A qualitative, cross cultural examination of attitudes and behaviour in relation to cooking habits in France & Britain.

Andy Gatley[a1], Martin Caraher[b], Tim Lang[c]

[a]London School of Hospitality & Tourism, University of West London, St Mary's Road, London. W5 5RF, United Kingdom

[b] & [c] Centre for Food Policy, City University London, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Northampton Square, London, EC1V 0HB, United Kingdom

[1] Corresponding author.

E-mail address: andy.gatley@uwl.ac.uk (A Gatley)

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Abstract.

Food campaigners, policy makers, journalists and academics continue to debate an alleged decline in home cooking, a corresponding increase in individualised eating habits and the impact of such trends upon public health. The focus of this research was to examine and compare current domestic food practices in Britain with those of another country, namely France. In-depth interviews with 27 members of the public drawn from both countries enabled the researchers to explore people's actual cooking practices in the home. Analysis of the data revealed that respondents from both countries often lacked time to cook and increasingly relied on a mix of both raw and convenience type foods to varying degrees. A range of cooking skills was employed in the home although confidence in relation to cooking was more varied with the French respondents demonstrating greater willingness to 'cook from scratch'. There was some evidence of men on both sides of The Channel engaging with cooking in the home although this often formed part of a leisure activity undertaken at weekends and for special occasions.

Keywords: cooking, , cooking confidence, convenience, food choice, culinary cultures, cross-cultural qualitative research design

Introduction

Although resistant to change, domestic food practices and eating habits have always evolved alongside broader cultural changes and are linked to key social determinants and powerful economic structures in an environment in which food is both produced and consumed (see Mennell, 1996; Warde, 1997; Nestle Family Monitor, 2001; Mintel, 2003; Cabinet Office Report, 2008). However, since the Second World War, the pace and rhythm of change appears to have quickened and Lang *et al.* (2001) considered that in Britain, knowledge of cooking skills and their application in the home are now in a period of fundamental transition. The potential significance of any such trend is that while no causal link has been established between cooking at home and obesity, it has been suggested that if people lack the ability or confidence to cook, their food choices are bound to be more limited (Chen *et al.* 2012; Rees *et al.* 2012). It has also been argued that the ability and willingness of someone to cook is one of the factors that can enable people to make informed decisions about their food choices, their diet and their capacity to implement advice on healthy eating (HEA 1998; Caraher *et al.* 1999a; Lang *et al.* 2001). Any decline in cooking skills can result in people becoming more reliant on convenience foods and while many are nutritionally well balanced, others are more highly processed and frequently high in fat, sugar and salt (Stitt *et al*. 1996) and thus require people to understand food labelling if they wish to control their diet (Caraher *et al.*). In light of the recent European 'horse meat scandal' and fraudulent food labelling, Blythman (2013) considers that if we want to eat safe, wholesome food then we must select unprocessed foods and cook them ourselves. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, Pollan (2013: 1) suggests that cooking not only gives people greater autonomy over the foods they eat but that it is also

> "the most important thing an ordinary person can do to help reform the American food system, make it healthier and more sustainable."

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63 'Cooking' has been described as the application of heat to food (McGee 1984) while
64 Levi Strauss (1965) theorized how a range of culturally acceptable procedures are
65 used to transform nature (raw) to culture (cooked) or indeed how raw food becomes
66 cooked through a process of cultural transformation (Beardsworth *et al.* 1997; Pollan
67 2007). Fieldhouse (1986: 63) adds that the actual cooking process or method of
68 cultural transformation selected depends on the *'types of food available, the state of*
69 *material culture and the cultural needs and preferences of the society'*. Similarly, the
70 term 'cuisine' is often used to describe methods of food preparation traditional to a
71 specific population or region and is influenced not only by the types of food available
72 locally, but also by such factors as economic conditions, trade patterns, culture and
73 customs. Caraher *et al.* (1999) highlight how attitudes and behaviour in relation to
74 cooking needs to be studied within a wider social and cultural context and for example
75 Mennell *et al.* (1994: 20) employed the term 'culinary culture' as *"a shorthand term for*
76 *the ensemble of attitudes and taste people bring to cooking and eating"* while Short
77 (2006) and Lang *et al.* (2009) describe 'culinary culture' as the knowledge and
78 experience of how to plan and create a meal.

79

80 Who cooks what, why and how is a central focus of this research. Previous studies
81 have demonstrated how cooking was seen as a woman's duty, refuelling the active
82 breadwinner and how such labour demonstrated her nurturing responsibilities for the
83 family with the "proper" meal symbolising a woman's role as homemaker (Murcott,
84 1982 &1995; Charles and Kerr, 1984 &1995; **DeVault 1991**; Mennell *et al* 1992;
85 Brannen *et al.* 1994;, Fieldhouse 1995; Charles, 1995; Dixey, 1996; Warde, 1997,
86 Beardsworth & Keil, 1997, HEA 1998). Murcott (1982, 1983, 1983b) examined the

constituents and prescribed cooking techniques associated with the socially important 'cooked' or 'proper' meal in Britain and found there to be strict rules that must be adhered to in relation to what makes a 'cooked' dinner 'proper' (see also Charles and Kerr 1990). Such a meal must consist of meat, potatoes and a boiled green vegetable served on a single plate. Douglas (1997) found that a 'proper meal' typically also demands the eating with others such as family members around a table along with certain rules regarding social interaction. She noted highly definable and sequenced meal structures throughout the day and while less significant meals and snacks could be unstructured, the Sunday meal, for example, had to be larger and demanded more varied cooking methods along with the addition of gravy so as to mark the day as special. (see Douglas and Nicod 1974, Charles and Kerr 1984; Murcott 1995a).

However, evidence suggests that in the twenty first century, meals are becoming restructured, simpler, made with an increasing range of convenience foods, demonstrate greater male involvement and are more likely to be eaten alone although considerable variation remains and it is premature to report the 'death of the family meal' (HEA 1998; NFM 2001; Mintel 2003; Warde *et al*. 2005; Bove & Sobal 2006; Key Note 2007; Hunt *et al.* 2011). The globalisation thesis points to how powerful structural factors within the food system now operate at a global level and are having a more universal impact on the relationship the individual in many parts of the world, now has to food (Mennel, 1996; Ritzer, 2000; Popkin, 2001; Schmidhuber *et al.,* 2006; Andrieu *et al.,* 2006; Pollan, 2007; Warde *et al* 2007; Millstone *et al.,* 2008). Large multinational food corporations have emerged which target consumers around the world that often appear to share increasingly similar habits and tastes as a result of cultural homogenisation (Wallerstein 1979; Giddens 1990; Robins 1991; Hall *et al.* 1992; Waters 1995; Needle 2004). Changing working and family structures, hectic and

113 increasingly urban lifestyles, time scarcity, rising affluence and competing demands on
114 leisure time as well as demographic and technical changes have all contributed
115 towards the development of increasingly concentrated agri-food businesses eager to
116 satisfy demand for pre-prepared foods, fast food, takeaways and other products from
117 the food service sector (Tansey *et al.* 1995; Warde 1997 - & 1999(Time
118 scarcity/Montreal; Atkins *et al.* 2001; Pollan 2007; Keynote 2007; Lang *et al.* 2009).
119 Such availability of convenience foods, defined as commercially processed foods
120 designed to save time and effort, have influenced meal preparation and consumption
121 patterns in many parts of the world (Warde *et al.;* 2007; Bruner, van der Horst and
122 Siegrist 2010 see Appetite and conv. Foods article). With the widespread increase in
123 women in paid employment, access to convenience foods and other meal solutions,
124 women are reported to be spending less time cooking than twenty five years ago and
125 men slightly more (see Tansey *et al.* 1995; Lang *et al.* 2001; NFM 2001; Pettinger *et al.*
126 2004; Warde *et al.* 2005a & b & 2007; Lake *et al.* 2006; Pettinger *et al.* 2006; FSA
127 2007; Keynote 2007).

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129 While evidence of the globalisation of consumption might point to convergence of
130 practices around food and cooking, divergence remains apparent both within and
131 between countries. Despite globalising trends, many countries endeavour to preserve
132 their distinctive culinary cultures and socio-demographic conditions and individual
133 household arrangements continue to influence attitudes and behaviour in relation to
134 domestic cooking practices. Whilst the time spent cooking may be declining in many
135 homes, interest in food and cooking in Britain, at least among certain social groups,
136 appears to be rising as can be noted from the popularity of celebrity chef shows and
137 their bestselling books. The growth in farmers markets in many British towns, the quest
138 among some for more sustainable diets, the search by others for ever healthier

regimens and life enhancing foods suggest that counter cultural tendencies are also present.

Aims of study

While theory has suggested the significance of the 'cooked' or 'proper' meal to the family, recent research points to its declining importance. Furthermore, given our theoretical understanding of how cooking behaviours are shaped by interaction with a range of structural as well as socio-cultural factors, it was important not only to explore the influence of such factors, but to examine how food items are currently being transformed in to culturally acceptable meals as well as the skills employed to achieve such an outcome. Such an exploratory study required access to the routine, lived experiences of people's everyday cooking practices within the home and in order to develop detailed understanding of such activities, qualitative interviews were selected as an appropriate means by which to gather the necessary data **(Mason; Chapman).** Additionally, Warde *et al.* (2007) remind us that research comparing cooking habits across countries can be very useful and that only limited comparative research has been undertaken (see Rozin et al (1999) and nxxxx), most of which has been quantitative in nature. As such it was felt that cross-cultural qualitative research would provide a particularly useful lens with which to more deeply observe similarities and differences across socio-cultural settings and offer a means by which to extend our knowledge of the complexities of such phenomena. It was decided to examine how people currently cook in Britain, their response to globalising tendencies within the food system, society and culture more generally as well as how contemporary living and working arrangements influence their attitudes and behaviour in relation to domestic cooking practices. The aim was to compare such data with data collected from a

comparable country so as to gain insight into whether such globalising trends and changing social arrangements are having a similar impact and whether there is evidence of increasing homogenisation of food and cooking habits across national borders or whether distinctions largely remain both within and across national borders (see Raaji 1978; Hantrais 1995; Sobal 1998).

It was decided to select a country which was similarly developed and shared certain geographical, socio-economic, historical and political similarities as well as offering broadly comparable literature and data sets. France is Britain's closest foreign neighbour and there are obvious similarities between the two societies but also important internal variations (Mennell, 1996; Pettinger *et al.,* 2006; Rogers, 2004). Pettinger *et al.* (2004) go so far as to ask how it is that two countries could be so close geographically and yet so far apart gastronomically. By this they are not discussing simply ways of cooking but their overarching attitudes to the enjoyment of eating and the role it plays in social life. Pettinger *et al.* (2006: 1020) add:

> "their cuisines are popularly seen as offering striking contrasts, even though they have been in mutual contact and influenced each other for many centuries".

While the alleged absence of a strong, uniquely national British cuisine is in contrast to what is often regarded as a more robust French one, it has been argued that there has been growing convergence of food practices and diets between the two countries since the 1960s (Mennell, 1996). As such, this study aims to compare the rhythm and manner that a range of powerful influences are having on attitudes and behaviour in relation to domestic cooking habits in France and Britain.

The next section of this paper explains the sample and method used to carry out the research. It is followed by the presentation of the results and such findings are then discussed.

Methods

Participants

One of the researchers (AG) had previously lived and worked in Nantes in north-western France and it was decided that such familiarity could help with the recruitment of suitable research participants. Upon searching for a comparable city in Britain, reference was made to the 'European Twinning Scheme' which directed us to Cardiff in south Wales which is twinned with Nantes and it was evident that both cities shared many similarities[2]. Adults were then purposively recruited through a range of personal, employer and institutional contacts as well as using a snowball sampling technique so as to access a small, yet diverse sample of people in relation to variables such as age, gender, occupation, educational experience, life-stage and living arrangements. A comparable range of characteristics were sought from both cities and the final sample included 13 French and 14 British participants ranging in age from 23 -73, with a mean age of 45. A total of 12 women and 15 men were interviewed, a total of 15 lived with children in a family and the remaining 12 were either married/co-habiting without children or lived alone. Further biographical details can be seen in Table 1. Household organisation and social variables can be an important influence on attitudes in relation

[2] Both cities are of a similar size and Nantes is the largest city in north-west France with a population approaching 300,000. Cardiff is the largest city in Wales with a population of almost 350,000 although both have much larger and similarly sized metropolitan populations. Both were important regional ports and Cardiff remains the capital city of Wales and Nantes, historically the capital of Brittany is now capital city of the Pays de la Loire region and the Loire-Atlantique Department. Brittany and Wales have each developed regional cooking styles based on local products which tends to reflect a poorer, more peasant based cuisine than in some other regions and correspondingly their culinary cultures tend to enjoy a lesser reputation.

to cooking as well as account for variation in behaviour and Bourdieu (1984 not 86 re Distinction) suggests that in turn, food practices are used as an expression of taste and distinction.

Interviews

Based on the review of literature, an in-depth semi-structured interview guide was designed and respondents were individually asked open-ended questions based around two key themes. Initially, respondents were asked to reflect upon the range of foods eaten in their homes, both the everyday and the occasional, including how they were prepared and by whom, the amount of time spent preparing such foods, what they thought constituted a 'proper meal' and to recall how current food practices compared to what they remembered happening in the homes of their childhood. The second theme focused on how they had learnt to cook, how confident they now felt to cook and to discuss the factors that influenced decisions of who prepared what foods for consumption. Further probing questions were used to encourage respondents to expand upon their descriptions. The interview guide was piloted, amended, approved by City University's Ethics Committee, translated into French and checked by two native French speakers who were both bi-lingual. . All interviews were undertaken by one of the researchers (AG) and in Britain these took place in English while in France, French was used. Interviews typically took one hour and informed consent forms were obtained prior to the commencement of each interview. The interviews took place at times and in locations chosen by respondents which were often their homes or the homes of their friends/relatives and in a few instances, at their place of work or a nearby cafe.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and those undertaken in French, were translated into English during transcription by one of the researchers (AG). The accuracy of the translations was checked by an English teacher of French in the UK. The constant comparative method was used and the content of the interview transcripts were first examined and re-examined so as to get a sense of the interviews overall and simultaneously initial ideas for the categorisation of data emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1990/evening meals Miles & Huberman, 1994 Masc Berg 2007). One page individual biographical profiles were developed which summarised respondents' overall attitudes and behaviours in relation to cooking as well as describing their defining social characteristics. A synopsis of such profiles can be seen in table 1 and such a process made an important contribution to the early stages of analysis (see Richards 1998). An iterative process of reviewing the literature and analysing the emergent themes served to refine the categories and the interview transcripts were subsequently entered into NVivo, re-read and then coded accordingly. Categories or "nodes" for analysis revolved around themes such as 'domestic cooking habits' and included 'frequency of cooking', 'gender roles and responsibility for cooking', 'influences on domestic food practices', 'learning to cook and confidence' , 'childhood memories of cooking in the home' etc. The use of computer software facilitated the process of analysis as data categorised under each "node" could more easily be compared, reorganised and summarised and the writing of analytical memos further helped direct and log the refinement of themes within and across the 'nodes'. Such a process served to develop greater understanding of respondent's attitudes and behaviours in relation to their domestic food practices and contributed to more robust qualitative analysis and conclusion building (Miles *et al.* 1994; Richards and Richards 1998; Sarantakos 2005; Berg 2007). The same author (AG) undertook each stage of the collection and analysis

of the data and such familiarisation with what the respondents actually said enhanced the quality of the interpretation however, regular peer debriefing with the first authors academic supervisors also helped direct the process and enhanced the rigour of the interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 evening meal). The quality of the analysis was also enhanced via the asking of follow-up questions to test preliminary findings and enhance the credibility of the research and in addition, thick description via the use of illustrative quotes was used throughout (Lincoln & Guba 1986).

Results

The key findings from the interviews are presented under seven headings and reflect the principle aim of the research, namely to explore people's attitudes and behaviour in relation to cooking habits in France and Britain. The first three headings reflect the memories, attitudes and beliefs respondents held about food and cooking and how skilled they felt in relation to cooking. The following four headings relate to actual behaviour in relation to domestic food practices and reveal what foods were cooked in the home, when, why and by whom. Under each heading, findings are first presented from the British respondents, followed by data collected from the French respondents. This section is followed by a discussion of the findings and finally, the conclusion.

Remembrance of meals past

Respondents were encouraged to recall from their childhood how foods in the home had been cooked and transformed into meals and how this differed from the meals prepared in their homes today. Ten respondents in each country specifically discussed the time spent cooking and all but one of these in each country considered that they

spent less time cooking than their parents had mainly because their mothers were not in paid employment and they had spent more time *'cooking from scratch'*. In addition, the majority of the respondents in both France and Britain agreed that during their childhood the foods available were mainly fresh foods which took more time to prepare as well as there being less labour saving kitchen equipment available. Meals in the past were portrayed as being more predictable and domestic routines frequently dictated what foods were bought which then formed part of a set weekly rota of meals. The range of foods available was also often described as more limited then, although seven French respondents described how the foods eaten had changed little.

Mothers of the British respondents tended to be described as *"good plain cooks"* and over half of the British respondents' mothers were said to have cooked puddings and cakes. Eating together as a family was described as more common then although at least six respondents referred to men's shift patterns which disrupted eating together. The following comments, first from British respondents followed by a French respondent sum up many of these points:

> "my mother never worked so there was always a meal ready when we got home...she used to cook things from scratch...pies and that type of thing, the basics. It was always fresh because my father had a vegetable garden...we never had a fridge and everything was bought on that day. My father worked late in the evening, so we would have our tea before he came home but on Sundays we always sat down together for a roast". (Alison)

> "My mother cooked week days and my father always did Sunday lunch because he was a mine worker and his shifts were erratic. It was very traditional home cooked food…you always knew what you were going to have". (Bob)

> "...my mother did much more than I do nowadays. I remember my grandmothers, my aunts, my great aunts who spent an inordinate amount of time cooking". (Ann-Marie)

Meat was remembered as a central part of meals in both countries and *'traditional'* meals of roasts or *'meat and two veg.*' in Britain were popular and often followed by a homemade pudding. Similarly in France, respondents described *'classical'* main courses which were usually meat based and sauced, but unlike in Britain, this was described as invariably having been preceded by a starter and followed by cheese and/or dessert/fruit.

Cooking as a significant activity

Respondents were asked whether they thought it important that people cook in the home and if so why, as well as to discuss other possible meal solutions. Looking first at the British respondents' comments, just under half discussed how they enjoyed the social aspect of cooking and eating, especially at weekends, although alternatives to the daily 'chore' of cooking such as restaurant, takeaway or ready prepared meals were also positively accepted as the following working woman indicated:

> "I don't think it would be nice always to eat takeaways. Is the act of cooking important…I'm not sure. I think it is important to maybe put a meal together so perhaps I do think cooking is a bit important." (Susanne)

A working mother explained that she felt guilty if she did not cook although lack of time was frequently cited as the principle barrier to the enjoyment of cooking as the following working mother explained:

"I try to get it done as quickly as possible. It is not that enjoyable if you have to do it day in and day out." (Margaret)

Looking at the French respondents' comments, Martine described cooking as:

"…a way of living and it has a lot to do with the rhythm of life… to be responsible regarding nutrition, to take charge of this".

Agathe added how the eating of home cooked foods is appreciated, promotes conviviality and described cooking as:

"...a discovery... you have the basic foundations that you respect then you can let your imagination run".

François continued:

"we need to keep the skills and not break the ties to our culture".

Cooking in France appeared more positively accepted as part of a daily routine although Mathilde, a 74 year old widow, considered how nowadays many women no longer had to face the daily drudgery of cooking and added:

"Evolution has freed women because working all the time in the kitchen is not always pleasant...it can become a chore."

Cooking skills and confidence

Respondents were asked about how they had learnt to cook and how confident they felt nowadays to prepare a meal. All but two of the British respondents expressed some reservations about their ability to cook and the British men discussed being "fairly confident ...I wouldn't particularly experiment" (John) or how "I need the instructions... a

plan" (George). Four British women explained how they were confident with the "basics" (Alison) and "quick and easy" dishes (Paula) and either preferred not to experiment or "need a recipe and method" to follow (Jackie). Susanne continued:

> "There are certain things that I do that I am confident of. Friends came to lunch on Sunday and I did lamb pasta, I did grapes... cheese... then I just got some ice cream. Yeah, I would never do a roast, I'm hopeless …it makes me stressed."

French women discussed being fairly confident to prepare a range of foods although lacked some skills necessary to prepare certain dishes. The French men considered they had a set of basic skills yet around a half went on to describe quite complex dishes such as *"beef bourguignon"* [3](François). Two more men explained:

> "...when I go to the shops I have no idea but then I see some lentils so I might then take some pork or some sausages...if I see a little veal I'll think about maybe a casserole...some spices, some coconut milk, a little curry. I don't always need a fixed idea" (Cedric)

> "...steak au poivre, Coquilles St Jacques, flambés with a cream sauce[4]. These are some of my specialities but they are not difficult". (Jules)

Contemporary domestic cooking practices

Respondents were asked about the foods they regularly cooked in the home and respondents in both countries reported using foods that were quicker to prepare than

3 A beef stew from Burgundy in France which traditionally uses red Burgundy wine, flavoured with herbs and garnished with pieces of bacon, button onions, mushrooms and croutons.

4 Typically in France, many prime food products such as steak and scallops (coquilles) are first fried and then put to one side while a sauce is made in the pan in which the food item was cooked. Brandy would often be added to the pan and set alight ('flambéed') sometimes also wine and then cream so as to make a sauce that would then be poured over the food item and served.

their parents had used including much greater use of rice and pasta. The availability of a range of prepared foods such as dairy puddings, frozen fish, tinned beans/legumes and the occasional pizza were frequently regarded as 'handy'. Typical comments from British respondents included:

> "I do buy a lot of readymade meals. I suppose because I am working and my husband works away. Yes, we reheat them and then serve fresh veg. with them". (Jackie)

> "We get a bit lazy these days…I do try to cook something decent at least once a week…I try to steer clear of instant meals, the ones you put in the microwave but I do the next laziest thing…like fish in breadcrumbs or ready cooked chicken bits that you just put in the oven". (Jack)

> "We buy a lot of ready cooked frozen meals…you know the type it takes 20 minutes in the oven to warm up …or micro –wave meals… pasta in white wine and garlic and things like that. We have a fair range of tinned soups in the house…beans, beans and sausage and ravioli, corned beef, that sort of thing. We also have yoghurts for the children." (Bob)

French respondents also appreciated the availability of some convenience and frozen type foods as demonstrated in the following quotations:

> "I often buy frozen fish because it is not bad... and rice goes well with frozen seafood. Tinned vegetables like corn and red beans enable me to prepare rice salads..." (Martine)

> "Fish, it is easy if it is frozen and I like it and you can even poach it when still frozen and I find it tastes good". (Ann-Marie)

Other French respondents agreed that prepared foods such as mashed potatoes, frozen vegetables and washed salads were convenient and that such items might be served with simple grilled meats or fish in an overall meal structure which was often now less complex.

The everyday scheduling of modern life

Respondents were asked to discuss the sort of things that influence their choice of foods to cook in the home. There was considerable variation in responses although busy family and working schedules, obligations to attend children's activities as well as a range of leisure opportunities were most frequently described as significant influences on their decision making. Respondents again described how cooking had to be either quick or reserved for when one had more time such as at weekends. A range of responses, first from Britain and then from France included:

> "I try to think 'ready, steady, cook' in my mind, you know…I'm going to get this meal done in 20 minutes and normally I have to dash anyway because I come home from work, pick up the shopping on the way and I want to get the meal on because I've got other things to do, homework to do with my daughter and God knows what else." (Margaret)

> "My wife and I try to eat together but she is involved with the PTA and I'm involved with the rugby club, I work late some nights, she works late other nights and so on." (Pete)

> "There's also a lot less time available now as well as a desire to do other things instead. Plus I work a fair distance from where I live so it depends on the journey too." (Loic)

"It has to be quick, maybe steak and chips." (Arnaud)

"…at weekends it [cooking] is possible, it is just a question of time." (Sabine)

Respondents in France and Britain discussed how such schedules had resulted in them increasingly relying on the availability of foods that had been part prepared as opposed to preparing a meal from scratch.

Cooking and gender

Respondents were asked about who cooked in the household, whether such activities were shared and if so how. When asked, almost no British or French respondent could remember their fathers undertaking much cooking and a typical response was:

"We go back to those days, the wife cooked and the husband went out to work" (Alison).

However the working women being interviewed in both Britain and France reported that by the time they now got home from work, they had little desire to cook. In addition, some respondents in both countries reported how their male partners were spending more time shopping for food and cooking than they remembered their fathers doing but it remained difficult to gauge to what extent men were now more equally sharing such everyday domestic tasks. For example, while 6 of the 17 male respondents who did not live alone discussed how the woman in the household had the greatest responsibility for cooking, the remaining 11 considered that cooking was now less gender differentiated. The following comments, first from Britain and then from France, attempt to reflect a range of views expressed in relation to cooking and gender:

"...he does make a nice cup of tea, but no he doesn't cook". (Alison)

"I have got the major responsibility, yes. He likes cooking his curries, Indian and Chinese foods...he is good with stir fries, so that's his part of the cooking… Friday evenings, then I would take over the rest of the week." (Jackie)

"I cook three times a week and my wife four or vice-a- versa. We have a strict rota of cooking every other day." (Dave)

"I'll cook probably a couple of nights, my husband will cook a couple of nights and he is more likely to cook if friends are coming and he's happy to cook more complicated things." (Susanne)

"...for the simple things it is often my wife...pasta for the children…and they usually eat before us. But if it is a dish that takes a while to prepare it is often me." (Mehdi)

The majority of the men that reported cooking tended to describe how they cooked as part of a leisure activity or when friends or family were visiting. However, findings also indicated that changing family structures and household types appeared to encourage men to cook and for example, 2 of the younger French males lived alone and cooked most days and one of the younger British males who shared a mixed household also cooked regularly.

Cooking for social occasions

When discussing domestic food provisioning, nearly all respondents in both countries said they enjoyed sitting down at home with family and friends to share a meal and it appeared to be a significant social activity. However, responses varied and for example two British women explained that they *'rarely cook'* (Alison) for friends or family other than at Christmas. As outlined above, it was also apparent that among

both the British and French respondents, males were more likely to cook for social occasions which also usually demanded extra effort. Cooking for special occasions tended to create greater anxiety among the hosts in Britain as mentioned earlier by Susanne who said that when friends came to eat she " would never do a roast …it makes me stressed." British respondents were more likely to rely on a 'tried and tested' recipe, something they had done before but perhaps served with some additional courses. For example, Bob in Cardiff explained how he would typically prepare spaghetti bolognaise with 'all the trimmings' and a 'Vienneta' to follow and another who shared cooking responsibilities with his wife said:

> "I think we make more of an effort but it would probably be something that we had done in the past and we're happy with and is a bit out of the ordinary." (Dave)

Some British respondents described being less sure if it mattered if the meal consisted largely of convenience products or indeed was totally a 'take-away meal' provided everyone enjoyed the occasion. For example, such a sentiment was articulated by Susanne who commented:

> "I love people coming round and sitting round a table and eating, I also think they haven't come for the food and the important thing is that we are all round the table together".

In France, the 'hosts' appeared more experienced, relaxed and sufficiently confident to 'try out' a new and/or special dish and for example, Agathe explains:

> "I always take a risk and do things that I have never done before...at times it is a success, at other times not."

More French respondents than British, also discussed taking pride in the fact that the greater part of the meal would be cooked from scratch, and that this reflected care and love between the provider and the receiver.

Cooking traditions: change and continuity

As previously noted, when discussing the foods cooked in the home, both British and French respondents positively commented on the ease by which foods such as rice and pasta could be prepared for consumption. However, only in Britain did respondents frequently describe how such products were often incorporated into quite complex 'ethnic' or 'international' styles of cooking. For example, a working mother explained:

> "The evening before I did a pork-paprika thing with cream, so that was Hungarian, and I think I did curry before that, chicken curry so it is very cosmopolitan. We often do French and Italian...and Chinese…we do a stir-fry occasionally". (Margaret).

Men in particular discussed how "different recipes from around the world" (Dave) were used and for example "I'll cook Chinese, Thai, or…Italian...the range is much, much better than in the past" (John).

Favorites such as lasagna & spaghetti bolognaise were also positively commented upon although recipes were often modified or anglicized as best described by the following family man who rarely cooked himself:

> "Tonight we've got chilli con carne but it won't be made like a normal chilli con carne, it won't have chilli beans in as I can't eat that sort of thing…I like baked beans in for me instead. I don't eat anything spicy". (Tom)

Meals prepared and eaten in France were described as 'traditional' and for example, Ann-Marie explained how she cooked "often French dishes in sauce...classics I suppose...dishes of meat with sauce...blanquette, bourguignon, boeuf en daube[5]". No respondents in France spoke of cooking 'ethnic' dishes although couscous was discussed as being quick and easy. However when respondents discussed eating it as part of a tagine, they explained this was done in restaurants and only rarely cooked in the home[6].

Discussion

The data collected revealed that cooking at home remained a significant activity for many respondents and as noted, some women felt guilty if they did not cook, while for individuals living alone, the only option other than to cook was to consume ready prepared foods. It was also evident from the interviews that the frequency of cooking tended to increase with age. However, the findings also highlighted how cooking habits are always evolving and reflect wider economic, social and cultural changes.

One key difference in the findings between Britain and France was that no French respondent described the use of totally prepared ready meals (see also Pettinger *et al.* 2004; Fischler *et al.* 2008), while in Britain, oven ready foods such as lasagne, battered fish, bread crumbed chicken and other such convenience options were common place

[5] A 'blanquette', is a white meat stew, typically made with veal, when neither the butter nor meat is allowed to brown. 'Boeuf en daube' is a slow cooked, beef stew, originating from Provence and traditionally cooked in a special dish called a daubière.

[6] Tagine is a famous North African casserole named after the clay dish it's cooked in. Meat (optional) such as lamb is slowly cooked with aromatic spices, vegetables and often (dried) fruit and typically served with couscous which is a staple food in North Africa and made from granules of durum wheat (semolina). Although traditionally steamed, it can quickly be boiled and is often incorporated into salads in France or served as an accompaniment to tagines, stews, fish and other dishes.

among about half of those interviewed. Earlier research carried out by Pettinger *et al.* (2004 and 2006) also found that while about two-thirds of their French respondents cooked a meal from raw ingredients on a daily basis, less than a quarter of their English respondents had done so although there was considerable variation among social groups (see Rozin *et al.* 1999; Taylor Nelson Sofres 2003; INPES 2004; Warde *et al.* 2005; FSA 2007). Busy work and/or personal schedules were often cited as the reason why convenience food options were selected and Warde (1999: 518) considers that as a result of such schedules and 'de-routinisation', people have less opportunity to prepare a meal at home from scratch and/or eat with other members of the household. Certainly respondents in France and Britain described how the pressures they faced were as much about difficulties of timing as they were simply a matter of shortage of time although overall, respondents in France described being more willing to set aside time for cooking and valued it more than their British counterparts (see also Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2010).

It was also apparent from respondents on both sides of The Channel that many transformational processes continue to be applied to raw foods so as to make them both edible and acceptable and the application of heat or energy to raw ingredients remains a defining characteristic of cooking (Levi-Strauss 1965; McGee 1984; Murcott 1995a; Symons 2000, Pollan 2013). However, the precise nature of such transformational processes is changing as people increasingly rely at least in part, on mechanical labour in factories to transform raw ingredients in to ever more ready prepared foods (Lupton, 1996; Mintz, 1996; Ritzer; 2000; Caraher 2001). Caraher *et al.* (1999b) ask whether the term cooking now also refers to the assembly process or the re-heating of ready cooked items and other writers have suggested that blunt distinctions between *'cooking from scratch'* and cooking using convenience products

are overstated (see James *et al.* 1997; Lang *et al.* 1999; Caraher 2001; Stead *et al.* 2004; Short 2006). Whether cooking with fresh, raw foods or cooking with pre-prepared &/or convenience foods or indeed a mix of these remains a complex practical task and while the application of mechanical skills may now be less essential, the cook continues to require academic knowledge and 'tacit' perceptual, conceptual, design, and planning skills (Short). For example, Short noted that regardless of the foods being prepared, the cook still demonstrated perceptual skills of timing and judgement so that different foods would be ready simultaneously. Similarly she contends that abilities to understand the properties of food in terms of taste, colour and texture and how they will react when combined or heated continue to be displayed. She noted how people who cook continue to demonstrate menu design skills, organisational skills and multi-tasking skills as well as creative skills to prepare a meal from whatever ingredients were available. Cooking, in order to get food "on the table and down throats" (Lang *et al.* 2001: 2) embraces a whole range of skills and those interviewed for this research described having a variety of such skills so as to be able to safely prepare a range of foods to suit the tastes and preferences of others. Significantly, however, British respondents were more likely to discuss how organisational skills and the lack of confidence caused them the greatest anxiety in relation to cooking and such factors have been found to influence the degree to which people find cooking to be an effort and in turn this tends to impact upon their ultimate cooking practices (see, Short 2006).

Also of interest from the findings was the broad appeal in Britain of 'ethnic' style foods and an internationally influenced cooking style. It is perhaps surprising that the British, ostensibly and proudly raised on the Roast Beef of Olde England and 'plain and simple' foods, should raise such '*foreign dishes'* to an iconic status such as when chicken

589 vindaloo[7] inspired the unofficial anthem of the England football team in the 1998 World
590 Cup. It has been argued that the popularity of "pork chipolatas cooked in an Indian
591 style" (Jaffrey 1982: 61) along with 'exotic' ready meals and takeaways reflects Britain's
592 acceptance of multi-cultural influences. However, it has been argued that such
593 hybridized dishes lack authenticity (see James 1997; Bell *et al.* 1997). James goes on
594 to suggest that the acceptance of such creolized foods actually represents continuity
595 rather than a diminution of British food traditions and Ashley *et al.* (2004) argue that the
596 continued search for inexpensive and convenient ways of enlivening 'plain and simple'
597 British food reflects a subtle continuation of many of the imperatives of British cooking
598 and in many ways is nothing more *than* "old food habits in a new form" (James 1997:
599 84). In contrast, others describe how Britain has enthusiastically abandoned tradition
600 and embraced a food revolution, new global markets and an eclectic mix of foreign
601 influences and is now more culturally diverse, creative and has developed more
602 exciting ways of doing and eating things (Grant 1999; Marr 2000; Blanc 2002;
603 Cartwright 2002; Rogers 2004) and a kind of cuisine *'sans frontiers'* (see Blanc; Panayi
604 2008) or *'global cuisine'* (Defra 2008). The modern supermarket stocked with foods
605 from around the world has been cited as having prompted an important shift in Britain's
606 eating consciousness. Blanc goes on to suggest that Britain's recent interest in what
607 he terms *'fusion cookery'* - cookery based on the best of local and globally sourced
608 ingredients, represents an exciting transition in British culinary practices. Such
609 fascination, however incoherent, with the 'exotic' appears to be in contrast to how
610 French respondents described their cooking and eating practices of more time
611 honoured, classical dishes. Indeed, Pettinger *et al.* (2004: 307) remind us that while
612 British cooking and eating habits may have absorbed "foreign cuisine, France tends to
613 *'follow the flag'* and local, regional and national culinary traditions seem to have

[7] An Indian curry dish, traditionally from Goa and made from pork. In its Anglo-Indian form, it is often made from chicken and is very popular in UK curry houses where it is served as a very fiery, spicy dish.

614 persisted more". De Certeau *et al.* (1998) argue that such complex and time
615 consuming regional recipes, reliant on local produce often now prove less suitable for
616 modern urban life and tend to refer to an outdated social status of women and as a
617 result, they suggest that traditional regional cuisine and *terroir* will lose its coherence
618 and become an irrelevance. Cartwright has described France as having a fetishism
619 with cultural heritage and concluded that France must engage more in the outside
620 world if it is not to become a museum culture. Certainly Mennell (1996) points out that
621 while successive waves of immigration have influenced Britain's cooking and eating
622 habits, immigrants from Indo-China and North Africa have had less of an influence on
623 foods prepared in French homes.

624

625 Cooking has been found to demonstrate differential gender involvement with wives
626 described as food servers, refuelling an active breadwinner and reflecting the
627 continued patriarchal structure of society with the "proper" or "structured meal"
628 symbolising woman's role as homemaker (Charles and Kerr, 1984; Murcott, 1995a;
629 Warde, 1997, Beardsworth & Keil, 1997, HEA 1998). In spite of the fact that around
630 75% of women aged eighteen and over in both France and Britain are now in paid
631 employment, women still appear to bear a far greater responsibility for cooking than
632 men (Rozin *et al.* 1999; NFM 2001; Mintel 2003; Amalou *et al.* 2004; INPES 2004;
633 Warde *et al.* 2005; FSA 2007) and Pettinger *et al's.* (2006) comparative research found
634 that the gender division was more defined among their English sample. While such
635 inequalities in the division of domestic tasks would appear to persist, findings from this
636 research concur that women in both countries appear to be spending less time cooking
637 than twenty five years ago (Poulain, 2002, Mintel, 2003; Amalou *et al.* 2004; Pettinger
638 *et al.* 2004, Drouard 2004, Warde *et al.* 2005; Key Note 2007) and that men were
639 choosing to cook more than in the past albeit as part of an occasional, leisure activity

involving creativity and/or entertaining. It is perhaps for this reason that men were also more likely to say they enjoyed cooking than women who often appeared less likely to have such choice (see also; Lupton 2000; Lang *et al.* 2001; Stead *et al.* 2004; Warde *et al.* 2005; Lake *et al.* 2006). Certainly this research suggests that in Britain, men were most likely to engage with the cooking of a summer barbeque, a dinner party, a Sunday roast or a Friday night curry. In France, men were more likely to cook than women when there were large leisurely gatherings and social occasions. Younger British and French males, often living alone reported cooking on a more regular basis and such results may help allay fears that young men, increasingly living alone, are not able to cater for themselves. However, some respondents also suggested that men probably spent more time talking about cooking than actually doing it and it remains to be seen whether such young men continue to cook if and when they go on to settle down or marry (see Murcott 1995b).

This research has shown that since the nineteen sixties a sophisticated and increasingly global food industry has promoted an increased variety of foodstuffs, which to a greater or lesser extent have infiltrated people's cooking practices on both sides of the Channel. Changes to working patterns, family structures and gender roles along with a perceived lack of time and increased disposable income have all contributed to the popularity of such food products, stimulated huge growth in the eating out market and promoted a corresponding decline in the amount of time spent cooking in the home. British and French respondents discussed simpler meals with greater substitution of more processed and convenience foods and it was apparent from the British respondents in particular how the selection of a mix of both 'convenience' and raw food products was increasingly the norm. However, food continues to be prepared in the home and many raw foods continue to be cooked via

the application of heat or energy although considerable variation exists between and within both countries. While writers such as Poulain (2002) have suggested there to be some 'destructuration' of the French food model of three highly structured meals per day served in the company of others, all but one of the French respondents discussed how they routinely engaged in the daily rhythm and communal nature of meals served at set times although accepted that the cooking might be simpler and depending on the occasion, they might 'skip' the starter and/or cheese course. In Britain, the pattern of three meals a day was also widely recognized but it has been less resistant to change with for example some participants in employment discussing how the midday meal at work was often a rushed sandwich, eaten alone at the desk or as Bob described, a "*re-fuelling"* occasion undertaken whilst "*on the go".* The 'proper meal' of meat and two veg., eaten in the company of others, remained popular but appeared to now more likely be reserved for special occasions and with evidence of the Sunday roast now being cooked and eaten in a commercial establishment such as a 'pub' or as Alison described, *"if we go out it's usually Sunday lunch which would be a carvery"*

With less time now being spent on cooking in the home there is concern that this will negatively impact on the inter-generational transfer of cooking skills and undermine confidence to cook as well as knowledge about food more generally. Certainly, the British respondents, with two exceptions, appeared more reticent about their cooking skills than their French counterparts and it remained more common in France for respondents to express pride in the fact that the greater part of the meal would be 'cooked from scratch'. Perhaps as a result of the greater use of raw ingredients they appeared to have retained more confidence in relation to cooking and handling food, were more prepared to experiment and this appeared to be an important influence on the willingness and frequency with which they cooked. Domestic food practices in

692 France appeared more deeply embedded in culture and unlike the British respondents,
693 all French respondents discussed their pride and confidence in a deep rooted national
694 cuisine and its continuation. The persistent re-enactment and ritualisation of time-
695 honoured behaviour patterns around food, its preparation and consumption appears to
696 play a crucial role in confirming a sense of cultural identity and appears to act as a
697 bulwark against the globalising tendencies within the contemporary food system. Such
698 a culinary culture maintains the centrality of food to everyday life and the application of
699 traditional cooking skills although the continued relevance of such methods and the
700 rejection of new ways of doing things, despite a radically changing environment,
701 remains to be seen.

702

703 While many aspects of culture are indeed deeply engrained and slow to change,
704 culture remains a fluid construct, influenced by a myriad of factors operating in the
705 wider environment. With the increased availability and popularity of a diverse range of
706 convenience type foods it does appear that there has been some sort of convergence
707 of domestic food practices and a restructuring of the skills required to transform food
708 into culturally acceptable meals albeit with considerable variation within each country
709 and across social divisions. However, rather than any fundamental transition in the
710 skills required (Lang *et al.* 2001) it is more that the precise nature of the required skills
711 have been modified and reflect broader changes in relation to the foods available, the
712 role of women in society and personal lifestyles. Perhaps then, not only are the skills
713 required for cooking evolving but with them, what is commonly meant by the term
714 cooking in contemporary society (see Short 2006; Caraher *et al.* 2010).

715

716 Limitations

This is a small exploratory study based on a limited number of respondents drawn from just two cities in Britain and France. While neither city could be said to be representative of the entire country, both were carefully selected, comparable and neither was atypical. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the attitudes and behaviour to cooking of those from either city are significantly different from the general population within each country. While the sample was perhaps disproportionately middle-aged and more likely to exhibit certain attitudes and behaviours, it was felt important to interview those more likely to have established relatively stable routines in relation to domestic food practices. All but four of the respondents were in employment and this may have increased the likelihood of them using convenience foods and other time saving strategies. Murcott (1995) also suggests that a limitation of such research into food and cooking is that it has relied on what people say they do rather than observing what they actually do. For example, Warde (1999) reminds us of possible bias in such findings as some respondents, particularly mothers and 'homemakers' may feel ashamed to discuss using convenience foods in place of preparing a 'proper meal' for their families. Such biases might be further exaggerated in France where it has been shown that personal identities are more closely inter-connected with food and where respondents may feel inclined to defend their cooking traditions. However, probing questions were repeatedly used during the interviews in an attempt to verify the findings and enhance the credibility of such a comparative study which it is felt has provided a meaningful comparison and insight into the attitudes and behaviours in relation to contemporary cooking habits in Britain and France.

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899

Table 1 Biographical profile of respondents

Name*	Gender	Age	Life-stage	No. in Household	Occupation	Description
French Respondents						
Ann-Marie	F	49	Family	2 or 3	Housewife	Previously worked as a nurse. Lives with husband and adolescent son from previous partner who stays alternate weeks. A confident cook and enjoys the social aspect of eating.
Mathilde	F	74	Widow & Empty nester	1	Retired	Separated 20 years ago and has 2 adult offspring. Confident to cook a range of simple meals, rarely ate out and her cooking/living habits etc were very regular.

Martine	F	51	Single	1	Teacher	A confident and regular cook with a repertoire of dishes and thought cooking was important and that people should take responsibility for their diets.
Jean Claude	M	43	Single	1	Unemployed	Had previously worked in docks as a logistics technician and driver. He was confident to cook but preferred not to.
Jules	M	46	Family	4	Architect	Self-employed & worked from home. His wife was not in employment and did most of the cooking although he might cook a *'couple of times a week'* and *'simple things'*.
Agathe	F	44	Family	4	Housewife	One of ten children who left school at 18. She enjoyed cooking, was confident, although *'not an expert'* and cooked most midday and evening meals for the family.
François	M	55	Married, No children	2	Teacher	Lived 7 years in French territories in Indian Ocean. He *'cooked very little'* and lacked confidence yet cooked most evenings. Found cooking a chore and often ate out.

Cedric	M	46	Family	2 or 5	Teacher	Lives with partner plus child from previous relationship and 2 children of present partner. Children stay alternate weeks. He enjoyed cooking, especially for family and friends.
Yann	M	35	Single	1	Computer technician	He cooked most days, would sometimes *'grab'* a takeaway, eat in a restaurant or use some convenience foods but preferred fresh foods cooked at home by him.
Mehdi	M	46	Family	5	Fruit & Veg. Trader	Left Algeria to attend university in Nantes. Now, due to his work, ate lunch out and rarely cooked although enjoyed cooking for family and friends when he had the time.
Sabine	F	34	Family	4	Librarian	Left school at 18 and a working mum of 2 young children. Considers cooking to be *'a pleasure…part of everyday life… it's a good moment for the family to be all together'*
Arnaud	M	37	Family	4	Electrician	Left school at 18. Enjoyed cooking, was confident and cooked most days although often *'something quick, maybe steak and*

						chips', when he returned home for lunch.
Löic	M	23	Single, lives with g'parents	3	IT Developer	Grandparents tended to cook for him. He cooked when he had the time and space but often preferred to *'do other things'* and found '*takeaways and drive-ins'* very practical
British Respondents						
John	M	55	Married, No children	2	Architect	Cooking shared with wife. Meals were quick, fresh '*and low in fat and sugar because of weight problems'* and were often eaten off the lap in front of TV. Enjoyed *'cheap and cheerful'* Indian restaurants and takeaways.
Susanne	F	55	Married, No children	2	Teacher	Cooking was shared, fairly mundane and she did not much enjoy it although enjoyed food, eating out and eating with friends, when her husband would cook and there was more time.

Paula	F	55	Widow, No children	1 or 2	Information Manager	She did not spend a lot of time cooking for herself although '*at the weekend I spend a bit longer'.* She was not adventurous but enjoyed cooking more elaborate meals for friends
Dave	M	58	Family	3 or 5	Teacher	Lived with 2nd wife and her daughter. He has 3 daughters from 1st marriage. Had a cooking and shopping rota to ensure tasks were equally divided. Enjoyed cooking and eating together even if the television was on.
Margaret	F	55	Family	3 or 5	District nurse	Lived with 2nd husband and his and her children. Either he or she cooked an evening family meal and it was *'sort of cuisine from all over the world'.* She enjoyed home prepared food but found it a chore.
George	M	58	Family	5+	Optometrist	Born in Belfast and lives with 2nd wife and an extended, largely vegetarian family. He *'loved'* cooking and enjoyed spending a couple of hours preparing a meal with *'a glass of wine'*.

Jackie	F	30	Family	3	Secretary	She ate *'readymade meals...because I am working and my husband works away and I have a young son so it is convenience really'*. They also enjoyed a Sunday roast and the occasional Indian takeaway.
Bob	M	40	Family	4	Manager	His wife also worked so tried to share the cooking but lacked time so tended to cook *'oven ready meals'*. He cooked Sunday lunch which he enjoyed and got *'a sense of pride as well'.*
Sarah	F	42	Family	3+	Administrator	Clearly passionate about food and *'I spend hours in the kitchen cooking...puddings and desserts and cakes and …Sunday... we have about 10-15 people up for dinner'*
Pete	M	49	Family	4	Tel. engineer	Enjoyed cooking, unlike his wife and prepared a range of fresh foods. '*Friday nights we tend to go out…just my wife and I...we don't eat as much together round the table, maybe three time a week'*

Tom	M	44	Family	5+	Tel. engineer	Lived in an extended family with up to 9 children. Learnt to cook in the army where he spent 14 years but now cooked infrequently because: *'My wife won't let me. She has the food ready for me when I get home'.* The children enjoyed convenience foods and treats such as McDonalds, Pizza Hut and KFCs
Alison	F	57	Married Empty Nester	2	Secretary	Did not enjoy food/cooking although confident with the *'basics'* and thought cooking was important as it was *'cheaper'* and *'you know what you are eating'*. Her husband never cooked.
Jack	M	30	Single with Cohabitees	4	Administrator	Lives with girlfriend, brother and tenant. Enjoyed cooking, was fairly confident and had *'about five kinds of nice meals I can do from scratch'* and did the majority of the cooking.
Angelina	F	43	Single with parents	3	Administrator	Had returned home to live with parents due to ill health. Tended to cook the evening meal although at weekends '*we all end up cooking together'. C*omplex family dietary

						requirements demanded complicated diets.

*Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality