decorating the plates and sharing the tasty result with family and friends. This is an encouraging moment, exciting and rewarding to the mind, but not necessary to the life. It is independent of ordinary life and has no serious impacts to an individual's survival. Therefore, cooking can be considered a play.

When cooking is considered a play, a person needs to think about what dish he or she will cook, what ingredients are needed. He or she needs a shopping list, learns cooking tips, enjoys the process and tastes the final result. However when a person is starving, will he or she schedule a plan to cook and enjoy the process? Of course not. He or she will grab anything that can be used to cook for food before starvation. In this case, cooking is not enjoyable or playful, but concerns instinct and survival. On the other hand, when cooking is in the paratelic state, it amplifies the value of play. In this situation, cooking can be the way that an individual realizes self-worth. To be more specific, a person's esteem will be amplified when he/she cooks a tasty food and the dish is enjoyed by others. Cooking is also a process to let a person find his or her personal value. It seems like animals' play is a process to practice its surviving skills. A personal value is exhibited when cooking is a process that a person will realize more rules for different ingredients or dishes, keep improving the quality of the dish, motivate his or her interest. Finally, a personal value is demonstrated, but not just pursue the quality of a dish.

Whether cooking is a play or not and its boundary between seriousness and non-seriousness can be ambiguous. Sometimes it is not very easy to determine if a person is enjoying cooking as a play or engaging in cooking as a serious activity. For example, just because a person is cooking. We cannot conclude that he or she is enjoying cooking as a play activity. If this person is a chef, cooking is a job to him then it might not be a play. This is a serious situation that this person relies on cooking to survive. If an individual a cooking amateur, he or she enjoys the cooking process, but not rely on cooking to survive. It won't affect this person's life because cooking is outside "ordinary" life. In this situation, cooking is play.

To make an activity more like a play, we should make it satisfy the definition of play. How to make cooking more game-like? Simulation of the cooking process can be a great way to achieve our purpose. This simulation could be digital or non-digital. For example, a cooking App for children will let kids learn how to cook, how to create different dishes without engages in real cooking, which can be dangerous for small children when hot stove and knives are involved. Or in a non-digital way kids can use toys to simulate the cooking process. Both are great ways to help kids learn while having fun playing.

In summary based on the above examples I believe that cooking is a play because it has rules for the ingredients and dishes, it is a relatively independent activity from daily life and when it is in a non-serious situation, it encourages people to demonstrate their personal value. My recommendation for making cooking more game-like is to create "cooking games" that simulates the real world cooking process.