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

3

4

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15 **Abstract.**

16

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

31

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

34

35

## 36 Introduction

37 Although resistant to change, domestic food practices and eating habits have always  
38 evolved alongside broader cultural changes and are linked to key social determinants  
39 and powerful economic structures in an environment in which food is both produced  
40 and consumed (see Mennell, 1996; Warde, 1997; Nestle Family Monitor, 2001; Mintel,  
41 2003; Cabinet Office Report, 2008). However, since the Second World War, the pace  
42 and rhythm of change appears to have quickened and Lang *et al.* (2001) considered  
43 that in Britain, knowledge of cooking skills and their application in the home are now in  
44 a period of fundamental transition. The potential significance of any such trend is that  
45 while no causal link has been established between cooking at home and obesity, it has  
46 been suggested that if people lack the ability or confidence to cook, their food choices  
47 are bound to be more limited (Chen *et al.* 2012; Rees *et al.* 2012). It has also been  
48 argued that the ability and willingness of someone to cook is one of the factors that can  
49 enable people to make informed decisions about their food choices, their diet and their  
50 capacity to implement advice on healthy eating (HEA 1998; Caraher *et al.* 1999a; Lang  
51 *et al.* 2001). Any decline in cooking skills can result in people becoming more reliant  
52 on convenience foods and while many are nutritionally well balanced, others are more  
53 highly processed and frequently high in fat, sugar and salt (Stitt *et al.* 1996) and thus  
54 require people to understand food labelling if they wish to control their diet (Caraher *et*  
55 *al.*). In light of the recent European ‘horse meat scandal’ and fraudulent food labelling,  
56 Blythman (2013) considers that if we want to eat safe, wholesome food then we must  
57 select unprocessed foods and cook them ourselves. Meanwhile, on the other side of  
58 the Atlantic, Pollan (2013: 1) suggests that cooking not only gives people greater  
59 autonomy over the foods they eat but that it is also

60 “the most important thing an ordinary person can do to help reform the  
61 American food system, make it healthier and more sustainable.”

62

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

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

98

99 However, evidence suggests that in the twenty first century, meals are becoming  
100 restructured, simpler, made with an increasing range of convenience foods,  
101 demonstrate greater male involvement and are more likely to be eaten alone although  
102 considerable variation remains and it is premature to report the 'death of the family  
103 meal' (HEA 1998; NFM 2001; Mintel 2003; Warde *et al.* 2005; Bove & Sobal 2006; Key  
104 Note 2007; Hunt *et al.* 2011). The globalisation thesis points to how powerful structural  
105 factors within the food system now operate at a global level and are having a more  
106 universal impact on the relationship the individual in many parts of the world, now has  
107 to food (Mennel, 1996; Ritzer, 2000; Popkin, 2001; Schmidhuber *et al.*, 2006; Andrieu  
108 *et al.*, 2006; Pollan, 2007; Warde *et al.* 2007; Millstone *et al.*, 2008). Large multinational  
109 food corporations have emerged which target consumers around the world that often  
110 appear to share increasingly similar habits and tastes as a result of cultural  
111 homogenisation (Wallerstein 1979; Giddens 1990; Robins 1991; Hall *et al.* 1992;  
112 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).

128

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

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

141

142 Aims of study

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



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

169

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

179           “their cuisines are popularly seen as offering striking contrasts, even though  
180           they have been in mutual contact and influenced each other for many  
181           centuries”.

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

188

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

192

## 193 **Methods**

### 194 Participants

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

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

213

## 214 Interviews

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

234

## 235 Data Analysis

236 Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and those undertaken in French, were  
237 translated into English during transcription by one of the researchers (AG). The  
238 accuracy of the translations was checked by an English teacher of French in the UK.  
239 The constant comparative method was used and the content of the interview  
240 transcripts were first examined and re-examined so as to get a sense of the interviews  
241 overall and simultaneously initial ideas for the categorisation of data emerged (Strauss  
242 & Corbin, 1990/evening meals Miles & Huberman, 1994 Masc Berg 2007). One page  
243 individual biographical profiles were developed which summarised respondents' overall  
244 attitudes and behaviours in relation to cooking as well as describing their defining  
245 social characteristics. A synopsis of such profiles can be seen in table 1 and such a  
246 process made an important contribution to the early stages of analysis (see Richards  
247 1998). An iterative process of reviewing the literature and analysing the emergent  
248 themes served to refine the categories and the interview transcripts were subsequently  
249 entered into NVivo, re-read and then coded accordingly. Categories or "nodes" for  
250 analysis revolved around themes such as 'domestic cooking habits' and included  
251 'frequency of cooking', 'gender roles and responsibility for cooking', 'influences on  
252 domestic food practices', 'learning to cook and confidence', 'childhood memories of  
253 cooking in the home' etc. The use of computer software facilitated the process of  
254 analysis as data categorised under each "node" could more easily be compared,  
255 reorganised and summarised and the writing of analytical memos further helped direct  
256 and log the refinement of themes within and across the 'nodes'. Such a process served  
257 to develop greater understanding of respondent's attitudes and behaviours in relation  
258 to their domestic food practices and contributed to more robust qualitative analysis and  
259 conclusion building (Miles *et al.* 1994; Richards and Richards 1998; Sarantakos 2005;  
260 Berg 2007). The same author (AG) undertook each stage of the collection and analysis

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

268

## 269 Results

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

279

### 280 Remembrance of meals past

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

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

294

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

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

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

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

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

319

320   Cooking as a significant activity

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

327           “I don’t think it would be nice always to eat takeaways. Is the act of cooking  
328           important...I’m not sure. I think it is important to maybe put a meal together so  
329           perhaps I do think cooking is a bit important.” (Susanne)

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

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

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

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

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

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

342 François continued:

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

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

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

349

350 Cooking skills and confidence

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



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

358 “There are certain things that I do that I am confident of. Friends came to lunch  
359 on Sunday and I did lamb pasta, I did grapes... cheese... then I just got some  
360 ice cream. Yeah, I would never do a roast, I’m hopeless ...it makes me  
361 stressed.”

362 French women discussed being fairly confident to prepare a range of foods although  
363 lacked some skills necessary to prepare certain dishes. The French men considered  
364 they had a set of basic skills yet around a half went on to describe quite complex  
365 dishes such as “*beef bourguignon*”<sup>3</sup>(François). Two more men explained:

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

370 “...steak au poivre, Coquilles St Jacques, flambés with a cream sauce<sup>4</sup>. These  
371 are some of my specialities but they are not difficult”. (Jules)

372

373 Contemporary domestic cooking practices

374 Respondents were asked about the foods they regularly cooked in the home and  
375 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

403

404 The everyday scheduling of modern life

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

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

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

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

423 “It has to be quick, maybe steak and chips.” (Arnaud)

424 “...at weekends it [cooking] is possible, it is just a question of time.” (Sabine)

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

428

429 Cooking and gender

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

433 “We go back to those days, the wife cooked and the husband went out to work”

434 (Alison).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

463

464 Cooking for social occasions

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

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

479 “I think we make more of an effort but it would probably be something that we  
480 had done in the past and we’re happy with and is a bit out of the ordinary.”

481 (Dave)

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

486 “I love people coming round and sitting round a table and eating, I also think  
487 they haven’t come for the food and the important thing is that we are all round  
488 the table together”.

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

491 “I always take a risk and do things that I have never done before...at times it is a  
492 success, at other times not.”

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

496

497 Cooking traditions: change and continuity

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

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

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

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

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

517 Meals prepared and eaten in France were described as ‘traditional’ and for example,  
518 Ann-Marie explained how she cooked “often French dishes in sauce...classics I  
519 suppose...dishes of meat with sauce...blanquette, bourguignon, boeuf en daube<sup>5</sup>”. No  
520 respondents in France spoke of cooking ‘ethnic’ dishes although couscous was  
521 discussed as being quick and easy. However when respondents discussed eating it as  
522 part of a tagine, they explained this was done in restaurants and only rarely cooked in  
523 the home<sup>6</sup>.

524

## 525 **Discussion**

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

532

533 One key difference in the findings between Britain and France was that no French  
534 respondent described the use of totally prepared ready meals (see also Pettinger *et al.*  
535 2004; Fischler *et al.* 2008), while in Britain, oven ready foods such as lasagne, battered  
536 fish, bread crumbed chicken and other such convenience options were common place

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.



537 among about half of those interviewed. Earlier research carried out by Pettinger *et al.*  
538 (2004 and 2006) also found that while about two-thirds of their French respondents  
539 cooked a meal from raw ingredients on a daily basis, less than a quarter of their  
540 English respondents had done so although there was considerable variation among  
541 social groups (see Rozin *et al.* 1999; Taylor Nelson Sofres 2003; INPES 2004; Warde  
542 *et al.* 2005; FSA 2007). Busy work and/or personal schedules were often cited as the  
543 reason why convenience food options were selected and Warde (1999: 518) considers  
544 that as a result of such schedules and 'de-routinisation', people have less opportunity  
545 to prepare a meal at home from scratch and/or eat with other members of the  
546 household. Certainly respondents in France and Britain described how the pressures  
547 they faced were as much about difficulties of timing as they were simply a matter of  
548 shortage of time although overall, respondents in France described being more willing  
549 to set aside time for cooking and valued it more than their British counterparts (see also  
550 Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2010).

551

552 It was also apparent from respondents on both sides of The Channel that many  
553 transformational processes continue to be applied to raw foods so as to make them  
554 both edible and acceptable and the application of heat or energy to raw ingredients  
555 remains a defining characteristic of cooking (Levi-Strauss 1965; McGee 1984; Murcott  
556 1995a; Symons 2000, Pollan 2013). However, the precise nature of such  
557 transformational processes is changing as people increasingly rely at least in part, on  
558 mechanical labour in factories to transform raw ingredients in to ever more ready  
559 prepared foods (Lupton, 1996; Mintz, 1996; Ritzer; 2000; Caraher 2001). Caraher *et al.*  
560 (1999b) ask whether the term cooking now also refers to the assembly process or  
561 the re-heating of ready cooked items and other writers have suggested that blunt  
562 distinctions between '*cooking from scratch*' and cooking using convenience products

563 are overstated (see James *et al.* 1997; Lang *et al.* 1999; Caraher 2001; Stead *et al.*  
564 2004; Short 2006). Whether cooking with fresh, raw foods or cooking with pre-  
565 prepared &/or convenience foods or indeed a mix of these remains a complex practical  
566 task and while the application of mechanical skills may now be less essential, the cook  
567 continues to require academic knowledge and ‘tacit’ perceptual, conceptual, design,  
568 and planning skills (Short). For example, Short noted that regardless of the foods  
569 being prepared, the cook still demonstrated perceptual skills of timing and judgement  
570 so that different foods would be ready simultaneously. Similarly she contends that  
571 abilities to understand the properties of food in terms of taste, colour and texture and  
572 how they will react when combined or heated continue to be displayed. She noted how  
573 people who cook continue to demonstrate menu design skills, organisational skills and  
574 multi-tasking skills as well as creative skills to prepare a meal from whatever  
575 ingredients were available. Cooking, in order to get food “on the table and down  
576 throats” (Lang *et al.* 2001: 2) embraces a whole range of skills and those interviewed  
577 for this research described having a variety of such skills so as to be able to safely  
578 prepare a range of foods to suit the tastes and preferences of others. Significantly,  
579 however, British respondents were more likely to discuss how organisational skills and  
580 the lack of confidence caused them the greatest anxiety in relation to cooking and such  
581 factors have been found to influence the degree to which people find cooking to be an  
582 effort and in turn this tends to impact upon their ultimate cooking practices (see, Short  
583 2006).

584

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

589 vindaloo<sup>7</sup> 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

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<sup>7</sup> 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

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

653

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

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

681

682 With less time now being spent on cooking in the home there is concern that this will  
683 negatively impact on the inter-generational transfer of cooking skills and undermine  
684 confidence to cook as well as knowledge about food more generally. Certainly, the  
685 British respondents, with two exceptions, appeared more reticent about their cooking  
686 skills than their French counterparts and it remained more common in France for  
687 respondents to express pride in the fact that the greater part of the meal would be  
688 'cooked from scratch'. Perhaps as a result of the greater use of raw ingredients they  
689 appeared to have retained more confidence in relation to cooking and handling food,  
690 were more prepared to experiment and this appeared to be an important influence on  
691 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

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



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**Table 1 Biographical profile of respondents**

<b>Name*</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Life-stage</b>	<b>No. in Household</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>French Respondents</b>						
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 <i>'couple of times a week'</i> and <i>'simple things'</i> .
Agathe	F	44	Family	4	Housewife	One of ten children who left school at 18. She enjoyed cooking, was confident, although <i>'not an expert'</i> 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 <i>'cooked very little'</i> 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 ' <i>grab</i> ' 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.  <i>Considers cooking to be 'a pleasure...part of everyday life... it's a good moment for the family to be all together'</i>
Arnaud	M	37	Family	4	Electrician	Left school at 18. Enjoyed cooking, was confident and cooked most days although often ' <i>something quick, maybe steak and</i>

						<i>chips</i> ’, 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 <i>‘do other things’</i> and found <i>‘takeaways and drive-ins’</i> very practical
<b>British Respondents</b>						
John	M	55	Married, No children	2	Architect	Cooking shared with wife. Meals were quick, fresh <i>‘and low in fat and sugar because of weight problems’</i> and were often eaten off the lap in front of TV. Enjoyed <i>‘cheap and cheerful’</i> 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 ' <i>at the weekend I spend a bit longer</i> '. She was not adventurous but enjoyed cooking more elaborate meals for friends
Dave	M	58	Family	3 or 5	Teacher	Lived with 2 <sup>nd</sup> 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 2 <sup>nd</sup> husband and his and her children. Either he or she cooked an evening family meal and it was ' <i>sort of cuisine from all over the world</i> '. She enjoyed home prepared food but found it a chore.
George	M	58	Family	5+	Optometrist	Born in Belfast and lives with 2 <sup>nd</sup> wife and an extended, largely vegetarian family. He ' <i>loved</i> ' cooking and enjoyed spending a couple of hours preparing a meal with ' <i>a glass of wine</i> '.

Jackie	F	30	Family	3	Secretary	She ate <i>'readymade meals...because I am working and my husband works away and I have a young son so it is convenience really'</i> . 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 <i>'oven ready meals'</i> . He cooked Sunday lunch which he enjoyed and got <i>'a sense of pride as well'</i> .
Sarah	F	42	Family	3+	Administrator	Clearly passionate about food and <i>'I spend hours in the kitchen cooking...puddings and desserts and cakes and ...Sunday... we have about 10-15 people up for dinner'</i>
Pete	M	49	Family	4	Tel. engineer	Enjoyed cooking, unlike his wife and prepared a range of fresh foods. <i>'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'</i>

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: <i>'My wife won't let me. She has the food ready for me when I get home'</i> . 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 <i>'basics'</i> and thought cooking was important as it was <i>'cheaper'</i> and <i>'you know what you are eating'</i> . 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 <i>'about five kinds of nice meals I can do from scratch'</i> 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 <i>'we all end up cooking together'</i> . Complex family dietary

						requirements demanded complicated diets.
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\*Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality