

THE PRACTICE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DOMESTIC COOKING:  
INSIGHTS FROM FAMILIES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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B.Sc., University of Alberta, 2002

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Integrated Studies in Land and Food Systems)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

April 2010

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## **Abstract**

Does domestic cooking still matter in an era where pre-prepared meals and convenience foods are readily available and relatively affordable for the majority of the population? Should we be concerned by alarms of culinary deskilling raised in the media? This thesis addresses these questions by investigating the practice and significance of domestic cooking and cooking skills for participant families in the province of British Columbia in Canada. The study design was qualitative. A small sample of 22 families was recruited, where at least one adult and one teen were interviewed in each family. A maximum of diversity was sought within the sample, and families were selected from across the income gradient, with half living in an urban community (northeast Vancouver) and the other half living in a rural area (District of Kent). Each participant was involved in two semi-structured interviews including two photo elicitation activities. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then coded using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. The research findings provide insight into how much cooking was happening in participants' homes, who was doing the cooking, and how cooking skills were learned and taught. A significant and novel finding was the insight gained on the subjective meaning or significance of being able to cook within families. Participants spoke of home cooking as significant for reasons beyond just nourishing bodies, and in ways that challenge popular concerns about culinary deskilling. The findings support the argument that domestic cooking may be transitioning from a state of 'having to cook' to 'wanting to cook'. As well, the analysis of the findings suggests that the relationship between cooking skills and food practices is indirect. From a public health perspective an argument is made for the significance of basic cooking skills as enabling citizens to follow the dietary guidance in Canada's Food Guide. These basic cooking skills may best be taught, as part of a multimodal health promotion strategy, at periods of life transition when people are most interested in acquiring and applying cooking skills.

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## List of abbreviations

**BC:** Province of British Columbia, Canada

**CIHR:** The Canadian Institutes of Health Research is the Government of Canada's agency responsible for funding health research in Canada and an indirect funder of this research project

**Family Food Practices study:** The Local Food Cultures and Socioeconomic Status as Social Determinants of Nutritional Health: Exploring Family Food Practices study, of which this MSc thesis was embedded

**Kent:** The research site in the District of Kent, a rural area at the eastern end of the Fraser valley in southern British Columbia

**Km<sup>2</sup>:** Square kilometer is a measurement of area equal to one kilometer length by one kilometer width or 0.386102159 square miles, used in this thesis to compare the population densities at each research site

**n.d.:** used to cite references where no date of publication was provided

**Vancouver:** The research site in northeast Vancouver, an urban area at the western end of the Fraser valley in southern British Columbia

## **Glossary**

**Domestic cooking:** used interchangeably with “home cooking” to refer to the food preparation activities done in households in order to feed the family

**Cooking:** used broadly, and interchangeably with “food preparation”, to describe the activities carried out to make a meal. Participants’ more specific uses of the terms “cooking” and “baking” are elaborated on in Chapter Four.



## Acknowledgements

Dr. Gwen Chapman, my graduate supervisor, opened the door of the academy and enabled me to begin graduate studies. She created a space for my thesis research within her larger research project, and provided funding, mentorship and hands-on learning opportunities through a graduate research assistantship and teaching assistantship. All along the path of graduate studies Gwen has been encouraging, supportive and available. Gwen has positively shaped my graduate experience and I am grateful to her.

I would also like to thank Drs. Susan Barr and Alejandro Rojas who, as members of my graduate thesis committee, provided ongoing support and encouragement, giving feedback and advice on my research proposal and thesis.

I would also like to thank Dr. Sonya Sharma, postdoctoral research fellow, who conducted the recruitment, data collection and coding for the District of Kent research site. Sonya and I worked closely together on the *Family Food Practices* project and from the beginning she treated me as an equal, and was always willing to make time to talk about research, studies and life.

I am thankful to Faculty of Land and Food Systems instructors and staff for support and encouragement as I made my way through the program especially Drs. Alejandro Rojas, David Shackleton, Cyprien Lomas and Gwen Chapman. In addition I would also like to thank Drs. Deirdre Kelly and Sandra Mathison from the Faculty of Education for opening my eyes to a social science research perspective and Dr. Gale Smith for her insight on the teaching of home economics and cooking in the province of BC.

I am thankful for research funding from UBC in the form of a University Graduate Fellowship, as well as Canadian Institutes of Health Research funding in the form of a graduate research assistantship. Finally, this research would not have been possible without the voluntary and generous participation of the twenty-two families from Vancouver and the District of Kent BC who were interviewed for this research. Though I cannot thank them by name, I am grateful for their willingness to participate in this study and share the stories of their family foodways.

## **Dedication**

This thesis, and all it involved, is dedicated to my partner Nicki; whose imagination, daring, support and example gave me the courage to take this path.

# **Chapter 1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction to the research problem**

Diet, as a product of individual food practices, is an important factor in human growth, health, and the prevention of diet related chronic diseases (Joint WHO/FAO Consultation, 2003). Recognizing this, the government of Canada has been producing food guides since 1942 (Health Canada, 2002a), providing population level guidance on what types and amounts of foods to eat. Food guides and related nutrition programs have the aim of promoting healthy food choices in order to meet nutrient needs, promote physical health and well being, and reduce the risk of diet related chronic disease. However, despite 67 years of food guides in Canada, the majority of the Canadian population does not eat according to the recommended dietary pattern. Most notably, the majority of Canadians do not eat the recommended number of servings from the vegetables and fruit food group (Garriguet, 2004; Milne, 2004). In addition, diet related heart disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity continue to pose significant economic (Health Canada, 2002b) and social burdens.

This history of food guide promotion combined with a poor uptake of dietary guidance illustrates that simply providing nutrition education is not enough to ensure population wide adoption of healthy eating practices. In order to effectively promote healthy eating, a better understanding of what influences individual and family food practices is needed. Why are Canadians unable or unwilling to align their food choices with the dietary pattern shown in the food guide? Are there challenges to adopting this dietary pattern?

One challenge to eating in accordance with the food guide may be the task of preparing appetizing meals based on guidance detailing the kinds and amounts of foods recommend for each age group. This task is typically relegated to the domestic (or home) cook, as food guides are targeted at individuals and families, not restaurant cooks, and it is no small feat when considering the different nutrient needs of individuals in families or other considerations such as food preferences, time available for food preparation, or cooking within a budget.

The 1944 version of Canada's Food Rules (the 1961 version was the first to be called a food guide) was the first to show graphical images of food. From this first pictorial presentation to the current version, the Food Guide has emphasized whole and minimally processed foods both in graphic and textual forms (e.g. vegetables, cheese, breads, and tinned milk or canned beans and tuna in later versions). The 2007 version of the Food Guide is most explicit in recommending whole and minimally processed foods and suggests that half of one's grain choices be whole grain, that vegetables and fruits be chosen instead of their juices, and that lean meats and alternatives be chosen instead of high fat processed meats. Some foods such as fruit, nuts or milk are commonly consumed 'as is,' however vegetables, grains, meats and their alternatives typically require some form of preparation before becoming an acceptable meal. While the print version of the Food Guide does make some reference to healthier cooking methods and illustrates how a meal might be deconstructed into food guides servings, it does not provide support for domestic cooks on how to construct acceptable meals for family members using the recommended amounts and types of foods. This information gap has been addressed to some extent in online version of the Food Guide where a section called 'Using The Food Guide' was added to include supportive information on meal planning and grocery shopping, with examples of "fast and easy meal ideas" along with illustrations of how a family meal can satisfy the different recommended food guide serving needs of each member (Health Canada, 2007b).

Within North American families that include children, mothers have historically been, and continue to be, the primary family member responsible for preparing meals (Bowers, 2000). Social changes have resulted in an increasing proportion of mothers working outside of the home (Statistics Canada, 2006a), a decreasing amount of time spent on home food preparation, and an increasing proportion of families' food dollars being spent on foods from restaurants, ready to eat/heat meals, and foods not included in one of the Food Guide's four food groups (Statistics Canada, 2003). These social and dietary trends combined with an increasing prevalence of other diet related chronic conditions have lead to public and academic concerns over the effects of a perceived decline in domestic cooking skill on public health (Lyon, Colquhoun, & Alexander, 2003; Short, 2003b, 2006, pp. 2-6). However, little is known about the relationship

between peoples' cooking skills and their food practices (Caraher, Dixon, Lang, & Carr-Hill, 1999; Lang & Caraher, 2001). While there is some evidence that cooking courses positively change food practices over the short term (Stead et al., 2004; Wrieden et al., 2007) there is little available evidence looking at home cooking, how people think of their cooking skills, or what may be the relationship between these skills and family food practices. In addition, there is little research describing the relationships between home cooking, cooking skills and health (Lang & Caraher, 2001) or justifying concerns over culinary deskilling.

With public health campaigns encouraging people to eat more fresh and minimally processed foods, should more public health resources be directed toward home cooking and cooking skill as a determinant of food practices? In an age where there is an abundance of commercially prepared food available, do domestic cooking skills still matter to people in the context of their everyday lives? My thesis research is designed to contribute understanding to these significant questions.

## **1.2 Personal significance of the topic**

I have observed throughout my professional careers as an apprentice cook and dietitian that a person's confidence in their own cooking skill can have a strong influence on how they approach cooking situations. For some people, cooking is a pleasure and their skills enable them to step into the kitchen comfortably and confidently, viewing cooking as an act of provision, caring and creativity. For others, who have a very low degree of confidence in their cooking skills, the requirement to prepare a meal can lead to considerable anxiety and self-doubt. A small qualitative study from Scotland supports this observation, with half of the study participants falling into what was described as the "basic but fearful" group, those for whom venturing beyond familiar dishes caused a considerable amount of anxiety, and who were reluctant to make even slight variations to standard home meals. The other half of respondents were evenly divided on either side of this group with about a quarter feeling even less confident and classified as being in the "useless" and "hopeless" group, and the remaining quarter being more confident and falling into the "confident" group (Stead et al., 2004). Though not mentioned in that study, there was likely also another group of people who, regardless of their level of

confidence in their cooking skills, had very little interest in cooking and viewed it as a task best left to others.

Based on a combination of my personal and professional experiences, I have come to consider basic cooking skills as essential for being able to make use of the health-promoting whole and minimally processed foods shown in Canada's Food Guide, and resist the billion dollar marketing efforts of the global food industry (Lang & Heasman, 2004, pp. 198-202; Nestle, 2002, p. 12). These marketing efforts typically focus on value added processed foods, the types of foods that are generally higher in calories, fat, sugar, and/or sodium than their whole or minimally processed counterparts. Referring back to the study on cooking confidence by Stead et al. (2004), about three quarters of that group (those in the "useless/hopeless" and "basic but fearful" categories) would be unlikely to have the confidence in their cooking skills required to prepare meals based on the food level guidance in Canada's Food Guide.

### **1.3 Research objectives**

The primary objective of this study was to gain insight into the significance of domestic cooking and cooking skills for participant families in contemporary BC. Other objectives included learning what was happening in participant's homes with regard to cooking, and determining how domestic cooking skills were being learned and shared between generations.

At the onset of this study one of the primary goals was to gain insight into the relationship between participant's perceptions of their cooking skills, food practices and health. However, early analysis of the data prompted a slight revision of the research objectives in order to focus on the richest area of findings—that of the subjective significance of home cooking and being able to cook.

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

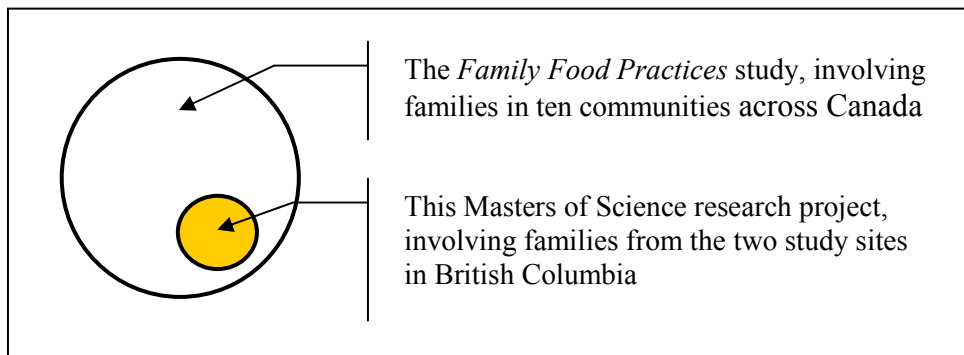
The findings from this research will be of significance to health and food policy makers, home economists, dietitians and others interested in the relationships between food choices, domestic cooking and health. This research contributes to gaps in knowledge around the topic of domestic cooking, providing new insights into how teenagers and parents perceive home cooking, what is happening around cooking in

participants' homes, and how cooking skills are learned and shared in the family context within British Columbia Canada. Perhaps more importantly, the findings will show the continued relevance of domestic cooking to families, linking themes from the data with broader issues in the Canadian food system and society.

### **1.5 Researcher's role/positioning the study**

This study was set within a national scale Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) funded research project titled *Local Food Cultures and Socioeconomic Status as Social Determinants of Nutritional Health: Exploring Family Food Practices*—short titled the *Family Food Practices* study from here on. Drs. Gwen Chapman (Associate Professor at the University of British Columbia) and Brenda Beagan (Associate Professor at Dalhousie University) were the principal investigators of this study, with research sites in 10 communities across Canada. I was a part of this research team, and as a graduate research assistant was responsible for all research activities at the northeast Vancouver study site in British Columbia (BC) including recruitment, data collection, and the initial coding and analysis. This work was carried out in partnership with a postdoctoral fellow who was similarly responsible for research activities at the District of Kent site in rural BC. I worked closely with the postdoctoral fellow in an effort to ensure equivalence in data collection and analysis for both research sites in BC.

Dr. Gwen Chapman was also my academic supervisor and as her graduate student I was given the opportunity to position my thesis research within the *Family Food Practices* study. I provided input into the interview guide developed for the *Family Food Practices* study and added several questions related to home cooking and cooking skill in order to address the research questions. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the embedded context of this thesis research project. Positioning this research as a 'subset of analysis' presented some constraints; however there were also several benefits. Chief among those benefits were the structural supports and mentorship that came from working with a team of experienced researchers—something that was invaluable for this novice social science researcher.



**Figure 1.1** Positioning this thesis research within the *Family Food Practices* study

For this Masters thesis research project I have analyzed a subset of the data generated from the *Family Food Practices* study, with attention towards the topics of home cooking, cooking skills and food practices. This thesis focuses on data from the two study sites located in the province of British Columbia, 1) northeast Vancouver and 2) The District of Kent. Figure 1.2 below shows the location of the two research sites at opposite ends of the Fraser Valley. The northeast Vancouver site is a densely populated and diverse urban area. The District of Kent site covers a much larger geographic area, has a smaller and less diverse population, and is mostly rural in nature.

This project has provided opportunities to hear what parents and teens in BC say about home cooking and their cooking skills. While I have clearly entered the project in favour of home cooking and cooking skill, the research has demanded that I frame these within the context of other influences on family food practices. The significance of this is that while cooking skills loom large in my mind as an influence on food practices, based on my history of professional and home cooking, I have come to see cooking skill as just one piece of the puzzle—perhaps a piece that has not received enough attention in efforts to promote public health through nutrition or in the research literature. Domestic cooking seems to be viewed as a type of ‘motherhood’ issue in that it is thought of positively but uncritically, with little research having been done on the topic to date.





**Figure 1.2** Map showing the northeast Vancouver research site circled in red on the left, and the District of Kent research site circled on the right. (Map from The District of Kent website, 2009)

## 1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter Two lays out the conceptual framework for the study, reviewing relevant literature and detailing the conceptual framework used. Chapter Three provides details on the study design and methods. Chapter Four presents the research findings, and Chapter Five includes a discussion of the findings and the conclusion. All appendices are located at the end of the document and provide supporting details.

## **Chapter 2 Conceptual framework**

The purpose of this chapter is to ground the research in previous work and present the theoretical concepts to be used. The chapter begins by looking at why domestic cooking skills are viewed as important. This is followed by a review of the concerns about culinary deskilling. The literature review then concludes with a look at the changing context for domestic cooking skills. A description of the theoretical concepts that inform the study brings the chapter to a close.

### **2.1 The significance of domestic cooking and cooking skills**

In the small body of published research concerned with domestic cooking skills, these home-based skills are framed as important primarily because of their role in influencing health and nutrition. The literature also presents an implicit, if not explicit, case for domestic cooking skills as being important in the areas of family cohesion and food culture, as well as for the achievement of community food security (CFS). The subsections below will present the case for each argument.

#### **2.1.1 Health and nutrition**

The evidence linking domestic cooking and cooking skill with health and nutrition is sparse as domestic cooking is a topic that has received very little research attention. Martin Caraher has identified that there is a lack of available evidence on the topics of the changes in home cooking over time, and how food is prepared and eaten (Caraher et al., 1999). Frances Short echoes this observation, and goes on to cite sociologist Alan Warde, stating that “cookery books, food journals and so on have no explicit theoretical base or analytical framework and do not necessarily represent actual cooking practices” (Short, 2003b, p. 14). One reason for this academic oversight may be because home cooking has historically fallen within the realm of the unpaid work of women. As such, domestic cooking may be thought of as falling under the umbrella of low status and taken for granted activities—the types of activities unlikely to attract research attention.

There is some evidence that cooking courses positively change individual food practices over the short term (Stead et al., 2004; Wrieden et al., 2007) resulting in such

benefits as an increase of fruit consumption and cooking from basic ingredients. As well, including hands-on cooking activities as part of nutrition education programs like *Cooking with a Chef* has shown the potential to increase cooking self-efficacy and improve the availability and accessibility of produce at home (Michaud, Condrasky, & Griffin, 2007). Also, a survey of young adults, ages 18-23, in the US found that the majority did not perform selected food preparation behaviours on a weekly basis. However, those young adults who reported frequent food preparation were more likely to meet dietary guidelines for fruit, calcium and vegetable consumption (Larson, Perry, Story, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2006). Canadian researchers investigating cooking skills within the context of food security for low-income households found that the frequency of 'from scratch' meal preparation and complexity of at home preparation were positively associated with intake from all four food groups. The study also challenged the notion that families in poverty lacked the skill to prepare foods from scratch, and suggested that having cooking skills cannot protect families from the poor dietary outcomes resulting from a low income (McLaughlin, Tarasuk, & Kreiger, 2003). Despite these short term benefits, little is known about the relationship between domestic cooking skills and diet quality over the longer term, or the possible relationship between domestic cooking, cooking skills and health (Lang & Caraher, 2001).

There is however an ample body of research linking the products of domestic cooking (i.e. dietary patterns) to health. Research linking foods to health tends to focus on nutrients, but people eat food and not nutrients. A nutritious diet is one of an array of factors that determines our health (Marmot, 2005; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). As such, it is known to play an important role in child growth and development (Walker et al., 2007), and in later life is an important factor in reducing the risk of developing the chronic diseases of diabetes, cardio-vascular diseases, dental diseases (Joint WHO/FAO Consultation, 2003), osteoporosis (Cloutier & Barr, 2003), and cancers of the digestive tract (World Cancer Research Fund & American Institute for Cancer Research, 2007). Based on these known associations between nutrient intake and health, federal governments in Canada, the United States and many other countries have used food guides to promote a dietary pattern, which according to the best available evidence, will promote health and reduce the risk of acquiring diet related chronic disease. In North

America the best available evidence from nutrition science is articulated in the Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) reports, developed jointly by US and Canadian scientists under the direction of the Institute of Medicine of the US National Academies. Both the United States and Canada recently revised their food guides to better reflect the dietary guidance suggested by the DRI reports and the changing food environment in both countries (Health Canada, 2007a; USDA, 2005).

Food guides can be thought of as public education tools communicating the nutrition policies of the government. The official dietary guidance in the current federal food guides from Canada and the USA suggests that everyone should eat more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, meat alternatives such as lentils, beans and tofu and drink low fat milk. At the same time the public is advised to limit intakes of total calories, fat, sodium and sugar. This guidance suggests a diet that is predominately composed of a variety of whole and minimally processed foods. In order for people to make use of the health promoting foods shown in food guides they must be able to either a) prepare those foods themselves, converting the separate foods from each food group into a meal, or b) attain them in pre-prepared meal form from others such as family cooks, restaurants, or food manufacturers. Despite the broad promotion of food guides, research based in Canada and the USA has indicated that only a relatively small proportion of the population in each country actually eats according to the recommendations of the respective food guides (McNamara, Ranney, Kantor, & Krebs-Smith, 1999; Milne, 2004). The reasons for this population level non-compliance are unclear, but likely reflect the complexity of the determinants of individual food practices.

A complex array of factors at the micro, intermediate and macro levels influence the food practices of individuals and populations. At the micro-level of personal choice, psychological determinants such as food preferences play an important role in food selection decisions (Asp, 1999) as do perceptions of time scarcity (Jabs & Devine, 2006). At the intermediate level of the eating environment, research by Brian Wansink and colleagues has shown that individuals make more than 200 food choice decisions each day, many of which are unconsciously influenced by ambient factors that are independent of the food itself, such as the time of day and social interactions (Garg, Wansink, & Inman, 2007; Wansink & Sobal, 2007). At the macro-level, food practices are influenced

by family (Beagan & Chapman, 2004; A. Hertzler & Frary, 1996; Woodruff & Hanning, 2008), peers (A. A. Hertzler & Frary, 1992), culture (Asp, 1999), social context (Delormier, Frohlich, & Potvin, 2009), socioeconomic class (Elaine M Power, 2004), history, gender, income (Caraher & Coveney, 2004), ethnicity (Ristovski-Slijepcevic, Chapman, Beagan, & Bassett, 2006), and food related policies from governments (Wansink, 2002) as well as corporate level processing, retailing, and marketing strategies (Davies, 2006) which are outside the control of individuals (Blaylock, Smallwood, Kassek, Variyam, & Aldrich, 1999). What this research on determinants of food choice shows is that it is not enough to simply educate citizens on the composition of a healthy diet, as is often done with nutrition education.

While there is very little research directly linking domestic cooking and cooking skill to health, there is a related body of research that has shown positive correlations between family meals, health and nutrition (Woodruff & Hanning, 2008). The research on the health and nutritional benefits of family meals has shown that the frequency of family meals was positively associated with dietary intake of fruits, vegetables, grains, and calcium rich foods, and negatively associated with soft drink consumption in adolescents (Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, Story, Croll, & Perry, 2003). The same study found a strong positive association between the frequency of family meals and intakes of calcium, iron, vitamins A, C, E, B6, folate, and fiber, as well as with the percentage of energy from protein. Related research has found that family meal frequency during adolescence correlated with higher intakes of fruit, vegetables and key nutrients along with a lower intake of soft drinks during young adulthood (Larson, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, & Story, 2007). In addition, another study conducted with adolescents in Ontario found that frequency of family dinners was significantly associated with eating breakfast on the day of the survey, confidence in being able to eat healthfully while at home and during social time with friends, and lower concerns about body weight (Woodruff & Hanning, 2009).

While these studies do not explicitly link domestic cooking or cooking skills to the food behaviours and positive nutrient intakes correlated with frequency of family meals, they do imply such a relationship. Canadian statistics (Statistics Canada, 2003) show that most of the foods purchased by households are basic groceries. Eating out at

restaurants, including fast food and take-out, only accounts for about 33% of household food expenditures in BC, with the remainder spent at stores (most of which is at supermarkets). Of the amount spent at grocery stores the majority is spent on basic items such as meats, dairy, eggs, bakery and cereal products, fruits and nuts and vegetables (see Table 2.1 below adapted from Statistics Canada, 2003). Thus, while it is true that families can eat together without having to cook, the Canadian food expenditure statistics show that a large proportion of the average household food budget is spent on basic foods from grocery stores, the kinds of foods that typically require food preparation at home before becoming an acceptable meal. For this reason it is reasonable to expect that there is some relationship between the benefits associated with family meals and domestic cooking.

**Table 2.1** Percentage of weekly food expenditure spent in stores 1982 and 2001

<b>Average percentage of total weekly food expenditure from stores in Canada</b>		
	<b>1982</b>	<b>2001</b>
<b>Food Purchased from stores</b>	100%	100%
<b>Meat</b>	27	20
<b>Fish and other marine products</b>	3	3
<b>Dairy products and eggs</b>	18	15
<b>Bakery and other cereal products</b> (includes bread, cookies, desserts, pasta, grains, breakfast cereal and related foods)	13	15
<b>Fruits and nuts</b>	10	11
<b>Vegetables</b>	9	10
<b>Condiments, spices and vinegar</b>	2	3
<b>Sugar and sugar preparations</b>	2	4
<b>Coffee and tea</b>	3	2
<b>Fats and oils</b>	2	1
<b>Other foods, materials and food preparations</b> (includes soups, precooked frozen foods and dinners, other precooked foods, potato chips and related foods)	6	10
<b>Non-alcoholic beverages</b>	3	4
<b>Food expenditures made while away from home on trips overnight or longer</b> (inclusive of restaurant and store purchases)	2	3
Adapted from Table 4 in Food Expenditure in Canada 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2003) Note: The sum of the 2001 column is 101% due to rounding		

### **2.1.2 Family cohesion and food culture**

A second case for the significance of domestic cooking and cooking skills can be drawn from the literature on the social benefits of family meals as well as connections between home cooking and food culture. In his history of food, Felipe Fernández-Armesto describes cooking as “a precious invention because of the way it forged community” and laments the “loneliness of the fast food eater” (Fernández-Armesto, 2001, p. 22). Several studies have described important social benefits of family meals, again with an implied relationship to domestic cooking and cooking skills as argued above. One study showed that both parents and adolescents had positive perceptions of family meals and suggested that the family meal may be useful for enhancing family togetherness and role modeling desirable behaviours (Fulkerson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Story, 2006). Another study by the same authors focused on ‘at risk’ youth and found a significant inverse relationship between family meal frequency and depressive symptoms (Fulkerson, Yubik, Story, Lytle, & Arcan, 2009). A large survey of adolescents in Minnesota USA examined the relationship between family meals and measures of psycho-social health, and found that frequency of family meals appeared to act as a protective factor in the lives of adolescents. The frequency of family meals was associated with a significantly lower odds of tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use, low grade point average, depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation (Eisenberg, Olson, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Bearinger, 2004). The authors then attempted to control for family connectedness and separate this from the affects of family meals. For boys, the influence of family meals remained significant for substance abuse and depressive symptoms. For girls, the results remained significant for all relationships except that between family meals and self esteem.

Similar to popular concerns about a decline in domestic cooking skills, there are also concerns about the decline of family meals that have prompted the development of numerous websites promoting family meals. For example, within BC alone there are the ‘Better Together’ (BC Dairy Foundation & BC Ministry of Healthy Living & Sport, n.d.), ‘Eat Together’ (Fraser Health Authority, n.d.), and ‘Eat Smart BC’ (EatSmart BC, 2008) websites along with an ‘Eat Together, Eat at Home’ PDF resource (British Columbia Medical Association, n.d.). As well, in neighboring Washington state there is the ‘Eat

Better, Eat Together' website hosted by Washington State University (Butkus, 2005). These websites and resources all promote family meals, citing such benefits as better communication within families, better school performance for children, and healthy child development, in addition to better nutritional intake. Beyond simply promoting family meals, these websites typically provides tips and resources to help parents plan successful family meals. It is worth noting that the websites cited above are supported, at least in part, by government, health authority or university institutions, suggesting a level of official support for family meals.

In a review of the social value of family meals (Story, 2005), Mary Story cites anthropological research describing how meals are important symbols of social connection, and that the transactions surrounding the meal have been historically considered the social glue of society.

Though the family meal is usually framed as a positive social occasion that may act as a protective factor for nutrient and social indicators of health, this is not always the case. Some research (Kichler & Crowther, 2001; Krug et al., 2009) has found that family meals can have a negative impact, such as when the communication at the table and role modeling by parents is negative and controlling. For example, in families where parents used food as part of a reward/punishment strategy to control behaviour, children were found to have an increased risk of developing an eating disorder in later life. In addition, the production of family meals is not typically shared by all family members, but is often the responsibility of one parent—usually the mother. This responsibility to produce family meals may lead to negative perceptions of home cooking and family meals when it is perceived as a burden to bear by the home cook.

It is clear that family meals are seen as important and the literature on the benefits of family meals shows a gradient with the highest frequency of family meals being most strongly associated with the benefits described. While home cooking may not be a part of every family meal it is likely that a higher frequency of family meals is associated with more frequent home cooking because take-out and restaurant meals account for only about one third of food expenditures for the average Canadian household (Statistics Canada, 2003). The same food expenditure data show that household food expenditures are highest for couples with children, suggesting that as family size increases more food



requiring home preparation will typically be purchased thereby increasing the association between family meals and home cooking.

In addition to the implied relationship between home cooking and family cohesion described above, some researchers have described family meals or home cooking as important sites for the transference of food culture. A review of anthropological research (Story, 2005) on family meals found that they can be occasions where cultural and ethnic heritage is transmitted. Tim Lang and Michael Heasman (2004, pp. 207-209) support this premise when they write that historically, mothers and grandmothers have been important purveyors of food culture as they taught the next generation what to cook and how. They argue that a decline in home cooking threatens this generational transfer of the “socially produced values, attitudes, relationships, tastes, cuisines and practices exhibited through food” (p.185) that comprise food culture. If home food production declines, the learning and teaching of food culture may shift from its traditional centre in the home towards the external food environments and marketing campaigns of the food industry. This shifting base for food culture may affect what foods (and non food ingredients) are consumed, the labour and equipment required to prepare a meal, attitudes towards food and meals, as well as how and where foods are eaten. A striking example of this influence of the food industry on food culture is in the creation of a relatively new space for family meals, types of food, and manner of eating family meals—that of ready to eat individually ordered foods that are quickly eaten in the automobile.

### **2.1.3 Community food security**

A final case for domestic cooking and cooking skills can be drawn from the community food security literature. Similar to the above scenario with family meals, the significance of domestic cooking and cooking skills to community food security is implied but not explicitly drawn out in this literature.

Community food security has a broader and longer term focus than does household food security and is most commonly described using a definition from Hamm and Bellows (2003) as “a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (p. 40). A sustainable community

food system is one that improves the health of the community, the environment and individuals, building a locally based self-reliant food system and economy (McCullum, Desjardins, Kraak, Ladipo, & Costello, 2005).

With regard to the above definitions of community food security, the current globalized industrial food system fulfills some but not all criteria. It has been highly successful at producing foods that can be sold at relatively low prices compared to average incomes, and distributing food so that it is readily available, especially to those living in urban areas. The average Canadian household spends only about 10% of its income on food—nearly half the proportion of household income that was spent on food in the 1960's (Statistics Canada, 2006b). As well, consumer choice has vastly increased with thousands of foods available at Canadian grocery stores, likely similar to the estimated median of 40,000 food items available in US supermarkets (Harris, 2002). The safety, cultural acceptability and nutritional adequacy of foods produced in this system are variable, with examples of both successes and failures, and must be considered on a case-by-case basis.

In contrast to its' successes, our global industrial food system fails to contribute to community food security in several important ways. First, from a food access perspective the industrial food systems' framing of food as a commodity neglects to consider issues of social justice or the human right to food, and leaves those without financial access to food dependent on the charitable food sector (Riches, 1999). In British Columbia, 89,886 individuals required the assistance of BC food banks in 2009, an increase of 15% over the previous year (Food Banks Canada, 2009), representing a failure of both public and food industry policy to adequately recognize and uphold the human right to food. From a global perspective about 1.02 billion people (or 1 in every 6) are currently undernourished (World Food Program, 2010), 1.6 billion adults are overweight (World Health Organization, 2006), and approximately 30-40% of the world food supply is lost to waste (Godfray et al., 2010). These statistics highlight fundamental inequities in food distribution and access within the current global and industrial food system.

From an environmental point of view the global industrial food system has been described as unsustainable in the long-term (Lang & Heasman, 2004) with input intensive agricultural practices contributing to the pollution of terrestrial and aquatic environments

from agricultural nutrients, pesticides, and pathogens such as *E. coli* bacteria (Tillman, Cassman, Matson, Naylor, & Polasky, 2002). The livestock sector in particular has significantly contributed to deforestation, erosion, green house gas production, and water pollution (Steinfeld et al., 2006). These negative environmental impacts undermine the ability of future generations to establish a state of food security.

Finally, the global and industrial model of the food system favours large scale food production, the centralization of food processing facilities, and corporate concentration (Lang & Heasman, 2004, p. 19), each of which tend to diminish community self reliance by eroding local production, processing and decision making capacity. Thus the current global industrial food system fails to contribute to the development of food secure communities in important ways.

Groups using the concept of community food security generally define ‘community’ loosely in terms of geographic areas, but may also include group membership criteria such as specific demographic groups who may be at risk of food insecurity (Pothukuchi, 2004). Because the definition of a food secure community includes being self reliant, this type of community will likely favour locally owned relatively small-scale food producers, processors and distributors. The community scale limits the feasibility of developing an extensive large scale food-processing infrastructure and thus a diet drawn from this type of food system is likely one that will draw heavily on whole and minimally processed foods—the kind of foods that require cooking skills to convert into meals.

In a position paper from Dietitians of Canada on community food security (Dietitians of Canada, 2007), strategies and activities suggested for building community food security include such things as facilitating access to farmer’s markets, community shared agriculture projects (CSAs), and community gardens for low-income individuals. For example, CSAs have been promoted as contributing to food systems transition and community food security by providing the social infrastructure to connect various processes in the food system—in this case it is a direct connection between producer and eater (McCullum et al., 2005). Also advocated are the development of community kitchens and gardens, school gardens, good food box programs and buy local campaigns. Each of these activities would increase the availability of local produce and other foods,

which are by and large in whole and minimally processed forms. What is implied but not explicitly stated is that food secure communities will have the domestic cooking skills required to make use of the local whole and minimally processed foods.

One important consideration with regard to developing a more localized and self-reliant food system is the difference between having locally produced foods available via the mechanisms described above, and ensuring that those foods are financially accessible to everyone in the community. Somewhat counter intuitively, foods imported from the globalized industrial food system are often available for a lower price than the locally produced foods available at farmers markets, CSAs and grocery stores. The reasons for this are complex, but include the economies of scale used by large food corporations, mechanization, and the efficiencies of mass distribution systems (Lang & Heasman, 2004, p. 139), as well as agricultural subsidies, and food pricing schemes that hide the total social and environmental costs of food production and distribution (Roberts, 2008, p. 131).

This issue of financial access to local (and often organic) foods highlights a tension existing between household and community food security, where the food systems transitions called for by advocates of community food security may result in more expensive food and thus threaten the household food security of low income families. In Canada, inadequate household income is the strongest predictor of household level food insecurity (Tarasuk, 2005), suggesting that keeping food costs low will only ease household food insecurity if household incomes are sufficient to purchase food in addition to other expenses. While cooking skills are essential to being able to prepare meals from whole and minimally processed foods, cooking skills alone can not protect low income families from the poor dietary outcomes (McLaughlin et al., 2003). Having financial access to the food that is available, regardless of the type of food system used to produce it, is essential to household food security and presents a challenge to developing food secure communities, which must be inclusive of households at all income levels.

Our food system, based on international markets and global trade, has produced a cheap food supply relative to average income. However, as global markets and household incomes fluctuate so does the relative price of food. Family vulnerability to the forces of a globalized food system was felt acutely during the recent global financial crisis. A

recent newspaper article with the headline of “Up the Recession Without a Wooden Spoon” (Payne, 2009) described domestic cooking skills as a lost art, a loss that was handicapping peoples’ ability to respond to the global financial crisis by being able to produce low cost nutritious meals at home. With the recession came a resurgence of popular interest in home cooking and other ‘do it yourself’ activities with the common aim of saving money in a time where there was a high degree of financial insecurity. Newspaper articles with headings like “Joining the ranks of do-it-yourselfers; Cash-strapped consumers doing own repairs” (Dizikes, 2009), or “Saving starts in the kitchen”(Creighton, 2009) are examples of a recession related resurgence of interest in becoming more self-reliant. Relying on the products of the food industry may offer convenience, but may also create culinary dependency. When industry produced ready-made meals become inaccessible due to financial insecurity, those households that have become dependent on outsourced meals may be at an increased risk of food insecurity. That being said, it should be noted that food retailers and service outlets are, in some cases, able to offer ready to heat/eat meals at a price that is less expensive than it would be if one had to purchase all the ingredients to make a similar meal from scratch at home—though the quality will likely differ.

The globalization of food markets, commodification of food, and corporate control of food production and distribution have each been framed by some non-governmental organizations, of which Via Campesina is the largest, and academics as threats to national and community food security. These concerns have lead to calls for food sovereignty as an essential element of food security (Menezes, 2001; Riches, 1999). Food sovereignty refers to the right of each nation to define and *control* its food system, instead of leaving national food systems subject to international market forces. This issue of having control over one’s food has also been framed as important at the household level. Tim Lang and Michael Heasman (2004, pp. 207-209) raise the argument that by not being taught to cook, individuals lose a central means for taking control of their diet. When this happens on a population wide scale the food culture becomes one of dependency on the products of the food industry.

In Canada, Jaffe and Gertler (2006) echo this concern over culinary dependency from a consumer skills perspective. Using Braverman’s concept of deskilling through the

rationalization of work processes (Braverman, 1974), they argue that food has become “increasingly subjected to industrial and scientific processes” (Jaffe & Gertler, 2006, p. 145). As the distance between the farm and the table increases and manufactured food replaces cooking from scratch, the consumer is less able to know and understand the entire process, resulting in a greater dependency of individuals and households on prepared foods. A future where citizens are dependent on the food industry, no matter how convenient, is one that perhaps only the food industry itself would desire.

Interestingly, a similar concern related to dependency has been raised with regard to the food security policies that are created at international institutions such as the World Bank. The issue of concern is that the people who are affected by the food security policies do not have a voice in creating or changing them. This democratic concern for citizens’ rights to shape their food system has led to a call for food sovereignty as a precondition for achieving food security (Patel, 2009).

It is conceivable that food service outlets could provide both nutritious meals and eating environments that would promote the psycho-social benefits of eating with family, doing away with the need for domestic cooking. However, it is unlikely that this would be an affordable option for most families. In addition, with regard to the criteria for community food security, it would be unlikely that these commercial food service outlets would support a locally based food system that was self-reliant and culturally appropriate. That being said, domestic cooking may not be the only solution for healthy meals that support family cohesion and community food security. A plausible alternative scenario could occur if, for example, community based low cost eateries were developed that focused on developing the locally based food system, providing affordable healthy meals, and a place where people could eat together. In this type of scenario individual families could choose not to cook at home (perhaps even eliminating the need for costly and energy intensive home kitchens) and the cooking skills and equipment would be held by a subsection of the community. This communal alternative would basically be an extended version of the current family, with a subsection of the community taking on cooking responsibilities for others. However, this sort of community focused food system does not reflect the reality in most Canadian centers (with the possible exception of Hutterite communes and some other religious groups), and would require a substantial

food systems and social transition before becoming a viable alternative for families. Until then, domestic cooking remains one of the most plausible ways for families to produce and attain healthy meals, reap the social-psychological benefits of eating together, and be part of a self-reliant, locally based community food system.

## **2.2 Domestic cooking skills in decline?**

Some food writers, social commentators and policy makers have expressed concern that domestic cooking skills are in decline (Payne, 2009; Sampson, 2007; Short, 2006, pp. 51-52). For example, when Felipe Fernández-Armesto describes modern food culture in his book on the history of food, he states that “in the microwave household, home-cooking looks doomed” (Fernández-Armesto, 2001, p. 22). Concern over culinary deskilling is particularly high in England and Wales where home economics classes providing hands-on cooking education were changed from required courses to optional courses in the national school curriculum (Furey, McIlveen, Strugnell, & Armstrong, 2000; Stitt, 1996). This curriculum change in England and Wales ignited much debate over the value of school cooking classes. The concern over the removal of practical cooking skills from the curriculum was supported by findings from the Health and Lifestyles Survey of the early 90’s that identified school cookery classes as the second most important source of cooking skills, behind mothers (Lang & Caraher, 2001). Interestingly, this decision was recently reversed. As part of the government’s strategy to cut obesity rates every school child aged 11-14 will now be given practical cookery lessons and learn how to make low cost healthy meals from fresh ingredients (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008). By way of comparison, home economics or cookery courses have never been mandatory in British Columbia’s public schools (personal communication, Dr. Gale Smith, April 20, 2009).

### **2.2.1 The case for culinary deskilling**

Beyond the removal of mandatory school cooking courses, other reasons cited for a possible decline in cooking skills include increased use of convenience foods and kitchen equipment such as microwave ovens and food processors (Short, 2007). These popular concerns in England have gained some support from a recent study that found that less than a quarter of English respondents cooked a meal from raw ingredients on a

daily basis, compared to two-thirds of French respondents (Pettinger, Holdsworth, & Gerber, 2007). Other related research has found that the number of fast food restaurants in Great Britain doubled between 1984 and 1993, and that the British eat more fast food than any other nationality in western Europe (Schlosser, 2001, p. 242).

While the United Kingdom appears to be a nexus of popular and academic discussion on cooking skill, this is also being discussed to a lesser extent in the United States and Canada (Jaffe & Gertler, 2006). A survey of 704 university students in the Northeastern US showed that the majority of students overestimated their food preparation knowledge, and that actual food preparation knowledge amongst these students was low (Byrd-Bredbenner, 2004). Similar to the situation in the UK, the perceived reduction in cooking skills in the US was attributed to a removal of cooking education courses from public schools, increased access to convenience foods, and changing family demographics (Michaud et al., 2007).

### **2.2.2 Challenges to the culinary deskilling hypothesis**

In contrast to the concerns about culinary deskilling described above, other authors have argued that the case for culinary deskilling is difficult to make, suggesting that domestic culinary skills may be in a state of transition rather than decline. That is, domestic cooking skills may simply be changing along with the social structures of work, family and the food system as well as the physical structures of the home kitchen. The paradox is that at the same time that the public is being increasingly labeled as culinarily illiterate, there has been a groundswell of interest in celebrity chefs, cooking television shows, cook books, cooking magazines and websites devoted to cooking. Isabelle de Solier reported that food TV shows have enjoyed unprecedented popularity in the UK with shows like *Jamie's Kitchen* attracting weekly audiences of over 5 million viewers. Similar success of food TV is reported in Australia (de Solier, 2005), and this popularity is echoed in Canada and warranted the creation of the Food Network in the year 2000 (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, 2000). In her discussion on the role of nostalgia on the Food Network, Sarah Kornik claims that the Food Network has an “unquestionable role in the public’s acquisition of food knowledge” due to its position as the primary food related television network in Canada (Kornik, 2007). This claim has yet to be proven, and it remains unclear whether those people



watching the Food Network and buying the books from celebrity chefs are actually improving their own knowledge and skills, or changing their food practices as a result.

While food TV initially started out as educational programming, recent years have seen entertainment playing a larger role – what de Solier calls “culinary edutainment” (de Solier, 2005, p. 467). One of the only studies looking into the issue of whether TV food programs actually teach people to cook was conducted in England (Caraher, Lang, & Dixon, 2000). The researchers found that while most people perceived cooking shows as entertainment, about 19% of viewers found the programs useful for learning about cooking. The study found a gender and class divide amongst respondents, with upper class women most likely to use food television as a source of culinary education.

Another difficulty with the argument for culinary deskilling is in the definition of what cooking skills are. Being a skilled cook involves more than simply knowing the mechanical skills of stirring, slicing or heating. In fact, many of the mechanical skills used in preparing, or assembling, meals from convenience foods are similar to those used when making a comparable meal from scratch (Short, 2003a). The skills required of the domestic cook are different from those required by the professional cook. While consistency of results are important to the professional cook, the domestic cook may more often require the skills of satisfying the preferences of family members and cooking while simultaneously caring for children. Beyond practical cooking techniques, cooking skill involves academic and cultural knowledge about food as well as perceptual skills such as knowing when a dish is cooked, timing skills and organizational skills. Domestic cooking skills are complex and contextual (Short, 2003b). In fact, mechanical cooking skills such as chopping, stirring, and sautéing which are the easiest to observe and assess may be less significant than the tacit and perceptual skills which are more difficult to measure such as timing and organization. With the problems inherent in defining what domestic cooking skills are, it becomes difficult to argue that they have in fact declined over time.

Any argument for the decline of cooking skill amongst modern home cooks relies on a period of comparison when presumably cooking skills were more commonly held. Phil Lyon et al. (2003) argue that it is difficult to compare the cooking skills of previous generations to the current one. Speaking of the British context, they note that previous

generations, affected by the food rationing associated with Britain's involvement in World War II, were forced into a culture of culinary innovation using whatever foods were available. In the post war period technologies such as gas ranges, refrigerators and indoor plumbing began to enter households that previously relied on coal stoves, iceboxes and outdoor water pumps. It is clear that previous generations required a very different skill set in order to feed the family but it is difficult to make a claim that everyone had more cooking skill, especially as the cooking responsibilities were mostly shouldered by the women of the household at that time (Lyon et al., 2003). The authors suggest that in the modern context of readily available prepared foods there has been a shift from 'having to cook' to 'wanting to cook'; and that focusing on creative cooking will maintain public interest in cooking at a time when having to cook is no longer strictly required.

It has also been argued that increased usage of ready-made convenience foods is contributing to culinary deskilling. However, Frances Short—whose research has found that convenience foods can be more connecting within the family than previously thought—has challenged this common sense notion. She found that the families she had studied in the UK tended to have an established hierarchy of cooking, 'everyday cooking' to feed the family, and 'proper cooking' for special occasions. Proper cooking was more likely to involve cooking from basic raw ingredients, whereas 'everyday cooking' was more likely to include convenience foods such as ready-made sauces or packaged desserts. Interestingly, children were most likely to be involved in meal preparation when the convenience foods were used, in part because these foods were easier to make, but also because parents were less concerned about children messing up these meals, and less personally attached to the outcomes than when a proper meal was being made from scratch (Short, 2007). When seen in this light, convenience foods may play a counterintuitive role in the acquisition and teaching of cooking skill within families.

Tim Lang and Martin Caraher have suggested that it may be more useful to think of domestic culinary skills as being in transition, rather than simply in decline. They point to the changing social and domestic environment as forces propelling this transition; suggesting that traditional approaches to teaching cooking skills may no longer be relevant (Lang & Caraher, 2001).

## **2.3 The changing context for domestic cooking and cooking skills**

The social and domestic environments that form the context for domestic cooking have changed over the last century and with that the nature, importance and characteristics of domestic cooking have also changed.

### **2.3.1 Changing family structures**

When speaking of domestic cooking skills, the focus is on the home and family. Canadian statistics show that the family is changing in size and living location. The average size of census families has decreased to three people (Statistics Canada, 2007a). In 1941, 38.2% of households had five or more members, while in 2006 only 8.7% of households had five or more members. These changes in family size have coincided with a population move from rural areas (those with < 1,000 people) to urban areas. In 1881 when BC was first included in the national census 82% of the population lived in rural areas. By 1941 the proportion living in urban areas had surpassed the 46% living in rural areas, and by 2001, only 15% of British Columbians lived in rural areas (Statistics Canada, 2005).

In addition to changes in the size and living area of the average family, there have also been changes in the types of families. Compared to previous generations, there are now a greater proportion of common-law (15.5%) and single parent (15.9%) families, with the traditional married couple heading a smaller proportion of families (48.5%). The 2006 census was the first to include same sex-couples, who represented 0.6% of all families in Canada (Milan, Vézina, & Wells, 2007). For the purposes of the 2006 census a family was defined as a couple with, or without, children, or a lone parent living with at least one child. Single people living alone and individuals living with other relatives or non-relatives were excluded from the definition of a census family.

There have also been important changes within homes, with a trend towards closing the gender gap in both paid and unpaid work. An ever-increasing number of Canadian women are working outside of the home. Their participation in the paid labour market has increased substantially over the last 20 years, from 70% in 1986 to 81% in 2005, closing in on men's participation rate of 91% in the same year. Inside the home, the gender divide in unpaid core housework (meal preparation and cleanup, housecleaning and laundry) has decreased over the last 20 years with men's participation increasing

from 40% to 59% and women's participation dropping slightly from 88% to 85% (Statistics Canada, 2006a).

With more women entering the paid labour market there has been an increase in the proportion of families with dual income earners. Amongst couples with children, the proportion of dual earners increased from just over one third in 1976 to three quarters in 2008. With more parents at work there has been a decrease in the amount of time spent at home with family. Between 1986 and 2005 the average amount of time that workers spent with family members decreased by 39 minutes for women and 45 minutes for men (Statistics Canada, 2007b). In line with a greater proportion of dual income families, a 2005 General Social Survey found that 19% of men and 34% of women (with a youngest child between 6 and 15 yrs old) reported feeling severely time crunched (Marshall, 2009).

One might expect that having fewer parents staying at home for childcare and housework might impact domestic cooking and family food practices. Time use statistics showed that Canadian men spent an average of 0.8 hours per day on cooking and washing up in 2005, and women spent an average of 1.2 hours per day on the same activities (Statistics Canada, 2009). Data from 1998 show that small changes have occurred in this area with the time that women and men spend on cooking and washing up coming closer together. Comparative Canadian historical data on time spent cooking could not be located for this review, however a report focusing on the changing role of women in American households does provide a historical comparison (Bowers, 2000). Bowers reports that a survey in 1900 showed that women spent 44 hours a week (more than six hours per day) preparing meals and cleaning up after them. Bowers notes that the time spent on cooking activities varied with a woman's class, as upper class families could hire domestic servants while lower class women would have to balance caring for their own families with working for other families (20.6% of women were in the paid workforce at the time). New home kitchen technologies (e.g. moving from hearth, to coal stove, to gas or electric stove, indoor plumbing and refrigeration), increasing availability of convenience foods, and changes in gender roles are cited as the main reasons why the amount of time spent cooking and washing up has decreased so dramatically.

It is clear that changing structures have contributed to changes in families and domestic cooking (i.e. much less time spent on home cooking than in previous eras). What is less well understood is the significance of these changes to population health, the family as a social unit, or the food system.

### **2.3.2 Broader changes in social structures**

In the pre-industrial age of Britain and North America, the majority of households were in rural settings and the work of both men and women was required for food provision and preparation. With industrialization, the gender roles began to separate with women becoming primarily responsible for household cooking and men becoming more responsible for bringing an income into the home to purchase food, rather than produce food as was previously done (Cowan, 1989). The industrial age promised to ease the burden of preparing family meals, freeing the housewife from the kitchen (Jaffe & Gertler, 2006; Silva, 2000; Watkins, 2003). However this promise was not fulfilled, as when kitchen appliances and commercially prepared foods were brought into the domestic kitchen there was a corresponding increase in expectations for the type of meals that should be prepared.

Studies conducted in Britain (Dixey, 1996; Lake et al., 2006), Canada (Beagan, Chapman, D'Sylva, & Bassett, 2008) and the United states (Brown & Miller, 2002) have shown that in most cases it is still the woman of the household who is responsible for cooking the family meal, though men appear to be making inroads into the home kitchen. Unsurprisingly, a survey in Britain revealed that mothers were the most frequently cited source for learning to cook (Caraher et al., 1999; Lang & Caraher, 2001). Given this highly gendered history of domestic cooking and current social values of gender equality, any call for re-skilling domestic cooks needs to be framed in a gender inclusive manner so as to not reinforce the past and present gendered divisions in domestic cooking. A resurgence of domestic cooking focused on women and girls, however well intentioned, could be critiqued as a social step backwards and a move away from the progression towards gender equality in paid and unpaid work.

### **2.3.3 Contribution of this research to the topic area**

Nutrition education alone, in the form of food guides, does not appear to be effectively steering population level dietary practices in the desired direction. Are there other efforts that departments responsible for public health should be making to help their citizens follow dietary guidance? More specifically, should public health departments and schools be giving more attention to cooking skill as a life skill and important influence on food practices, better enabling citizens to follow a health promoting dietary pattern? There has been very little research on domestic cooking and cooking skill and its relationship to food practices, especially in the Canadian context. Findings from this research will contribute to gaps in our understanding of this topic and may contribute to future health policy debates about the role of practical training in domestic cooking as part of a larger healthy eating strategy.

## **2.4 Theoretical concepts for understanding domestic cooking skills**

This section presents the theoretical concepts used in this research. The theory has the purpose of illuminating relationships between concepts (i.e. theory as a flashlight), and providing a framework for making sense of the data (i.e. theory as a closet for hanging data) (Maxwell, 2005, p. 43).

### **2.4.1 Context matters**

In this research one's cooking skills, and perceptions of them, are understood as being influenced by social structures such as education, culture, class and gender. In the tradition of everyday life sociology, these social structures are understood as having a dynamic interrelationship with one's personal agency (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). That is, individual action is shaped (but not determined) by social structures such as gender roles or class, but individual actions also serve to reinforce or change these social structures over time. For example, domestic cooking has historically been, and remains, a strongly gendered practice with women and girls typically doing most of the home cooking. Because of this gendered division of home labour it is more likely that young girls will be encouraged to cook at home than young boys, which reinforces the gendered divide in home cooking with each generation. However, if young girls resist a role in home cooking and young boys express an interest in home cooking; this social structure

of a gendered divide in home cooking may change. In fact statistics show that the gendered divisions of labour, both paid and unpaid, have been narrowing over the last several decades.

All this is to say that context is important, and it is recognized that participants' understandings of their cooking skills and food practices are shaped by the position they occupy in the complex matrix of society. Participants were asked for their perceptions of their cooking skills and food practices, and these perceptions are understood to be relative to one's social experiences, expectations, and the context in which the perceptions are formed.

#### **2.4.2 Cooking skill as a resource**

Skills, like any tool or resource, are not useful in and of themselves—they need to be put towards some purpose before they become useful. As embodied abilities, skills are not visible until they are put into practice and even then they can be difficult to perceive—as is the case with the perceptual skills used in domestic cooking. Skills take time and practice to develop. Though the amount of time and practice required varies by individual this investment is made because the skill can later be used to enable desirable ends. While it may seem obvious that cooking skills are learned in order to prepare a meal and feed oneself and family, this may not be the only reason they are developed, nor the only purpose that they are put towards. In this research participants were asked both for their assessment of their cooking skills, and what having these skills meant to them. The purpose was to gain insight into the underlying question of “why cook?” When there is relatively affordable and easily available ready to eat/heat food available from food processors, why would anyone expend valuable time, energy and practice acquiring domestic cooking skills? Understanding domestic cooking skills as a resource acquired with purpose will help to provide insight into a situation that on the surface seems illogical—that is, the fact that people continue to invest time and energy in learning to cook when cooking is no longer strictly required in order to obtain a meal.

### **2.5 Summary of conceptual framework**

This chapter has laid out the conceptual framework for this study grounding it within previous research and presenting the theoretical concepts to be used in the analysis

of the data. To recap, the case was presented for domestic cooking and cooking skills as important for health and nutrition, family cohesion and food culture, as well as community food security. The evidence base for these cases is limited as domestic cooking and cooking skills are topics that have received little in the way of research attention. The reason for this paucity of research may be because domestic cooking has historically fallen within the realm of unpaid women's work—an everyday taken for granted activity with low status. Within the context of diet related morbidity and mortality there has been fairly widespread concern within popular media, public health, and academic circles about domestic culinary deskilling. While this concern over culinary deskilling implicitly recognizes domestic cooking skills as a determinant of healthy eating this relationship has not been well researched. Despite concerns about the decline of home cooking skill, the case for culinary deskilling is not clear, with counter arguments suggesting that cooking skills are merely in a state of transition, responding to changes in society and in the family. In closing, the theoretical concepts used to analyze the interview data will position domestic cooking skills as context dependent personal resources that participants acquire and use in order to fulfill a desired purpose.



## **Chapter 3 Study design and methods**

This chapter begins with a statement of the research questions. What follows is a breakdown of the research process detailing the epistemological footing, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods used in this study. Next, the selection of the study sites and sample are described in detail. Ethical considerations are addressed in the final section.

### **3.1 Research questions**

The interview questions that were asked of participants related to cooking and cooking skills and were based on the research questions listed below.

#### **Initial research questions:**

1. Relating domestic cooking skill to food practices and health
  - a) How do parents and teens perceive the relationship between their cooking skills and food practices in the family context?
  - b) Do they think there is a relationship between their cooking skills and health, and if so, what is it?
2. Learning to cook
  - a) How do parents and teens learn to cook?
  - b) What are the barriers and facilitators of cooking and learning to cook in families?
3. The subjective meaning of being able to cook
  - a) What does being able to cook mean to participating parents and teens in the context of contemporary British Columbia?

In qualitative research projects such as this, the naturalistic (non-experimental and field work based) design has an unfolding nature (Patton, 2002, p. 44) with the research process involving “emerging questions and procedures” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). In this research project early analysis of the data suggested that the focus of the research questions should be shifted because the most significant and substantial findings were related to the third research question, with the first research question generating less substantial data for analysis. As such, the research questions and study goals were slightly revised and simplified, after data collection, to more appropriately address the

most interesting and significant aspects of the data. These revised research questions are listed below and addressed, in order, by the findings in Chapter Four.

**Revised and simplified research questions:**

1. What is happening in the homes of participants with regard to home cooking?
2. How do participants learn domestic cooking, and how is cooking skill shared between generations?
3. What does being able to cook mean to participating parents and teens in the context of contemporary British Columbia?

The underlying purpose of this research is to gain insight into what being able to cook means to participants and if it is different for participants in different social locations—especially comparing teens to parents. Should cooking skills be thought of as one of the determinants of healthy eating, and therefore a prerequisite to being able to follow the healthy eating advice found in Canada’s Food Guide? What is the relevance of cooking skills for contemporary families in British Columbia where there is an abundance of commercially prepared food available (if not always financially accessible)? In short, do cooking skills still matter?

### **3.2 The elements of the research process**

Michael Crotty (2003, p. 13) has articulated a way of understanding the research process as consisting of four interrelated elements. In descending order of breadth they are the researcher’s epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and the methods used—each is related to the other. I have used Crotty’s divisions of the research process in an effort to structure this social science research, a field of science that is often described as being messy, with definitions and boundaries in perpetual contestation. Each of these four elements is described below along with its application to this research project. Table 3.1 below shows the four elements as part of a cohesive research process.

**Table 3.1** Four elements of the research process

<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Theoretical perspective</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Constructionism	Interpretivism	Ethnography	Semi-structured interviews, and Photo elicitation

### **3.2.1 Epistemology**

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge: determining what kinds of knowledge are possible and legitimate. The study reported here is framed by the epistemology of constructionism, where knowledge and meaningful reality is understood to be a product of the interactions between humans and their world, as opposed to objective truths that are discovered. That is, knowledge is developed and transmitted in a social context (Crotty, 2003, p. 42). As such, this research does not seek to uncover a single truth; rather it seeks to interpret the multiple understandings that the research participants have of their cooking skills and food practices. From this epistemological position, data are viewed as being co-generated by the research participant and researcher. Thus it becomes important for the researcher to be reflexive and attempt to understand how one's subjectivities may have influenced the generation and later reporting of the data (see number five on reflexivity in section 5.3). Approaching this study from a constructionist epistemology privileged the participants' interpretations of meaning and enabled the exploration of the subjective significance of being able to cook.

### **3.2.2 Theoretical perspective**

One's theoretical perspective, or philosophical stance, takes into account one's assumptions about our world and social life. In this study the theoretical perspective of interpretivism grounds the approach. Interpretivism arose in reaction to positivism, and is primarily interested in looking for "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 2003, p. 67). If a positivistic approach had been used for this study, establishing objective measures and predictable causal relationships between cooking skill and food practices in families might have been the

primary goal. In contrast, the focus of this study is on how participants interpret and understand this relationship and the subjective meaning of being able to cook.

### ***3.2.2.1 Rationale for using an interpretive approach***

The theoretical perspective of interpretivism was chosen for this research topic based on an understanding of the core subjects of family food practices, home cooking and cooking skill as complex and contextual. Very little research has investigated the relationship between these subjects, and none has focused on the family context in British Columbia. For these reasons, an exploratory interpretive approach providing rich accounts of participants' interpretations of their home cooking, cooking skills and food practices seemed most appropriate. On a pragmatic level, this was also the theoretical perspective taken by the *Family Food Practices* study research team, creating an opportunity for mentoring from experienced researchers.

Cooking skills are complex: a combination of mechanical abilities, knowledge, and tacit, perceptual, conceptual and planning skills (Short, 2003b). The acquisition of these skills is also contextual, depending on structural factors such as educational policy, cultural norms (Caraher et al., 1999), as well as the norms within families. Because of this, studies of cooking or cooking skill that have been conducted in other countries may not reflect the situation in Canada or the province of British Columbia (BC) where this study was situated.

This study did not seek to evaluate participants' cooking skills. It would have been problematic to attempt to measure cooking skills within a group of participants that had been purposely sampled to maximize the diversity of socio-economic variables, as was the case with the *Family Food Practices* study. Any attempt to develop a common assessment tool would be prone to ethno cultural and socio-economic bias. Even if such a tool could be validated for a diverse population it may not really get at the relationship between home cooking, cooking skills and food practices, because not only is the acquisition of cooking skills context dependent, but the use of these skills is also context dependent.

The interpretive design of this study has brought out rich descriptions of individuals' food practices and cooking skills. The data are context rich, providing a unique window through which to compare findings between generations, genders and

socio-economic categories. This study explores the topic of domestic cooking skills and its contemporary meaning within the context of the diverse lives of participants from the two study sites in BC. The findings cannot be statistically generalized to the Canadian population due to the relatively small and non-random sample. Generalizability was not the goal of this study and would have obscured the context dependent nature of the findings, which provide insight into a significant topic that has received very little research attention to date.

### **3.2.3 Methodology**

The methodology is the strategy behind the methods of data collection, linking the methods to the desired outcome. Several key features from the methodology of ethnography apply to this study (see Lillis, 2008, p. 358), with the notable exception of prolonged field engagement. As such I consider the methodology of this study as having an ethnographic leaning, as opposed to being a traditional ethnography. Referring to the writing of educational ethnographer Martyn Hammersley, Theresa Lillis (2008) lists six core features of ethnography—this study meets all but one.

First, the study is concerned with empirical data collected from natural settings, rather than experimental conditions. In this case nearly every interview was conducted in the participants' homes, both for the comfort and convenience of the participants and so that the researcher could observe the participants' home worlds. Second, the perspective of the participants has been used when trying to understand the relationship between cooking skills and food practices. Third, the data were gathered from a range of sources using a purposively diverse sample, interviewing both parents and teens in a relatively informal semi-structured interview style, with photos taken by the participants. Fourth, the focus was on a relatively small group of families drawn from two locations, presenting a field of inquiry that may be considered as a microcosm of the larger issue of study. Finally, the analysis of the data focuses on interpreting participant's descriptions of the topic of study, with quantification playing a supporting role.

While the core ethnographic feature of sustained engagement at a particular research site cannot be applied to this study, each family was visited at least twice with a total interaction time amounting to approximately four to seven hours per family, depending on the length of interviews.

### 3.2.4 Methods

The methods are the techniques or tools used to gather and analyze data. The methods employed for data collection in this study were of a qualitative nature, and included two semi-structured interviews with each participant and two photo elicitation activities. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then imported into qualitative data analysis software to facilitate the analysis of the large amounts of textual data that had been collected. In the following sections each method is described in detail. Recruitment, site description and sample demographics are discussed in section 3.3.

#### 3.2.4.1 *Semi-structured interviews*

The in-depth interviews were used to explore what happens around food in the family, and the participants' perceptions of why and how this happens. An interview guide was used to ensure that questions relating to the research objectives were asked of each participant, and add a level of consistency between family interviews. However, each semi-structured interview allowed the opportunity to follow-up on interesting veins of discussion as they arose. The interview guide can be seen in appendix A, and contains questions pertaining to both this thesis research (shown in bold, and in figure 3.1 below) and the larger *Family Food Practices* study that this research is nested within. Probes (shown in italics) were used if participants had difficulty responding to the question, or to urge the participant to expand on their explanation.

The interview guide was developed through discussions with the *Family Food Practices* research team. My initial training as an interviewer began with assuming the role of a participant, responding to the questions in the interview guide as asked by the primary investigator for the research team in BC. Having observed an experienced interviewer I then switched roles and interviewed the postdoctoral fellow using the interview guide. This initial training was followed by discussion amongst the research team on how it felt to be interviewed and do the interviewing, with discussions of where the interview guide worked well or could use refinement. The experience of being one of the first to be interviewed for the project helped me to develop a sense of empathy for the research participants as I understood how difficult it could be to articulate responses to questions that probed the taken for granted and often unexamined aspects of one's food

practices. This training also enabled me to frame the interview process as one that could be a positive experience for participants, as I found that I very much enjoyed the opportunity to speak to questions about my food practices, questions that had never been asked of me before.

When the interview guide was developed, the terms ‘cooking skill’ and ‘food practices’ were used in a very general sense. ‘Food practices’ was meant to encompass the food choices, food preparation, and eating habits of participants. ‘Cooking skill’ was meant to encompass all food preparation knowledge and abilities used by participants in preparing meals, including both the physical skills of slicing, folding etcetera, as well as more tacit skills such as timing, organization, perception of doneness. Despite this anticipated general use of the term cooking skill, participants in the interviews often had a more narrow understanding of what counted as cooking skills. It was very common for participants to separately assess their cooking skills and baking skills without prompting from the interviewer. Also, on several occasions cooking skill was separated from basic food assembly. These participant lead differentiations of terms are discussed further in Chapter Four.

**Questions from the first interview:**

- How would you describe your cooking skills? How does this influence your eating patterns? The household eating patterns? *(Probe: how do your cooking skills relate to the healthfulness of your diet? What is a typical ‘meal’ that you might prepare? Who do you prepare food for? What is the difference between everyday cooking and cooking for special meals? What does “cooking from scratch” (or basic ingredients) mean to you? What’s an example of something you would make “from scratch”? How typical are your cooking skills compared to your friends?)*
- How did you learn what you know about cooking? Who taught you? *(Probe for adults: How do you pass on your cooking skills to other family members? To whom and at what age? What would being able to cook a meal for yourself and/or your family mean to you? )*

**Questions from the second interview using photo elicitation:**

- (Participant produced photos) For photos of foods at home, what involvement did you have in preparing these foods? How do these photos reflect your level of skill at cooking?
- (Photos provided by interviewer) Which of these would you feel comfortable preparing yourself? Which would you not be comfortable preparing? *(Probe: foods they would like to be able to prepare but feel they cannot? How they feel their cooking skill relates to their concept of healthy/unhealthy eating)*

**Figure 3.1** Questions from the interview guide specifically related to this research project

Because this study involved two research sites, two researchers were involved in the recruitment and interviewing. My colleague, a postdoctoral fellow on the research team, did the interviewing at the District of Kent site, and I did the interviewing at the northeast Vancouver site. Prior to the first interview each researcher sat down with



participants to review the consent forms; explaining the purpose and procedures of the study, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, compensation and future use of the data. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw at any time. If participants expressed a continued desire to be involved, teens were then asked to sign an assent form and parents were asked to sign consent forms for both themselves and the teen. The family was given a copy of the consent forms which also provided contact information for the principal investigators of the *Family Food Practices* study and the Research Subject Information Line at the UBC Office of Research Services should the family have any questions or concerns after the interview (see Appendix B).

An effort was made to conduct the interviews with parents and teens separately so that teens could speak freely without the influence of parents. Participants were given the option of having the interview at a location of their convenience in a relatively quiet and private area. In practice nearly every interview was conducted at the participant's home, usually in the living room or kitchen. Locating the interviews in the participant's homes helped to encourage participation because of the convenience it afforded the participant. It also allowed the researcher a window into the participants' home lives, and often a chance to witness family interactions around food practices. These in-home observations were recorded as post-interview memos and reviewed during the analysis.

The interviews were recorded using a small digital audio recorder, and the audio files were later sent to transcribers hired for the *Family Food Practices* study. One participant specifically spoke about the recording device saying "I thought it would be kind of intimidating with the microphone." She had previously been interviewed with a recorder held in front of her face, and comparing the two experiences said "I like it like this, like that [laughs – pointing to the small digital voice recorder sitting on the table]" (from participant bcv05m2).

The interviews with the adult participants typically lasted between one and two hours, while those with the teen participants were usually shorter, ranging from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. The length of the interview was largely determined by the participant's responses.

#### **3.2.4.2 Photo elicitation**

Between the first and second interview, participants were asked to take photographs of food in their day-to-day life. Participants were given a disposable camera if they did not already have a camera, or in many cases used their own digital cameras. Specific suggestions for images to capture, such as places where food was eaten or favourite foods, were provided on a list (see Appendix C) along with instructions for using the disposable camera. If a film camera was used the interviewer made arrangements to process the film before scheduling the second interview. If a digital camera was used the interviewer would bring along a portable digital memory device to retrieve the images. In both cases participants were left with a copy of their images, while the researcher took a second copy for the research project.

These photographs were then used to elicit discussion in the first part of the second interview. Participants were asked to take the interviewer on a tour of the photos, explaining the significance of each image. This collaborative photographic method provided the interviewer with opportunities to view the subject from the participant's perspective as well as follow-up on unexplained aspects of the images or any incongruence with what was said during the first interview.

This photo elicitation activity was designed to help participants articulate their thoughts around their food practices, thoughts that are often left unexamined and taken-for-granted. Harper (2002, p. 13) says that "images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words" based on the more primitive area of our brains where visual information is processed. Photos also de-center the authority of the researcher, and the central place of vocabulary in standard interviews allowing the participant to subjectively show what is often difficult to express (Elaine M. Power, 2003). An observation from these second interviews was that using the photographs often encouraged more discussion, especially from the teens, many of whom provided relatively brief responses to questions during the first interview.

During part two of the second interview participants were presented with two standard sets of photos, one with a variety of foods, and another of a variety of eating establishments. The study investigators selected these photos from an on-line photo service with the goal of including images of a variety of foods and eating places that may

represent the food practices of Canadians from a diversity of backgrounds. Participants were asked to sort the photos and discuss them based on categories such as comfort level with the foods or places pictured, their ability to prepare the foods pictured, or association of the foods with men or women, parents or teens. Participants were always given the option of sorting photos into a neutral or 'I don't know' pile, so as not to force an artificial dichotomy. The purpose of this photo sort activity was to develop a clearer sense of the participant's food related habits and beliefs, uncovering what is often taken for granted, and to have participants reflect on foods and ways of eating that may not have been typical for them. The participant's photographs were used as a source of data for the *Family Food Practices* study, but for this thesis they were used primarily as a tool to elicit further conversation as the photos themselves provided relatively little information that was directly relevant to this study's research questions.

#### ***3.2.4.3 Handling of transcripts and photographs***

Professional transcribers were hired to transcribe all audio recordings verbatim. Participants' identification was made anonymous with the use of ID codes to label the transcripts (e.g. bcv01m was the mother from the first family interviewed at the Vancouver site in BC). In the transcripts participants are referred to by their position in the family (e.g. mother, daughter or son) and any identifying information arising in the interview such as place of work, school or home were removed from the transcript when it was checked for accuracy by the interviewer. Once the audio recordings were transcribed, anonymized and checked for accuracy they were uploaded into Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software (version 5.6, manufactured by ATLAS.ti GmbH in Berlin, Germany), a database type of program that facilitates coding and analysis of textual and photographic data.

The photographs taken by participants during the photo elicitation activity were saved as digital files and labeled by participant ID and main content. Photographs that were significant to the participant or seemed to represent the participant especially well were also uploaded into Atlas.ti and linked to the sections of transcript where they were referred to.

#### 3.2.4.4 Coding and analysis

In this research project a subset of the data collected and coded for the *Family Food Practices* project was analyzed. As a result, all transcripts for this project were initially coded according to the procedures developed for this larger project.

Early in the interviewing stage, after a few transcripts had been generated, the *Family Food Practices* research team began to discuss and generate a code list. This was a lengthy and iterative process that occurred over several months. The research team read through several transcripts and discussed potential codes that could be applied to categorize the text. These codes were created based on *organizational* categories related to the research questions, *substantive* categories that provided insight into what was happening in the text, and *theoretical* categories that attempted to place the data in a more abstract framework (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97).

The initial code list proposed for the *Family Food Practices* study was extensive and somewhat overwhelming. An effort was made by the research team to trim the code list by combining similar codes and removing non-essential codes. Eventually the code list was pared down to 104 codes (see Appendix D for codes with definitions). During this code paring process it was decided to capture all the text relating to domestic cooking and cooking skill under the generic organizational code 'Food Preparation'. As a result nearly all the interview text related to this research was captured under the code 'Food Preparation'. After the code list had stabilized I began coding all of the transcripts from the Vancouver site and the postdoctoral fellow coded the transcripts from interviews at the District of Kent site. The postdoctoral fellow and I worked together to ensure inter-coder reliability by initially jointly coding and discussing the same transcript. As coding progressed we discussed any coding dilemmas and made adjustments to the code definitions where needed to ensure that they reflected the way the codes were being applied.

**Table 3.2** Code list with definitions

<b>Primary organizational code</b>
Food Preparation
<b>Secondary organizational and substantive codes</b>
Healthy/Unhealthy
Eating Style(s)
Roles/Responsibilities
Learning/Teaching
Sources of Information
Upbringing
Life Stage
Interpersonal Influences
Preserving
Homemade/From Scratch
Prepared/Processed
Convenience/Ease
Cosmopolitan Eating
Culture/Tradition
Food Identity/Philosophy
Connecting Through Food
Money/Cost
Control

When using Atlas.ti to search coded transcripts the code ‘Food Preparation’ was combined with other relevant codes, using the co-occur operator. This was a search strategy within Atlas.ti that produced quotations where the same section of transcript was coded by the two selected codes of interest. For example an early query searched for quotations where segments coded ‘Food Preparation’ co-occurred with text coded ‘Learning/Teaching’ to get at where participants were describing how they learned to cook or passed on their skills to others. Table 3.2 above shows a reduced list of codes from the *Family Food Practices* study that were related to this project and used in search queries. Code definitions were described using a codebook to help ensure consistent application of codes over time (refer to Appendix D).

In addition to the analysis based on coding, a deductive “block and file” approach (Grbich, 2007) was used during the early stages of analysis using a sub sample of six families to facilitate my understanding of how the research questions were, or were not, being answered by the participants’ responses. In the block and file approach participant

responses were typed into a table where each column was reserved for responses to one of the research objectives. This exercise produced a table breaking down how each research question had been spoken to by each participant. The exercise was later repeated with the entire sample of 22 families and was a valuable early analytical method for isolating quotations that addressed the research objectives. This spreadsheet approach also made it easy to see where participants had not spoken to particular research questions and enabled a quasi quantitative assessment of how many participants responded in similar fashions, suggesting whether a response was part of a greater theme or an isolated case. The use of the block and file approach led to identification of themes in the data and further analysis comparing how different subgroups (e.g. teens vs. parents) were responding.

A methodological issue that became apparent during this stage of analysis was that of having two different interviewers conduct the interviews for the BC study sites. Both interviewers followed the interview guide however, the unique identities of each interviewer influenced if specific lines of discussion were pursued or passed by. For example, because I have a history as a cook and am focusing on the research topic of cooking skills I was more likely to dwell on this topic during the interview than my colleague who conducted the interviews at the District of Kent site. As a result not all responses can be directly compared between the two research sites.

In addition to the coding and “block and file” analyses described above, three types of memos were kept to facilitate reflection and analytical insight (Maxwell, 2005, pp. 11-13). After each interview the interviewer recorded impressions from the interview and meeting the family. These impressions were transcribed along with the interviews as field note memos. The field notes were later referred to when creating family memos and when information about the family, such as interviewers’ impressions of the family dynamics, was sought. Secondly, during the coding process detailed memos were made for each family using a common template (see Appendix E) that would facilitate the understanding of each family as a unit, as well as the comparison of participant families. The family memo template was structured according to the main research questions of the *Family Food Practices* study. The field notes and memos were both completed by the researcher who conducted the interview with the family. The family memo template was

completed while the researcher was coding the transcripts for each family, and line references were often added to the memos to refer to key segments in the transcript and enable easy retrieval of quotes. In these family memos I added a separate field for this project for describing how participants perceived and learned their cooking skills, as well as the impact of these skills on family food practices. I added and completed this cooking skill focused memo section to the family memos from both research sites. Finally, as part of a qualitative data analysis course, a research journal was kept, recording ongoing research thoughts as related to course readings. These memos and journals have served to both capture and facilitate analytic thinking.

Coding is a way of fracturing data. The data were then reconnected analytically using two strategies. First, from the entire data set, a series of network or concept diagrams were built around the core topics of how people learned to cook and facilitators/barriers to developing or using one's cooking skills (see Chapter 4, Table 4.3 for an example). These network diagrams facilitated analytical thinking around themes evident in the data. A second connecting strategy, creating a storied episode, was used with the data from a single participant. The storied episode (see Appendix F) helped me to view what the participant was saying as an overarching narrative, connecting her self-identity around food, cooking skills and parenting. While not representative of the entire data set the exercise was useful in that it encouraged me to look for the overarching story in the transcripts of each participant interview, seeing more than just coded segments of text.

### **3.3 Site and participant selection**

This in-depth interpretive study involved a small sample of 22 families drawn from two distinct communities in British Columbia: 1) the northeast quadrant of the City of Vancouver located in the lower Fraser Valley, and 2) the District of Kent located in the upper Fraser Valley. The sampling areas for each study site, participant selection, and my relationship to both sites and participants are described below.

#### **3.3.1 Researcher's relationship with participants and sites**

The two research sites of interest in this study were selected as part of the larger *Family Food Practices* study, which I became involved with as both a graduate student

and graduate research assistant (responsible for the research activities at the northeast Vancouver site). These sites were selected with the goal of including one multicultural urban community and one rural community in British Columbia that were both accessible to the research team and demographically comparable to other research sites in Alberta, Ontario and Nova Scotia.

At the time of the interviews I had lived in Vancouver for approximately four years and was familiar with several of the city neighbourhoods included in the northeast Vancouver study site before beginning this study. There is a busy commercial and cultural district, appropriately called Commercial Drive that bisects this study site; I have been to ‘The Drive’ on many occasions to partake in cultural festivals or visit one of the many restaurants, cafés and shops along this central corridor. However, I have not lived in this area of the city, and I continue to feel like a visitor when spending time there.

All but one of the participants at the northeast Vancouver site was previously unknown to me. These participants had called or emailed the research team to express their interest in being involved in the study after seeing posters or being referred by other participants (see the recruitment section 3.3.4 for details on postering). Once accepted into the study I went to the participants’ homes for interviews (except for one interview in a café) or picking up film on at least two occasions, sometimes more often if the parent and teen interviews could not be scheduled back to back. My association with each family typically lasted for four to seven hours depending on the number of family members participating and the length of the interviews. Once the interviews were complete and the participants had received their honorariums there was no expectation of a continued relationship. Though the relationships that I had established with participants felt friendly and comfortable, they began with an expectation of anonymity. In this case the participant’s feelings of anonymity were likely strengthened by our lack of prior and post acquaintance.

I knew of one participant through a professional and university connection. This participant’s family was very welcoming during the interviews, and on invitation I did return to the home on two occasions: once, to pick some fruit from a tree in their back yard, and on a second occasion to discuss a teaching assistant position at the university—an opportunity that never materialized. Over the course of the interviews and later



meetings I developed a collegial relationship with this participant, however I do not regularly interact with her as our professional and personal networks do not often overlap.

The recruiting and interviewing for the District of Kent site was conducted by a postdoctoral colleague, and member of the *Family Food Practices* research team, whom I worked closely with up until the analysis stage of the research. This site is a couple hours drive East of Vancouver and I have very little personal experience with the area. I did not meet any of the participants at this site, and know of them only through their demographic profiles, transcripts and the memos kept by my colleague. Like myself, my colleague was an outsider at the District of Kent site and did not have prior acquaintance with the participants at that site. It is likely that the recruitment stage of the study would have proceeded more quickly if we were longtime residents and had established relationships in each research site. However our outsider status may have also helped participants to feel secure in sharing details about family food practices as there was little risk that this often personal family information would be leaked back to the local community.

### **3.3.2 The northeast Vancouver site**

Eleven households were recruited from the northeast quadrant of the City of Vancouver. The street boundaries for the sample area were set to include households east of Main Street, north of 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue, west of Boundary Road, and south of the harbor. This area was chosen for its diversity of family types, household incomes and ethnicities—with the goal of maximizing the diversity within the sample. The families that participated in the study lived in the Vancouver neighbourhoods of Strathcona, Mount Pleasant, Kensington-Cedar Cottage, Grandview Woodland, and Hastings-Sunrise. Table 3.3 below presents some of the demographic statistics for each neighbourhood. In general it is a fairly densely populated, multiethnic urban area bisected by Commercial Drive, a lively commercial corridor that has a large number of small grocery stores, cafes, restaurants and other small businesses.

**Table 3.3** Population profiles of the neighbourhoods in the Vancouver sample and the District of Kent

	<b>Vancouver Neighbourhoods in study</b>					<b>District of Kent</b>
	<b>Strathcona</b>	<b>Mount Pleasant</b>	<b>Kensington-Cedar Cottage</b>	<b>Grandview Woodland</b>	<b>Hastings-Sunrise</b>	<b>Kent</b>
<b>Land area</b>	3.4 km <sup>2</sup>	3.64 km <sup>2</sup>	7.23 km <sup>2</sup>	4.48 km <sup>2</sup>	8.12 km <sup>2</sup>	166.51 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Population</b>	11,920	23,615	44,665	28,205	33,130	4,738
<b>Population density</b>	3,506/km <sup>2</sup>	6,488/km <sup>2</sup>	6,178/km <sup>2</sup>	6,296/km <sup>2</sup>	4,080/km <sup>2</sup>	28/km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Number of families</b>	2,080	5,010	11,955	6,635	9,090	1,415
<b>Lone parent families</b>	24.3%	18.6%	18.2%	26.1%	18.2%	12.3%
<b>Median household income</b>	\$15,558	\$37,782	\$49,484	\$35,342	\$49,907	\$52,051
<b>Mother tongue</b>	43.9% Eng 40.3% Chin 4.7% Viet	62.0% Eng 10.0% Chin 5.0% Tag	34.5% Eng 33.0% Chin 6.4% Tag 5.3% Viet	62.0% Eng 14.4% Chin	36.8% Eng 39.5% Chin 5.5% Ital 3.9% Viet	87.6% Eng, 4.3% Dutch, 3.4% German
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of Vancouver Data from 2006 census. (2009). <i>Community web pages</i>. Retrieved July 10, 2009 from <a href="http://vancouver.ca/community_profiles/index.htm">http://vancouver.ca/community_profiles/index.htm</a></li> <li>Kent District Municipality Data from 2006 census Province of British Columbia. (2007). <i>BC Stats</i>. Retrieved on July 10, 2009 from <a href="http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/census.asp">http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/census.asp</a></li> <li>Language abbreviations Eng (English), Chin (Chinese), Tag (Tagalog – a Filipino language), Viet (Vietnamese), and Ital (Italian). Other languages are the mother tongue of less than 2% of the population.</li> </ul>						

### 3.3.3 The District of Kent site

Eleven families were also recruited from The District of Kent, which is approximately 120 Km east of Vancouver in the upper Fraser Valley. The District of Kent includes the communities of Harrison Hot Springs, Agassiz, and Harrison Mills. These communities are small towns and villages with a low population density, surrounded by farms and hemmed in on three sides by mountains. The economy in Kent

has historically been driven by agriculture, but tourism and recreation are growing contributors (see table 3.3 above for the population profile).

### **3.3.4 Recruitment**

As this study was interested in comparing the understandings of cooking skills and food practices between generations in the family unit, each participating household needed to have a minimum of one teenager (age 13-19 years) and one parent who was willing to participate and able to communicate in English. The families also needed to have lived in the area for at least two years, as knowledge of the local food environment was important to the *Family Food Practices* study. An incentive of a \$100 grocery gift certificate for parents and \$20 entertainment gift certificate for teens was used to aid in recruitment and express appreciation for participant's time spent volunteering with the study (see a reduced letter sized version of the recruitment poster in Appendix G).

Recruitment methods differed somewhat at each study site. For the northeast Vancouver site posters and pamphlets were placed in coffee shops, community centers, Laundromats, grocery stores, high schools and on street lamp billboards. Posters were effective at recruiting lower income and single parent families from a diverse ethnic background. However, upper and middle-income families did not respond to the posters and pamphlets, necessitating the use of other methods. One upper income family was recruited through a personal connection, and generated two other upper income recruits through referral. Middle-income families were targeted and recruited through an advertisement in a weekly community paper.

For the District of Kent site a key informant resident played an essential role in referring local families who would likely meet the recruitment criteria. More than half of the participant families from this site were recruited based on key informant referrals. The remaining families were recruited through posters, word of mouth, and researcher visits to local businesses.

Each household expressing interest in participating in the study was contacted by the researcher for an explanation of the study and collection of demographic data such as family composition, household income and highest level of education attained by the adults in the households for screening purposes. This initial screening data were used as part of purposive sampling to maximize the socioeconomic diversity within the study

group. Once the study group was established additional demographic data (including gender, age, occupation, income, education, family history, ethnic background, immigration status, and health status) were collected to characterize the sample. This additional demographic information was typically collected at the end of the first interview using a demographics form for each participant. The data collected for each participant family were then entered into a spread sheet where the participant data for both research sites were stored and organized, facilitating demographic comparisons between families and research sites.

Each family had a minimum of one teen and parent willing to participate (with the exception of bck06 where the teen was unable to participate). Six families had both parents participate, and four families had more than one teen participate. In these instances the adults or teens were interviewed together. As mothers were the primary contact persons for the research, encouraging fathers to join in on the mother's interview proved to be the most successful way of recruiting fathers. No fathers were recruited or interviewed individually. Recruitment and data collection began in May of 2008 and concluded in February of 2009. Table 3.4 below shows the overall demographics for the families participating in this research.

**Table 3.4** Participant demographics

<b>Participant's age and sex:</b>	<b>Vancouver site (n = 26)</b>	<b>Kent site (n = 27)</b>	<b>Total (n = 53)</b>
Teen males	8	5	13
Teen females	4	8	12
Teen age range (years):			
13-15	6	8	14
16-18	6	5	11
Adult males	3	3	6
Adult females	11	11	22
Adult age range (years):			
30-39	1	3	4
40-49	7	6	13
50-59	6	5	11
<b>Family structure:</b>	<b>Vancouver site (n = 11)</b>	<b>Kent site (n = 11)</b>	<b>Total (n = 22)</b>
Adult male and female + children	5	10	15
Adult male and female + children + grandchildren	1	0	1
Adult male and female + children + grandparent	1	0	1
Single mother + children	3	1	4
Single mother + children + grandparent	1	0	1
<b>Parent's education level:</b>	<b>Vancouver site (n = 14)</b>	<b>Kent site (n = 14)</b>	<b>Total (n = 28)</b>
High school	1	3	4
Trade school	2	2	4
Diploma/ Some post secondary education	4	4	8
Undergraduate degree	3	4	7
Graduate degree/diploma	4	1	5
<b>Annual family income:</b>	<b>Vancouver site (n = 11)</b>	<b>Kent site (n = 11)</b>	<b>Total (n = 22)</b>
< \$30,000	5	2	7
\$30-75,000	2	5	7
\$75-100,000	1	4	5
>100,000	3	0	3
<b>Family heritage/ ethnicity:</b>	<b>Vancouver site (n = 11)</b>	<b>Kent site (n = 11)</b>	<b>Total (n = 22)</b>
Euro-Canadian	6	10	16
First Nations/Métis	2	1	3
Chinese	2	0	2
South Asian	1	0	1

### **3.4 Ethics**

Could this research harm the participants? Care was taken during each stage of the research to ensure that no harm would come to the participants. As part of the informed consent process prior to the interviews, participants were informed of the potential for specific benefits and harm arising from their participation, as well as their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. There was a risk that some participants who might have a troubled relationship with food (e.g. those with eating disorders) may experience some psychological or emotional distress during the interview, or that the interviews may bring to the surface family tensions around food. This risk was anticipated to be small. To prepare for this potential harm each researcher carried an information sheet detailing local counseling services that could be shared with the participant if need be. In practice these counseling information sheets were never needed, and the interviewers received several positive comments from participants on their involvement in the study.

Beyond informed consent, the two main strategies to reduce the potential for harm were confidentiality and anonymity. During the interviews parents and teens were interviewed separately, and care was taken not to share information gleaned from the interviews with other family members. The audio recordings were transcribed by professional administrative staff who did not know the participants and received the audio file under title of the participant ID code. Transcribers were instructed to delete the audio file after the transcription was finished and not to share information gleaned from listening to the interview. The verbatim transcripts were cleaned for accuracy and of any identifying information including names, and identifiers of work, school or home by the researcher who conducted the interview.

In data management activities each participant is referred to by a participant code referencing the study site, family number, participant's position in family, and the interview number. The participant's first name and participant ID code are located together on only one document (the demographic data sheet) which is kept in a locked cabinet at the research office on UBC Campus. The participant's full name and optional address is located on the consent forms which are kept in a separate locked cabinet and

do not include the participant ID code. One participant at the District of Kent site had made a request to remove sections of the transcript where the discussion had moved into very personal matters. This request was respected and the sections of transcript removed from the record.

During the reporting stage care will be taken to present quotations and other descriptive information in ways that do not reveal the identity of participants.

As part of the Ethics submission to UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) I completed the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics' Introductory Tutorial for the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) on April 8, 2008. Because this research project is in essence analysing a subset of the data being collected for the *Family Food Practices* study the application for ethics approval has been subsumed within the BREB application for the larger study. I have been listed as graduate student co-investigator for this study on an amended application to BREB # H07-01685-001 (see Appendix H).

## **Chapter 4 Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter study data are presented using participant quotations, tables and figures. The chapter begins by documenting how key terms used during the interviews were interpreted in unexpected ways by participants. Following this, each section responds to the research questions using data to answer the questions of “what is happening in the homes of participants with regard to home cooking”, “how do participants learn and teach domestic cooking”, and “what does being able to cook mean to participating parents and teens in the context of contemporary British Columbia?” The chapter then concludes with a summary of the findings.

### **4.2 Defining cooking**

During the interviews participants responded to the key terms of ‘cooking skills’ and ‘cooking’ in unanticipated ways. When the interview questions were developed for this research project, ‘cooking skills’ were conceived of in a very broad sense and were intended to be inclusive of all the food preparation knowledge and abilities used by participants in preparing meals (refer to section 3.2.4.1 for interview questions). Similarly, ‘cooking’ was also intended to be understood in its broadest sense and was meant to be inclusive of all food preparation activities used in making meals. However, when participants were asked to describe their cooking skills they commonly adopted a more narrow definition of these terms than was intended. Participant understandings of these terms differed from the interviewer’s broad intentions in two main ways. The first, and most common, was where participants distinguished their cooking skills from their baking skills. The second, and less common, was where participants distinguished cooking from food preparation. These participant lead terminological distinctions are elaborated on below.

#### **4.2.1 Cooking versus baking skills**

When participants were asked to describe their cooking skills, they commonly and spontaneously made distinctions between their cooking and baking skills. Baking was



associated with making sweets such as cakes and cookies, whereas cooking encompassed most other types of food preparation (with exceptions described in section 4.2.2 below). There were several reasons for this distinction. One reason was that participants simply felt that their competencies at baking and cooking differed and required separate descriptions. Such is the case with a man from the Vancouver site who said:

I would say I'm an okay cook. I'm not, I would say I'm not as creative as [my spouse] can be. I use recipes more... [However,] in the baking I feel completely and utterly confident about baking. I can try new things with abandon... (bcv06mf1 lines 3005 - 3022)

In families where baking was a household activity both teens and adults commonly made this distinction between baking and cooking skills. This distinction, however, was not made in families where baking was not a typical household activity.

Another reason for separating descriptions of cooking from baking was because these activities were sometimes performed by different family members. This type of role based separation is exemplified by a woman from the Vancouver site. When asked to describe her cooking skills she first described her spouse's cooking skills. He cooked about five nights out of the week, and she saw the cooking as being primarily his role.

I think [he] is probably up there around an eight or nine [out of ten]. He's an amazing cook and I think I'm probably you know like a seven. I bake. I can bake, that's what I've always done. But there are a few meals that I can do really well. You know it's just that's the way it's [the labour division has] sort of fallen in our daily lives. (bcv08m1 lines 1699 - 1707)

In this family, cooking and baking are seen as different based on the patterns of food production that have developed over time; with the man doing most of the cooking and the woman doing most of the baking. This was one of just a couple of families interviewed where the man did the majority of the meal preparation (see table 4.2). In most other families the parent who was mainly responsible for the cooking, most often the woman, was also the one who would do the baking if baking was done in the family.

Two of the 22 women in the study distinguished cooking from baking on the basis of ingredients used in each activity, notably sugar. For example, when asked to describe her cooking skills, a woman from the Vancouver site qualified her assessment by saying:

I only bake muffins and like I bake a few special desserts over the year, but otherwise I'm not really a baker because all the baking calls for sugar

and I'm so anti-sugar. So, I don't really bake, you know? (bcv01m1 1043-1052)

In the interviews with the two women who negatively linked sugar with baking, health concerns were implied but not explicitly stated as the reasons for limiting baking. Continuing from the above quote, the participant went on to provide another distinction between baking and cooking when she said:

And also it's [baking is] such a detailed, like it's such a science. One wrong thing and the whole thing messes up. I prefer cooking where, you know, you can throw in this and you can throw in that and you let it, you know, it can cook an extra half hour it's even better. You know, so it's not an exact science with cooking so I like it better. (bcv01m1 1043-1052)

Separating baking from cooking based on the structure and feel of the activity was only spoken to by one participant. Whether or not baking is in fact a more 'scientific' and structured activity than cooking may depend on one's confidence in the activity and one's expectations of the outcome. It is likely that novice cooks and bakers each view the activity as fairly structured and governed by the rules and procedures dictated in a recipe; whereas the more skilled practitioner may see more room for experimentation and flexibility.

Several participants articulated this cooking/baking binary in another way based on differing levels of enjoyment associated with cooking compared to baking. An example of this distinction arose during an interview with a man who was a chef from the Kent site. During a joint interview with his spouse the topic of his work came up and she said "but for you cooking has always been a job..." and he followed up saying "for me it's probably baking I like better than cooking, that was my first apprenticeship...I enjoy that more than cooking" (bck11mf1 lines 914 - 930). In this example cooking was associated with paid work, something that needed to be done to support the family. In other families some women complained about the drudgery of daily cooking; unpaid but equally necessary work required in supporting the family. In this sense baking may be seen in a more favourable light because it typically happens less often than cooking, tends to be an optional instead of a required activity, and is more often done to make a treat (e.g. cookies or cake) rather than a basic staple of daily meals.

A final way that participants distinguished cooking from baking was based on the frequency with which each activity was performed in the home. Speaking about his spouse's baking, a man from the Kent site said "[she] likes to bake, although she doesn't do as much baking as she does [Spouse said: As I used to?] As you used to, or certainly you don't bake as much as you cook" (transcript bck09mf1 lines 793-799). In this case the decreased frequency of baking in the household was related to household tensions caused when the man would eat the baking meant to be saved for the children's lunches. This use of frequency of practice as a distinction between baking and cooking follows a logic that activities performed several times a day like cooking, differ from activities that may be performed less than once per day like baking, even though they both occur in the same kitchen space.

To summarize, when participants were asked to describe their cooking skills many of them spontaneously differentiated their cooking skills from those used for baking. The reasons for establishing this cooking/baking binary were based on differences in 1) competency, 2) family roles, 3) ingredients used, 4) structure of the activity 5) preference and, 6) the frequency associated with cooking and baking activities in the home.

#### **4.2.2 Cooking vs. food preparation**

In addition to the distinctions made above, a few of the teen participants distinguished between what counted as cooking versus food preparation, or simply putting something together (bcv06sasb and bcv07d). An interview segment with two teen brothers, ages 14 (SB) and 16 (SA) from the Vancouver site, illustrates this as they tried to determine what qualified as cooking. They agreed that making Kraft Dinner® macaroni and cheese didn't count as cooking because "the only part of making [it] is boiling the water," but struggled to determine where the line between cooking and food preparation should be drawn. They said that cooking was:

SA: Not coming out of a box. Not everything in one box

SB: Starting from scratch. Starting from scratch I think is cooking

SA: Well starting from scratch would be like making your own pasta and we've never done that

SB: Well no, I mean like pasta like from a box that like, like

SA: I think everything, if it comes all in one box it's not making it

SB: Yeah separate boxes, it's preparing it not

SA: Then again making pancakes  
SB: But you don't use mix do you. He makes pancakes  
SA: Well no. Making pancakes out of a box sometimes we do that and when we  
SB: Well you have to  
SA: Well you add milk so it is cooking  
[all laugh, some inaudible words] (transcript bcv06sasb1 lines 2355 -2391)

This exchange shows how difficult it can be to define what cooking is, even when one has a clear idea of what cooking isn't, such as with the Kraft Dinner® example mentioned by the teen boys above.

Qualifying words like 'cooking from scratch' and 'homemade' were also used by other participants to help describe what they meant by cooking within their family context. In some interviews participants were further asked to clarify what they meant by 'cooking from scratch'. For example when a woman from the Vancouver site, who frequently used the words 'homemade' and 'from scratch' to describe the food that was eaten at home, was asked what cooking from scratch meant to her she said:

M: If I was making a pasta dinner. Say I was making an Alfredo sauce, I could do that from scratch or I can buy it from the store. Buying it from the store and putting it with the pasta wouldn't be making it from scratch. That would be kind of a, not completely processed, but partly processed. But again I'd look at the package and see what was in it.

I: And the pasta you would normally buy?

M: Italian usually, sometimes fresh and sometimes dried. But yes, we don't make our own pasta, no. Like a, something I haven't done...

I: So would you say that cooking from scratch is important to you or?

M: Uh, I would say, I, we, I do it as much as possible. (bcv07m1 lines 1969-2032)

For this participant homemade or from scratch meals were placed in opposition to 'processed' meals, where processed foods were negatively associated with "chemical additives or preservatives" (bcv07m1 lines 1416-1419). In the example above, using a

store bought Alfredo sauce for a pasta dinner was not her preferred method of cooking a pasta dinner, but would be okay so long as the ingredients did not qualify it as being too processed. Thus the terms ‘from scratch’ and ‘homemade’ served to specify a particular kind of cooking, one that relied more upon basic ingredients than processed ingredients, but were flexible enough to include some processed foods such as store bought pasta.

For a few participants, cooking had a more literal meaning of applying heat to food. This physical understanding of cooking lead to some difficulties communicating the intent of the interview questions with one participant who was following a raw food diet and avoided ‘cooking’ her food. After speaking about some of the pressures and stresses of trying to make meals for her teen son this woman, a single mother from the Vancouver site, said:

M: I mean I can cook, but its [inaudible word]. I don't know. I'm just not that enthusiastic about cooking cooked food, making cooked foods.

I: Yeah. What about if we change the term and say like preparing raw foods? Is that

M: It's a little easier for me because then that's what I'm interested in (bcv02m1 lines 2666 – 2674).

These examples show that the terms ‘cooking’ and ‘cooking skills’ as used in the interview questions were understood in different ways by different participants. When developing the research questions I had purposefully used a broad definition of ‘cooking skills’ to provide room for the participants to describe whatever they perceived their cooking skills to be within the context of their family. I had not however anticipated the various interpretations of the word ‘cooking’. Participants differentiated cooking from baking, basic food prep using convenience foods, and the preparation of raw (uncooked) meals.

This section has described how participants variously understood the meanings of key terms used in the interviews. It is significant that these distinctions arose spontaneously as participants felt the need to clarify what they meant by ‘cooking’ or ‘cooking skills’ as compared to the broad use of these terms by the interviewers. This may suggest that there is a range of food practices occurring within participant homes and that participants subdivide these practices based on self imposed or culturally derived

distinctions between cooking and baking, or cooking and more basic forms of food preparation.

#### **4.2.3 The relativity of our perceptions of our cooking skills**

In addition to the various interpretations of ‘cooking’ and ‘cooking skills’ made by participants there was also variation in how participants assessed their own cooking skills. Participants’ assessments of their cooking skills were relative in nature and dependent on the context in which the assessment of their skills was made. For example an 18 year old female from the Kent site initially described her cooking skills in comparison to her mother saying:

“Mine are okay. Like I can follow a recipe and make whatever, and then I can sometimes just figure out how to make something just from having it a few times. But compared to mom, we’re [she and her sister] not very good cooks.” (bck05dadb1 lines 911 – 914)

However, later in the interview she assessed her skills more favourably when compared to her friends, saying:

“It depends on the friends, but in general mine I think are a little better. Like I can make a roast dinner but my friends probably wouldn’t be able to. I can do more cooking from scratch. Like I think my friends mostly do more convenience foods.” (bck05dadb1 lines 1075 – 1078)

As this example shows, the assessment of one’s own skills can vary depending on whose skills are serving as the comparison. This teen participant described skills such as being able to ‘follow a recipe’, ‘figure out how to make something’ and ‘do more cooking from scratch’ as indicators of cooking skill that can be compared between people (see Table 4.1 below for other participant’s examples). Other context dependent factors affecting one’s self appraisal of cooking skills may include the type of cuisine or the social expectations associated with the meal.

<b>Table 4.1</b> Participants’ descriptions of indicators of their cooking skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- feeling confident</li> <li>- being adventurous</li> <li>- being creative</li> <li>- not being sloppy</li> <li>- not feeling intimidated by cooking</li> <li>- making good tasting food</li> </ul>	Being able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use seasonings</li> <li>- make anything</li> <li>- cut fast</li> <li>- maneuver around the kitchen</li> <li>- use a recipe</li> <li>- go off-recipe</li> <li>- cook fancy foods</li> <li>- cook from scratch</li> <li>- cook from different ethnic cuisines</li> </ul>

Participants self assessments of their cooking skills were subjective and relative to whomever served as the comparison. At the beginning of the study these self assessments of cooking skill were thought of as significant, however in retrospect the result of the self assessment was less significant than the process that participants used to assess their skills. For example, in the quotes above the teen girl assessed her cooking skills as “okay”, “not very good” or “a little better” depending on whom she compared herself to. This quote shows that the process the teen used to determine her skill level provided more significant information than the result of the assessment.

### 4.3 How often is cooking happening in participants’ homes?

Home cooked meals were the norm for participant families. In all but one family, the evening meal was considered the main meal of the day, and was also the meal where family members were most likely to gather together. For example, when describing family meals a mother of five said “supper, that’s the only meal we’re all together” (bck08m1 lines 88-89). Breakfast and lunch were meals more likely to be eaten individually or by subgroups in the family.

All 22 families interviewed described the homemade meal as their most common type of meal, especially for the main meal. Meals from restaurants, takeout, or ready to eat/heat meals were described less frequently. When the adult participants described eating out, most used words like ‘rarely’, ‘occasionally’, and ‘if pressed for time’. Interview responses suggested that when eating out did occur, it was more frequently with the lunch meal. For example, in an interview with the parents of a family at the Kent

site (bck09mf1) the man described their dinner meals saying “it’ll usually work out that [the eldest boy] will cook a couple times a week. I’ll cook a couple times a week, and then [the woman] will cook three times I would say, a week” (lines 367-370). A little later in the interview, when describing how often they ate out at restaurants the woman asked her spouse “how often do you think we go out? Once a month maybe?” he clarified asking “for a dinner?” and then agreed that they ate dinner out only about once per month “for a good one”. He then further clarified this by adding “we will eat out all the time, but for lunches” (lines 472-483). This quote suggests that the home made meal is considered most important for the main family meal of the day, whereas for other meals it was more acceptable to “eat out all the time”.

A variety of reasons were suggested for choosing the more laborious option of making homemade food most often. For the families with a low income, eating out was economically limited by the often higher cost of meals purchased at restaurants. That being said, upper income families did not necessarily eat out in proportion to their ability to pay for restaurant meals. Somewhat surprisingly, upper income families also spoke about eating out only occasionally, with some citing they could make better meals at home and were often unimpressed by restaurant meals. Also, homemade meals were spoken about with regard to health preferences or limiting prepared/processed foods. For example when describing what she liked about how the family ate, a health conscious woman from the Kent site said “we are happy that we are eating basic, wholesome, nutritious, from scratch, as little processed as possible” (bck11mf1 lines 962-963).

It is apparent from the food practices described that cooking meals remains a common activity in participants’ homes and that eating together as a family is considered to be important, even though it doesn’t necessarily happen at every meal. What is not immediately apparent is on whose shoulders the responsibility for preparing these homemade meals rests.

#### **4.4 Who does the cooking?**

The task of feeding the family was nearly always taken on by the adults in the family (see Table 4.2 below). Some of the teens occasionally took responsibility for family meals as part of a ‘kids cooking night’ family initiative, or to step in for the



absence of the typical adult cook, but this appeared to be the exception to the rule of adults feeding the family.

**Table 4.2** Who is the primary meal provider in participants' homes?

	Vancouver	Kent
The woman	5 (includes 3 single mothers)	7 (includes 1 single mother)
The woman* & her father share	1 (bcv11, single mother)	-
The woman & her mother* share	1 (bcv04)	-
The man	1 (bcv08)	1 (bck07)
The woman & man share	3 (bcv05,07,10)	2 (bck01,11)
The woman, man & adult son share	-	1 (bck09)
Notes: 1. In the Vancouver sample 1 man and 1 woman had taken on primary baking roles but only secondary cooking roles. In the Kent sample two of the women had taken on primary baking roles, but secondary cooking roles 2. This table does not include kids cooking nights as this was typically only one night per week and had parental involvement 3. The asterix (*) denotes the person who cooks more often in shared cooking arrangements when this was apparent from participant responses		

In 14 of the 22 participant families the woman was the adult who was primarily responsible for family meals. Five of these families were headed by single mothers. In two of the families from the Vancouver site a grandparent to the children lived in the home and assisted the woman of the house in preparing meals. In these two cases a grandmother was the primary cook in one home, and a grandfather was a secondary cook in the other home. There were also two families in which the man had primary cooking responsibilities and eight families where the cooking duties were shared between adults. In these families where adults shared cooking duties, the degree of sharing was not always clear from the participant responses, especially in families where the men did not participate in the interviews. Participant responses suggest a range of sharing as some of these parents cooked together, some would alternate cooking nights, and others based the sharing on work schedules and their availability at home. For example, in one Vancouver family the adult couple would typically plan and cook meals together during the school year, but the woman took on most of the cooking responsibilities when she was away

from her teaching job during the summer months, a time when her spouse continued to work full time outside of the home (bcv07m1 lines 110–146).

Amongst the teens, none had primary cooking responsibilities, though ‘kids cooking nights’ had been established in four families and, less formally, some teens helped the adults prepare meals in other families. In these cases the adults remained primarily responsible for providing meals, especially concerning the dinner meal. As may be expected, the older teens were more likely to have taken on some cooking responsibilities than the younger teens.

Home cooking has historically been a strongly gendered activity. This legacy was evident in this study as women were nearly always involved in preparing family meals. However, women were not the only ones preparing meals in families. Of the dual parent households, men were significantly involved in preparing meals in at least eight of the 17 families. This contribution of men to home cooking was most significant at the Vancouver site where, when the single mother headed families were omitted, there was only a moderate gender divide in home cooking. At the Vancouver site, in most cases where there were two adults in the household the cooking was shared between them. At the Vancouver site there was no apparent gender divide in teens with regard to cooking, only two of the 11 families had both male and female children, and teen involvement in preparing home meals seemed to be primarily based on the degree of interest that either the parents or teens had in cooking as opposed to predefined gender roles.

The gendered divide in home cooking was more evident in the families at the Kent site. In about half of the families at this site family meals were primarily made by the woman of the household, and the women in all but one of the remaining households shared in preparing meals. Of these families a gendered division of domestic cooking was most strongly apparent within three large families of Dutch and Swiss heritage (bck04, 08 and 05) with 6, 5 and 10 children respectively. The women in each of these families were stay at home mothers who identified strongly with being the family cook and whose spouses worked full time outside of the home (two in farming and another in carpentry). The women from the Dutch families identified strongly with their Dutch heritage, one where cooking is primarily a female activity, and the Dutch community in the area. These three families in particular presented a fairly traditional approach to the family division of

labour with the women staying at home and being responsible for most of the housework and childcare.

At the Kent site only four of the 11 families had both male and female children living at home. In contrast to the apparent gender neutrality in teen cooking at the Vancouver site a gendered divide in home cooking was suggested by the responses from teen girls in the two families of Dutch heritage at the Kent site (bck04 and bck08) and the teen girl from the family of Swiss heritage (bck05) at the same rural site. The strongest teen example of this gender divide arose when a 14 year old from a Dutch family was asked to compare her cooking skills to those of her older brothers. She said, “My brothers don’t know, they probably don’t know nothing about that kind of stuff...they never cook” (bck08d1 lines 858-863). The girl’s mother explained this by saying “They’re never home. They come home and food is on the table” (bck08d1 line 865). A more moderate example of this gendering of home cooking arose in the other Dutch family, when the 16 year old girl was describing her friends; she said that the oldest children in the largest families tend to have the best cooking skills, adding that the “guys know how to cook too, from my friends, they know how to cook, just basics” (bck04dasb1 lines 1408-1431). While the two quotes above suggest that home cooking was primarily an activity for the female teens in two or three of the 22 families this gender divide was not apparent in most families. This finding may be biased by the fact that only 6 of the 22 participant families had teens of both gender living at home at the time of the interviews.

The findings from this study show that the women in the household were nearly always involved in the preparation of family meals, and often took primary responsibility for doing so. However, in contrast to the historical situation where women were typically solely responsible for preparing family meals, men took on some of this responsibility in almost half of dual parent families interviewed for this study and primary cooking responsibilities in two of the families. With regard to the participant teens, with the exception of the three Dutch and Swiss families described above, the teen data do not suggest that teen girls are being trained to become home cooks any more than the teen boys. Indeed, amongst the teen responses there were boys who loved to cook, girls who disliked it and vice versa.

#### **4.5 How is home cooking learned and taught?**

Participants learned home cooking skills both inside and outside of the home, and these skills were learned and taught in both active and passive forms. Amongst the teenaged participants the most commonly cited way of learning to cook was by watching parents, mostly mothers but inclusive of fathers, cook. For families with three generations in the home the grandparents often also played a role. Again, grandmothers were cited more than grandfathers. A 15 year old girl from the Kent site provided an example of this learning to cook through parental observation when she was asked how she learned what she knows about cooking. She responded by saying “mostly from my mom, actually I guess I haven’t really learned that much from her either. Mostly I guess I just pick it up by myself.” When probed to describe how she picked up this knowledge she further reflected on her learning and said:

Well I guess from watching my mom so I guess technically from my mom. I haven’t really like sat down and she’s taught me this but I guess from watching her and my best friend’s mom (bck02d1 lines 876-885).

This type of learning was most often described as a passive observational process, one that occurred in a non-structured format without explicit goals of learning to cook. Though this passive style of learning was most commonly cited, some of the teens were more actively involved in food preparation at home. This active involvement ranged from relatively small and isolated cooking experiences such as making cookies to the more demanding experiences of preparing family meals. Four participant families had instituted a kids cooking night where the teen(s) took on responsibility for planning and preparing the meal once per week. These kids cooking nights were instituted by parents with the goal of creating opportunities for their children to actively learn to plan and prepare meals. This intent was most clearly articulated by a single mother from the Vancouver site who described kids cooking night by saying:

I want them [her teen son and daughter] to go through the process of planning for a meal. So that’s really for me what this Tuesday Wednesday cooking is about, it’s not so much that I get a night off cooking but I really want them to see everything that goes into getting the meal on the table. (bcv09m1 lines 414-418)

The second most common way for teen participants to learn cooking skills was through classes at school or in the community. Teens attending public schools in BC may receive anywhere from a lot of food skills training to almost none, depending on the school they attend and electives they choose. In addition to elective courses in Home Economics, which include an element of food studies, some school boards offer specialized food studies courses. The teens in this study had a range of cooking experiences in the class room environment. Some teens had only a minimal exposure to cooking through a Home Economics class; such was the case with a 16 year old Vancouver boy who said he disliked cooking. He described learning what he knew about cooking by saying “at the school they make, like they make us take a cooking class like...in grade eight, we had to take a home-ec class” (bcv11sa1 lines 1063-1068). Other teens had more substantial exposure to cooking at school through cooking class electives or special cooking career related programs. In total, about three quarters of the teens who were interviewed spoke about having some exposure to cooking in the school environment. Two of the Vancouver teens were involved in more extensive cooking programs at school, including working at the student cafeteria and participating in the culinary arts program available at the school. These two teens were both male and had ambitions of becoming chefs (bcv09s and bcv10sb).

In contrast to the structured learning at school, a few teens at the Vancouver site also mentioned learning by experimenting and trying out things on their own. Despite the popularity of cooking television programs on The Food Network, only a couple of the teens mentioned watching food TV as a source of learning to cook. When it was mentioned, food TV programs by celebrity chefs such as Gordon Ramsey and Jamie Oliver were cited as less significant than parental observation as sources of learning to cook (bcv07d, bcv08s and bck07s).

When adult participants spoke about learning to cook they separated their learning into two different life stages, the first was when they were children living in their parents’ home, and the other was when they were adults living outside of their parents’ home. Similar to the teen participants, the adult participants also most frequently cited learning to cook by watching their parents, and in some cases grandparents, cook or bake when they were younger. In contrast, some adult participants made explicit reference to *not*

learning to cook from their parents. In some cases this was because the primary family cook was absent, such as when that person was away at work or had passed away. In these cases the adult women recalled having to step up and take on the cooking duties for the family with little preparation (bcv09m, bck08m and bcv06m). In the other cases, the adult recalled either not being interested in learning to cook (bck01m, bck07m), or was not being encouraged to hang around the kitchen as a child (bck03m, bcv05m). For example, when asked if she learned to cook from her mother, a woman from the Kent site responded by saying “not really. Really I wanted to be outside in the barn” (bck01m1 line 694).

In comparison to all of the teens who spoke about learning to cook at school, only a few of the adult participants mentioned learning how to cook in secondary school. In later life about a fifth of the adults had taken culinary arts classes offered by cooking schools, with three adults having undertaken apprentice cook training (bcv01m, bck07f, and bck11f), with two of them later finding work as chefs (bck07 and bck11). Though learning to cook in secondary school was mentioned less frequently by adult participants than by teens, this difference in reporting may have more to do with a diminishing significance of past secondary school-based learning to the adults than to any intergenerational differences in the cooking courses available at participants’ secondary schools.

The second most commonly cited way of learning to cook by adult participants was by reading cookbooks and food magazines; followed closely by learning from siblings, spouses, or friends. Though most adult participants cited multiple forms of learning to cook, several considered themselves to be self-taught, usually by reading cooking books and food magazines.

As with the teens, only a small number of the adult participants mentioned watching cooking TV shows as a way of learning cooking skills (bcv05m, bcv07m, bcv09m, bcv10m and bcv11m). None of the adults from the Kent site spoke of watching food TV, though this may have actually occurred and been overlooked during the interviews. Other infrequently cited ways that adult participants described learning to cook were by searching the Internet for recipes, reading package instructions, being

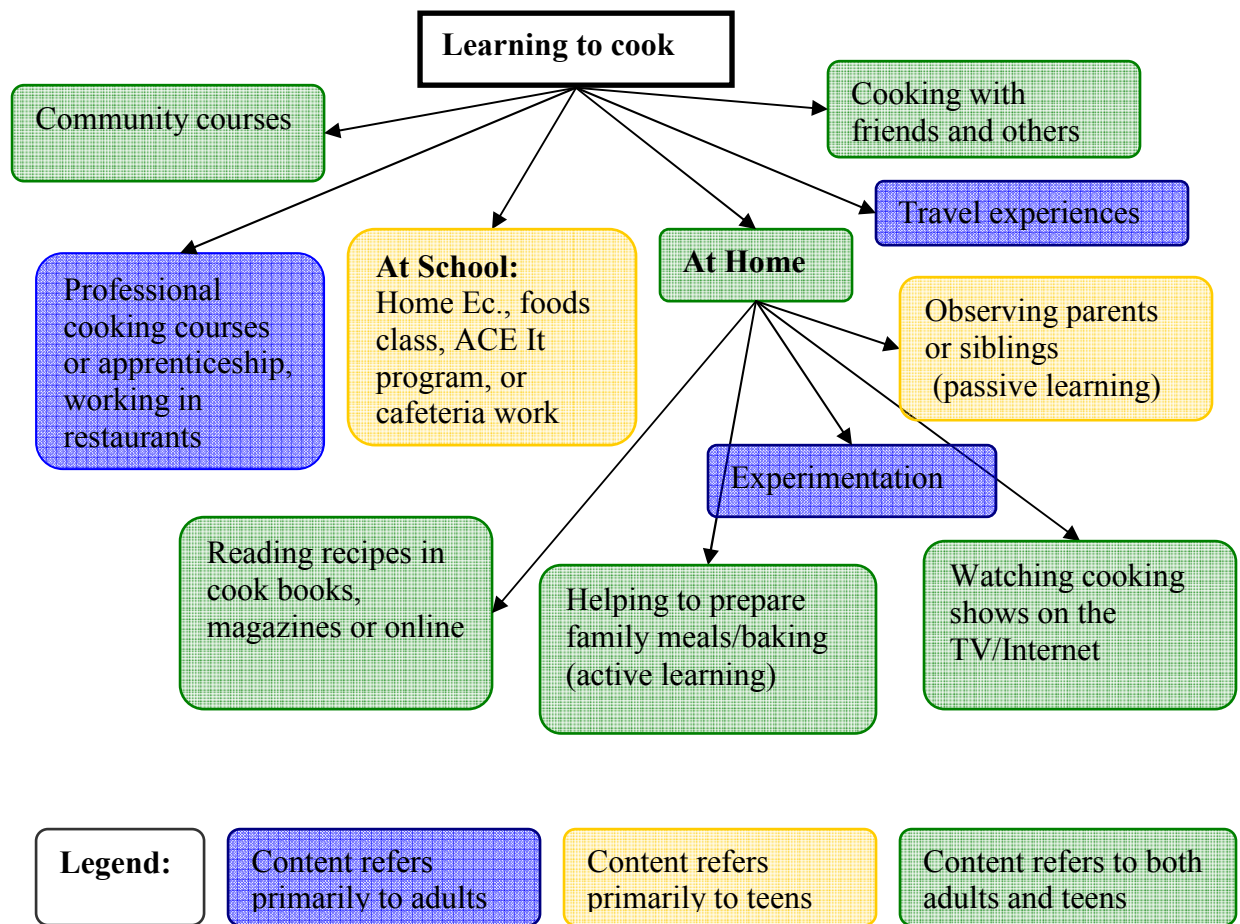
actively involved with their parents in cooking (as a child), and learning through exposures gained while traveling.

During the interviews the adults were asked if, and how, they passed on their cooking skills to other family members. When parents spoke about teaching their teens how to cook no strong themes emerged. Less than half of the parents spoke about trying to involve teens in cooking, frequently adding that the teens lacked interest in being involved. For example, when asked if she was passing on her cooking skills to her daughter a woman from the Kent site said “No. She...doesn’t take the interest in it [cooking] as I did as a child” (bck10m1 lines 1618-1623). Only about one quarter of the parents actively involved their teens in cooking or baking at home. For example, when asked if her children ever helped out with the meal preparation a woman from the Vancouver site described how her kids learned to cook saying:

“It'd be like "ok, it's kids cooking night, go for it" and they'd cook whatever they want. They can all cook. But mind you as soon as they are old enough to stand I've got them cooking with me” (bcv03mf1 lines 2232-2238).

Parents also responded, less frequently, that they promoted teens’ learning of cooking skills by drawing attention to aspects of the cooking that they were doing (bcv01m), supporting any teen interests in cooking by providing ingredients and coaching (bcv06m), leaving instructions (bck03m), encouraging teens to follow package instructions (bcv10m), or encouraging teens to learn their cooking skills at school (bcv10m).

The comparison of the two generations of participants indicated that they had very similar ways of learning to cook while living at home as teens; primarily by observing parents cook and participating in cooking classes at school. After moving out and becoming independent the influence of parental role modeling appeared to diminish and the influence of cooking courses, cookbooks, magazines, friends and spouses, personal experimentation, and to a lesser extent food TV and travel increased. The network diagram below (figure 4.1) illustrates how adult and teen participants spoke about learning to cook; the text boxes have been colour coded such that content in blue boxes refers primarily to adults, content in yellow boxes refers primarily to teens and content in green boxes refers to both adults and teens.



**Figure 4.1** How participants described learning to cook

While the figure above shows that adults and teens learn to cook in a variety of ways, with some modalities favoured by one or the other age group, it does not show the factors that participants described as facilitating or hindering the development of their cooking skills (see Table 4.3 below for a list of these facilitators and barriers).



**Table 4.3** Factors influencing the development of participants' cooking skills

Influencing Factors	Facilitators	Barriers
<b>Personal factors</b>	<p><b>Both teens and adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desire to try new foods (e.g. bcv07m, bck08m, bck09m)</li> <li>- Dietary change (e.g. raw food or vegetarian - bcv02m, bcv09m)</li> <li>- Enjoyment of cooking and/or eating (e.g. bcv04da)</li> <li>- Cooking career ambitions (e.g. bcv09s, bcv10sb, bck11f)</li> </ul> <p><b>Teens:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preparing to move away from home and become independent (e.g. bcv07d)</li> </ul>	- (no examples cited)
<b>Interpersonal factors</b>	<p><b>Adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Marriage (e.g. bcv05m, bck01m, bck04m),</li> <li>- Role expectations, requirement to cook for the family (e.g. bcv06m, bcv09m, bck11m)</li> <li>- Requirements of a job (e.g. bcv03m)</li> </ul> <p><b>Both teens and adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support or encouragement from family or friends (e.g. bcv05m, bcv08m, bck01d)</li> <li>- More responsibility for food preparation tasks related to ones age or stage of life (e.g. bcv06sa, bcv07d)</li> <li>- Desire to measure up to the skills of others (e.g. bck03m)</li> <li>- Desire to connect to others via cooking (e.g. bcv07f), or seeking the approval of others (e.g. bck01d)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Both teens and adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family or peer group discourage cooking (e.g. bck09s, bck03m)</li> </ul>

While participants were not explicitly asked what factors encouraged them to, or discouraged them from, learning how to cook many made reference to this when they described how they had learned to cook. These influencing factors described by participants can be organized into personal and interpersonal categories as seen in table

4.3 above. Some of these factors have already been mentioned in the preceding paragraphs of this section or will receive further description in later sections and will not be repeated here; however, I will present examples of the influencing factors that are not described elsewhere.

One of the personal level factors that facilitated the development of cooking skills was a desire to try new foods based on a dietary change, curiosity or simply an enjoyment of food. This facilitating factor was described by a woman from the Kent site who described learning to cook by saying “I always like[d] trying out recipes. [I was] curious a bit, I don’t know, I got bored of just my mom’s cooking” (bck08m1 lines 1876-1877). In this example and others, curiosity or a desire to explore new foods, cuisines or eating styles was one of the enabling forces facilitating the learning of cooking skills.

The two other main categories of personal level factors were both related to participant’s perceived future need to be able to cook, either for work or for independent living. The motivating factor of preparing to move out of the home and become independent, as described by teens, receives attention in section 4.6.3.2. The motivation of learning to cook based on career ambitions was described by a 17 year old boy at the Vancouver site who was enrolled in a culinary arts program at his high school. When asked about his plans after high school he said “I plan to spend it [a scholarship] on doing level two and that way I can do level three [of a culinary apprenticeship] then I’ll become a red seal chef...then I plan to work in a in a five star hotel” (bcv10sb lines 163-172). In this case the teen’s motivation to take a career in cooking was likely motivated by a combination of his personal desires to be a chef and his parents’ guidance towards a career in the trades.

The interpersonal factors that encouraged participants to learn how to cook included the responsibility to feed others as related to role expectations or life transitions. For example a woman from the Kent site described her motivation to learn to cook after she was married when she said “I learned that if I wanted to please him [her husband] I’d better learn how to cook. So basically [I taught myself] with cookbooks” (bck01m1 lines 711-712). This type of life stage change as motivating a desire to learn to cook was also described by some teens who were expected to take on more food preparation responsibilities, especially for their school lunches and snacks, as they grew older. For

example, a 16 yr old Vancouver teen who tended to make pasta for his lunches said “I learned how, because I was consuming so much that mom didn't want a, or dad didn't want to make it anymore for me” (bcv06sasb2 lines 858-859). As a practical skill, it makes sense that learning to cook is related to one's life stage, becoming most important at times where one is becoming more independent or responsible for the care of others.

The other main grouping of interpersonal facilitators included wanting to learn to cook in order to connect with family members, because of the encouragement and support of others (see section 4.6.2 on connecting to others), or in order to measure up to others' cooking abilities. An example of this arose when a woman from the Kent site was describing her upbringing and suggested that the cooking skills of her siblings and importance of food in her family influenced why she felt it was important to be able to make meals from scratch. She said:

Food's always been a big thing in my family...I have three sisters and two brothers and they all cook and they're all good at it...I'm the youngest, and so perhaps [the motivation was] just feeling like I could measure up or something (bck03m1 lines 493-499).

While family support, encouragement or even sibling competition can serve as a motivating factor for learning to cook, the family or peer group can also prove to be a barrier to learning to cook in some contexts. As mentioned earlier in this section some of the adult participants were discouraged from hanging around the kitchen when they were children. In an example of the influence of peers one 14 year old teen from the Kent site mentioned that his peers were discouraging him from taking an optional cooking class at school when he said “I am doing it [the cooking class] this term, although I might quit it because my friends say it's all bull” (bck09s1 lines 110-111).

This section has shown that there are a number of ways in which participants learned to cook. Additionally this section has presented several facilitators and barriers to learning how to cook as described by participants. The significance of these findings is that learning to cook is framed as sensitive to an individual's context. The sources of participants' cooking knowledge differed by life stage, family history, access to resources, and personal interests. As well, participants' social group, role expectations, stage of life and personal ambitions or goals all influenced whether or not (and to what extent) they made the effort to learn cooking skills.

## **4.6 What is the significance of home cooking, and being able to cook?**

The significance of home cooking and being able to cook emerged as one of the most interesting and rich areas of findings in this study, prompting the revision of the research questions (see section 3.1). In many of the interviews participants were asked what it meant to be able to cook a meal for themselves or their family. Responses to this question, in addition to other unsolicited responses on the topic, painted a rich picture of the significance of home cooking within participant families. These findings are grouped below by major themes beginning with the theme of control, continuing with the theme of connecting to others, and concluding with the themes of culinary confidence and exploration.

### **4.6.1 Theme of control**

When participants spoke about what being able to cook meant to them the theme of control was a pronounced element of adult responses, though only occasionally expressed by teens. Being able to cook gave the parents a sense of control over the ingredients and foods used in meals. This theme of control was also evident in the adults' desire to avoid some types of eating establishments, as well as exercise a degree of familial self-reliance.

#### ***4.6.1.1 Control over ingredients, foods and eating places***

One of the ways that cooking skills enabled adults to exercise control was with regard to the ingredients used in meals. For example, a woman from the Vancouver site who had expressed some concern about her son's body weight spoke about her desire to protect her children from poor food choices made outside of the home—such as 7-Eleven Slurpees®—when she said:

So I feel even more pressure inside the house to be very healthy because I don't have control of what goes on outside... It's about not having crap in the house... because there's not that sense of you know control over what happens outside the house and they're [her children] making their own choices out there... I feel like I need to be sure they get their vitamins when they're here [at home].  
(bcv09m1 lines 2321-2372)

For this woman, the desire to control what kinds of foods her children had access to at home was amplified by the fact that the children spent a couple nights every week at their

father's house; a place where pop was typically served with dinner (against the mother's wishes). By being able to cook she was able to actively decide which ingredients and foods would and would not be used in family meals, exercising a gate keeping role where undesirable foods and ingredients could be screened out of the family food supply. The parental role is one often framed in terms of guardianship. As guardians, parents may view exercising control over the family food supply as a way of protecting their children's health by limiting access to negatively perceived ingredients or foods. Another example of this arose when a woman from the Kent site, who described herself as a "scratch cook", talked about the challenges of having a strong sense of responsibility for her children's health. She said:

I feel satisfied by the act of providing what I see is a pretty healthy diet. I mean it could always be better. You know, it could always be better. But all I would be doing was cooking all day long. I've done that before. I've spent agonizing amounts of time in the past stressing about everything that my kids are putting into their mouths and spending five or six hours a day cooking (bck03m1 lines 397 – 403).

A little later in the transcript she speaks about how she would occasionally buy her kids packaged cookies and feel badly about buying something with "questionable ingredients". The interviewer then asked if this had anything to do with ideas about how one was supposed to be as a mother. She responded saying:

Yeah. I think feeling like everything is under YOUR control about what your kids are eating. And in the old days I would think, if they got sick, what did I do wrong? You know things like that. Then I'd say, "Okay, we're not eating any sugar this week." (bck03m1 lines 463-472)

From the two quotes above it is clear that the responsibility felt by some parents to exercise control over the ingredients or foods used in family meals can be a source of stress. This desire for control, in order to protect the health of the family, may serve as motivation for parents to prepare meals from basic ingredients even if it involves "cooking all day long", instead of using convenience foods where the ingredients are controlled by food processors and may be "questionable".

The negative framing of cooking skills, as enabling one to avoid undesirable ingredients was also referenced with regard to whole categories of foods and restaurants. When participants were asked what being able to cook meant to them it was very

common for adults to speak about cooking skills as enabling them to avoid categories of food and restaurants such as fast food, boxed food, canned food, convenience food, or processed food. These statements most often combined health and financial concerns. For example when asked what being able to cook meant to her a woman from the Vancouver site said:

Well I guess it's a life skill, necessity right. It's a basic life skill. You need to eat right so you need to learn how to cook. So if you didn't know how to cook then you'd be eating all kinds of processed food, convenience food and you'd be going out a lot eating fast food. So I don't think it'd be too healthy a lifestyle and it'd be very expensive (bcv11m1 lines 3445-3454).

In this example being able to cook gave the woman some control over what kinds of foods she ate, impacting both her health and food budget. In this section adults spoke about being able to cook in terms of having some control over what types of foods and ingredients were eaten. This did not appear to be a desire for control in and of itself; rather it seemed to be related to the role of the parents as providers and guardians, protecting the health and financial stability of the family. In this sense, cooking skills were a resource that the parents could draw upon in order to protect their family by exercising control over the food supply.

#### ***4.6.1.2 Control and self-reliance***

As described above the theme of control was evident when parents spoke about being able to cook in terms of *protecting* their family. The theme of control was also evident when parents spoke about wanting to *provide* for their family. In this sense being able to cook was framed positively as enabling families to be more self reliant by having some control over the family food supply. This desire for self reliance was often expressed when participants spoke about 'cooking from scratch' or 'homemade meals' especially with regard to growing and preserving foods. An example of this comes from a woman from the Kent site who spoke about why she kept a very well stocked pantry and freezer containing soups and breads made from scratch as well as some commercial products like baked beans.

When my oldest daughter was about a year, my husband...all of a sudden he got laid off and I had about 30, 35 dollars. That's all I had, plus money for the payments...I thought, "I need milk for the little girl." That was the first thing you need, right? So we kind of figured it out. I made my own bread and we had brown sugar and bread, which we still do sometimes, which is cheap. And we just lived very, very cheap, but after that time and all those things, especially before winter time I like my pantry well stocked. (bck04m1 lines 550 – 560)

The parents in this family had six children living at home and a relatively low household income of around \$30,000 per year. Stretching the food budget was something that the woman did regularly by buying foods in bulk, on sale and in season. She supplemented the grocery budget with produce from the garden, some of which she canned or froze. For this woman being able to cook and preserve foods was part of an overall strategy of self-reliance, providing for her family in times of fiscal uncertainty.

With regard to providing family meals, self reliance can also provide a sense of liberation or independence. For example when asked what it meant to be able to cook a meal for her family a woman and mother of two teen boys, from the Vancouver site explicitly and emphatically referenced the interrelated concepts of control, self-reliance and independence saying:

I'm liberated from the people who would like to sell me prepared things with ingredients that they control, not me. If I can cook I can have more control on what I spend. I can have more control on what goes in my body. I can have more control on what, tastes and what I eat because you can't buy prepared, you know all the things that I would like to eat. So I have control, and also a sense of creativity, for that half an hour before it's all eaten up. (bcv06mf1 lines 2991 – 3001)

Being able to cook enabled this mother to provide for her family in such a way that she had control of family meals so that she did not have to rely on "people who would like to sell [her] prepared things." This family engaged in several practices that increased their self reliance including: gardening, making bread, preserving fruits and vegetables, and buying or harvesting foods in bulk while in season.

Domestic cooking skills were also described in terms of enabling families to be more self reliant by controlling the amount of money spent on food. An example comes from the Kent site from a man who used to work as a chef. He said "as long as there's vegetables in the fridge there's always something you can make" (bck07mf1 lines 259-

261). He was an advocate of cooking from scratch with what was available and said “that’s what people need to learn, to work with what they have.” When asked about how the food budget was affected by unexpected expenses his spouse said:

When we get low on cash between pay cheques what we do is we plan our meals...Eat things that, you know, use it up; you forget to eat certain things. So then if you do that then you can really, you know, you save money if you’re not eating on the run kind of thing (bck07mf1 lines 305-315).

In this family, fluctuations in family income and expenditures were offset by the cooking and meal planning skills of the parents, being able to make a meal from “what they have” instead of having to purchase more food. Their cooking skills enabled the family to exercise more control over food expenditures by being increasingly self reliant.

This concept of using up the foods in the fridge was also spoken to by another adult participant, this time at the Vancouver site, who said that she hated throwing away food. She said “I like the idea of building a meal around what we have”, and when asked what bothered her about throwing food out said “It just seems like such a waste. You know it's expensive and it just seems, you know there are so many people in the world that have nothing” (bcv07m1 lines 1182-1193). With this participant, having the cooking skills to use “what we have” is related not only to having some control over food expenditures, but also to an awareness and concern for inequities in food access. In this case the family lived very near to an area of downtown Vancouver called the Lower Eastside, an area with a high concentration of food charity operations feeding those who do not have enough to eat. This family was relatively wealthy, earning about \$125,000 per year and the participant was acutely aware of the income disparity in her neighbourhood and related food access issues. In this case the family’s relative self reliance is juxtaposed against the need of low income families in the same neighbourhood.

Another participant spoke about using cooking skills to become more self reliant with regard to her concerns over a lack of control over food prices. At the time of the interview, May 2009, the prices of globally traded food commodities like rice were rapidly inflating and receiving a lot of media attention. She had a conversation with her



adult son regarding preparing for possible global food shortages related to the price of a barrel of oil. Relaying this conversation she said:

I said to him "you know we need to learn how to be the absolute best vegetarian cooks we can be so that we can still eat really well in the coming years." Because food, I really predict that food's going to be the new gold. (bcv01m2 lines 2771-2774)

When the interviewer suggested that a vegetarian diet could also heavily rely on imported foods and be subject to the same inflationary and scarcity related forces affecting the price of rice at the time, the participant clarified her position by saying "as local and as simple as possible... few ingredients and simple and local and you can eat really really well" (bcv01m2 lines 2830-2836). This participant was speaking about the relationship between cooking skills, self reliance and being able to control food costs by changing one's diet in a way that would potentially be lower cost and less dependent on international markets.

This section has presented how the theme of control was evident in participants' responses of what being able to cook meant to them. The participants were able to use cooking skills as a resource enabling them to protect and provide for their family by exercising some control over the family food supply. In this respect being able to cook took on both positive and negative tones. When the emphasis was on control the tone was negative, whereas when the emphasis was on self reliance the tone was more positive.

#### **4.6.2 Theme of connecting to others**

In addition to the theme of control, when participants spoke about the significance of domestic cooking skills, much of what they said related to the theme of connecting to others. As an example of how cooking is used to connect to others, when a woman from the Kent site described what being able to cook meant to her she said:

It's not so much the act of cooking that means anything, it's just the act of getting together and the playing the games and we just happen to do it over a meal [laughs] and because there's more people you cook more. So, it's not so much the food as it is the interaction, the getting together. (bck10m1 lines 1466-1470)

For this woman cooking was a means to an end—that of bringing family together. Earlier in the interview she said that home cooked meals "make home a place to be" (bck10m1

line 1285), something that was especially important for this single mother of an independence seeking teen. Getting together and connecting to others via cooking and family meals was expressed by participants in several different ways including: catering to family preferences, thinking of others while making meals, connecting with family and friends via meals, and learning to cook together.

One way that domestic cooks connect to family members is by making foods that they like to eat. There was typically some catering to family food preferences occurring in participant families (especially in bck03m1, bck07, bck08). This was evident with a woman from the Kent site. When asked what she normally cooks she said:

I've had to adapt over the years, because I tend to like to cook things that my family likes to eat and will eat. And they've compromised a bit too with me over nutrition and, you know. So I make a lot of very normal sounding food but I try to make it as nutritious as I can so that it's still palatable. (bck03m1 lines 197-202)

With this quote it is evident that there was a two way connection happening between the home cook and the receiving family members. The mother was adapting her cooking to the food preferences of each family member when she prepared meals, but the family was also accommodating the mother's concerns about providing nutritious foods. This dynamic relationship between the home cook and receiving family requires that the home cook have a fairly intimate knowledge of each family member and serves as a way to connect the family over meals.

Discussions about how family cooks cater to family food preferences led to a surprising and significant finding. In an effort to cater to family members parents often prepare plain and simple meals that are well below their level of cooking skills and personal preferences. About a quarter of the parents interviewed (bcv01m, bcv02m, bck02m, bck07mf, bck09mf) said that their cooking skills did not influence family meals as much as would be expected, or desired, because of their children's picky eating habits. For example, while describing her food practices a woman from the Kent site spoke to the influence of her children's food preferences on family meals saying:

My husband and I, before we had children, would cook different things and liked to try different varieties of foods and Chinese and East Indian and that sort of thing. When [daughter] got old enough that [she] was looking at food, she'd like very plain food and actually our meals got

plainer and plainer ... the kids were happy but my husband and I were getting more and more frustrated with this and...sometimes I'd cook two meals one for my husband and I, one for the kids. But I didn't always have the energy to do that, but anyway. (bck02m1 lines 89-108)

In this participant family, the woman had described her cooking skills as “actually pretty good” and said “I like to cook from scratch”. Her frustration with cooking plain meals for her family was clear. In this case and others the parents end up preparing meals both below their skill level and personal preferences in order to appease picky children. While the cooking skills of the family cook were often reported to support family connections by bringing family together, the quote above provides an example of where the family dynamics placed limits on the cooking happening in the home.

By adapting to others' food preferences the family cook is thinking of the eater. This connection between cook and eater was most clearly articulated by a man from the Vancouver site. He typically made the bread in the home and occasionally made dinners. When asked about what being able to cook meant to him he said:

I see cooking as, for me it's kind of a social expression as well as a sensual expression. I think of the people I'm going to be feeding invariably when I'm cooking. And so it's a wonderful connection with other people for me. I don't do it enough. But the baking I do. (bcv06mf1 lines 3014-3018)

A story of family breakdown told by a woman from the Vancouver site provides another example of families connecting through home cooking. When asked what being able to cook meant to her she spoke about how home cooking helped to bring together a neighbour's family.

We have a family that are close friends, who lost their father a couple of years ago, he died. And since then, the family...fell apart...and about a year ago, we started having a weekly dinner together. And I said to the mom, I said, all you need to do is cook. Put a big meal on the table and the kids will come out of their rooms and you guys will start to heal. And it's been almost a year and those kids; they are all coming out of their rooms. They bring their boyfriends over for the meal, they help...It works. It really really works. You start cooking food. You create a nice smell in the house. (bcv01m1 lines 1866-1895)

In the above example being able to cook a meal, the transformation of ingredients into a meal, was a skill used as a resource to patch together a fractured family. This sense of connection through home cooking within a family also extended to others outside the family (e.g. bck07 and bcv08) to include neighbours and extended relatives. An upper income family of three from the Vancouver site clearly exhibited this connection to others through cooking. When asked what being able to cook meant to her the woman, and mother, said:

I don't really know anybody not to cook...I don't know people who you open their fridge and there's just one thing in it. I don't know those people. Most of the people I know really like enjoy food and enjoy cooking...I mean to me it's so central to what it means to be a family...some of the best nights of my life have been over a table of food with different members of my family or not even you know [including non-family members]. [laughs] (bvc08m1 lines 1993-2018)

This was a family with a strong identity around food, cooking and eating together. After the interview was over and the recorder turned off the woman mentioned that her family connects to their neighbours through cooking, saying that once a year they closed off the block for a neighbourhood dinner, and also shared dinners with neighbours several times a year (from field notes).

However, cooking was not always connecting. For a couple of participant families their particular approach to home cooking was more socially isolating than connecting (bcv02, bck11). This occurred with a family from the Kent site who described following a special diet which involved eliminating some foods and rotating others throughout a cycle as a way of dealing with food sensitivities. The adults described how this way of eating affected them socially saying:

F: It's not easy to do it [the rotation diet], because it also isolates you and what do you call it? [I: Socially?] Socially, because people tend not to invite you [over] anymore because they feel, "Well what should we cook for them, you know for dinner."...And people are not comfortable...  
M: Yeah it scares people...definitely you became. Basically, I know I was called health freak. I know we did lose some friends over it. We were just kind of left on the side. (bck11mf1 lines 230 - 277)

In this family the man works as a chef and is not lacking in food preparation skills, but the family had chosen a specialized way of eating that made it difficult for others to

connect with them through food. While most families described home cooking in terms of connecting to others the specialized diets taken on by some families (e.g. raw foods, or rotation diet) seemed to present a barrier to the social aspect of sharing meals with others.

A final way that participants spoke about connecting through the use of cooking skill was by cooking with others and learning to cook with others. When asked how she learned to cook a 16 yr old from the Kent site said:

I think my auntie had a cooking date with me before and we just baked a bunch of stuff. And my dad got me into cooking and always like encouraged me and said it was good. I think for the most part at first I did it for the attention [laughs]. And then, now I just do it by myself because I just like to do it. (bck01d1 lines 877-881)

In this example learning to cook brought the teen together with her parents and relatives. Another example of connecting through learning to cook was mentioned by a man from the Vancouver site who took French cooking lessons in part as a way of connecting with his son-in-law who was also taking the cooking lessons (bcv07mf2 lines 1557-1618, bcv07m1 lines 124-128).

Though cooking was often spoken about in terms of connecting, cooking meals together was referred to by only a few families in this study. In some families home cooking was described as an activity best done alone. This was the case with a woman from the Vancouver site and her spouse. When asked if they cooked together she said:

M: No, when he's [in the] kitchen I don't

I: You stay out of the way?

M: Yeah I want to give him some space. He takes too long.

I: Okay [laughing].

M: Yeah he just, I don't have that kind of patience. I do my [thing]...he does his thing...

I: Okay. So how do you decide who cooks?

M: Lentils he likes to cook...and sometimes he wants me to cook. I said, "Then you're out of the kitchen." (bcv10m1 lines 1693-1727)

Despite this tension between the two adults around cooking together in the kitchen, cooking remained a source of connection between the woman and her 17 year old son who helped her out a lot in the kitchen. The preceding series of examples have shown how domestic cooking played a connecting role within most participant families, even though most families did not regularly cook together.

In summary, domestic cooking and cooking skills served as a resource for connecting family when the family cook catered to the taste preferences of others, when the cook thought of others while cooking, when families shared meals and when cooking skills were shared from one generation to the next. While most participants spoke about home cooking in a connecting way, some families spoke about their particular cooking and eating styles as being disconnecting with others.

#### **4.6.3 Themes of culinary continuity, confidence and exploration**

The final major themes that participants spoke to in regard to the significance of being able to cook were those of culinary continuity, confidence and exploration. Each of these themes will be addressed below.

##### ***4.6.3.1 Familial food cultures: culinary continuity and departure***

Several of the adult participants spoke about cooking skills as enabling them to either continue with family culinary traditions and practices or break away and explore new cuisines. For example, a woman from a Dutch family at the Kent site explained how her family practiced a traditional Dutch way of eating saying:

The Dutch community is basically all the same I think...Like if you take [a friend of the children]'s parents they probably eat potatoes, meat just like we do. Their mom was also born or the parents both were born in Europe...and my friends just like us...it's all same family right, same background so we kind of eat the same I think (bck08m1 930-940).

This woman had previously described herself saying "I'm the cook!" and did most of the meal preparation for the family with some assistance from her daughter. In this situation the woman's cooking skills enabled her to maintain continuity with a Dutch way of eating. However, a little later in the transcript when describing making desserts for the family her cooking skills also enabled her to depart from a Dutch tradition. Describing dessert she said:

Really Dutch [dessert] is something cooked with milk but since...[I] don't like milk so much, I try to go more probably more the Canadian way, apple pie and cobblers and fruit crisp that kind of, my mom wouldn't make a warm dessert unless it was something she could cook with milk (bck08m1 line 994-998)

The second quote shows how the woman's cooking skills enabled her to break away from the Dutch tradition of desserts cooked in milk and cater to her own taste preferences, while at the same time continuing to make desserts "quite often", because "we're very Dutch and my kids love it!" (bck08m1 line 325). In this example the mother appears to be using her cooking skills to navigate a space within her identity as a Dutch family cook living in Canada.

Several of the participant women who were the family cooks spoke about breaking away from the food traditions of their birth families. A clear example of this came with a woman from the Vancouver site. Speaking about how her eating patterns were influenced by her upbringing she said:

Mom bought margarine. She never bought butter ...and she even bought margarine that was uncoloured because it was like ten cents cheaper so it was like eating Crisco on your toast. It was gross...so for me you know I remember very clearly thinking as soon as I get out of this place it's going to be real butter. It's going to be real milk. It's like you know it's all going to get stepped up...when we [she and her brother] moved out we both became vegetarians and foodies to some extent. Our food was you know a source of pleasure and social scene...I think it was a bit of a rebellious reaction to the very utilitarian nature of food in my parents' household (bcv09m1 3464-3517).

In this example the woman uses her cooking skills to break away from the food traditions of her birth family, choosing to explore new cuisines and ways of eating. The two examples above show how cooking skills can be used as a resource to either continue or depart from the culinary traditions of one's family and culture.

#### ***4.6.3.2 Culinary confidence, independence and exploration***

Cooking skills, like any acquired skill, can leave one with a sense of confidence. Both adult and teen participants spoke to this sense of confidence and pride that accompanied successfully prepared meals. For example, between the first and second interviews a 17 year old teen from the Vancouver site had started cooking for her family one night a week. When asked if she was enjoying these cooking nights she responded by saying "Yeah I like cooking, and if the meal turns out well then I'm proud of myself for making a meal that doesn't taste bad" (bcv07d2 lines 663-668). Similarly a couple from the Kent site who may be described as 'foodies' spoke to this sense of confidence and

pride associated with being able to cook. When asked how important her cooking was to her the woman said:

I think it's in a way it's too important to me, which sounds kind of weird, but I take a lot of self-esteem from it...people always say if they won a million dollars, "Oh, I'd have a cook," and I would NEVER have a cook just because I really like it. (bck09mf1 lines 1279-1288)

A little earlier in the transcript the adults in this family were asked to describe their cooking skills and the man's response linked confidence in the kitchen with culinary exploration.

I think a lot of people are afraid of it. Afraid of cooking, and I think that's something that we don't have. None of us have a fear of cooking...we tend to be fairly adventurous and confident in the kitchen when it comes to making food. (bck09mf1 lines 1175-1183)

Having cooking skills was a source of pride and self-confidence for many participants. These feelings of proficiency often lead to culinary exploration by going 'off-recipe' or trying to cook dishes from other ethnic cuisines. This sense of confidence gained from having cooking skills supported feelings of both self-reliance and independence.

Whereas parents spoke to the concept of self-reliance from the perspective of home cooking and preservation, teens were more likely to speak of independence. The joint concepts of independence and responsibility were spoken about frequently amongst the teenagers, especially the older ones. Many, even those who didn't like cooking, considered it an important skill to have once they moved out of their parents' home. An example of this comes from an interview with a 14 year old from the Kent site who described himself as "not much of a cook" and was considering dropping his upcoming foods class based on peer pressure. When asked how important cooking will be to him he responded by saying: "Very. Because I know I have to make my own meals and not just make macaroni every single day." (bck09s1 lines 590-595). This type of response was quite common in the teen interviews. Even when the teen wasn't very involved in preparing family meals they often saw a future need to be able to do so, a time when they would move out of their parents' homes and become independent. Some of the older teens spoke about preparing for the time when they would be independent and move away from their parents' homes by acquiring cooking skills. For example, a 17 year old



teen girl from the Vancouver site who described taking an optional foods class in school said:

It's good because I'm moving out next year. This is my last year so I need to get into the trend of knowing how long things take to cook and what to do and what's easy and stuff like that. So I think it's important for me to learn all those things for next year. (bcv07d2 lines 217-231)

Cooking skill in teens provided them with an increased sense of independence, with some teens saying things like being able to cook means "I can eat what I like" (bck05d1 line 1356), but with this independence came responsibility. A 14 year old boy from the Kent site speaks to this dual aspect of becoming more skilled in the household kitchen. When asked what being able to cook a meal for himself and his family would mean to him he responded by saying "they [his parents] would expect it of me a lot more" and then with a probe from the interviewer continues by saying "that I could be independent without them" (bck07s1 lines 1436-1444). One teen even more explicitly combined these concepts of gaining independence through cooking skill and having responsibility to use it to prepare meals for others. When asked what being able to cook a meal for herself and family might mean to her a 15 year old teen from the Kent site said:

I think I guess right now it's not that much of a deal because I'm not really that into it...but I think it'd mean more to me later in life when I move out and I'm making meals for myself and when I have my own family and then making meals for them and being able to provide for them. (bck02d1 lines 903-908)

In this example the teen refers not to her birth family, but to a future family that she envisions providing for. This sense of responsibility was exhibited by teens who had started to take on some of the food preparation chores in the household by doing such things as cooking the family meal occasionally (bcv03, bcv07d, bcv09s, bck05d, bck08d), helping parents to make dinner (bcv10s, bck01d, bck04d, bck07s), making their own breakfasts, lunches or snacks (bcv04d, bcv05d, bcv06sasb, bcv08s, bck02d, bck03s, bck11d), or making foods for younger siblings (bcv10s).

In summary, being able to cook was a resource that enabled participants to both connect with and depart from their familial and ethnic food cultures. For both

generations, being able to cook was a source of pride and confidence. And, in teenagers especially, being able to cook was associated with gaining independence.

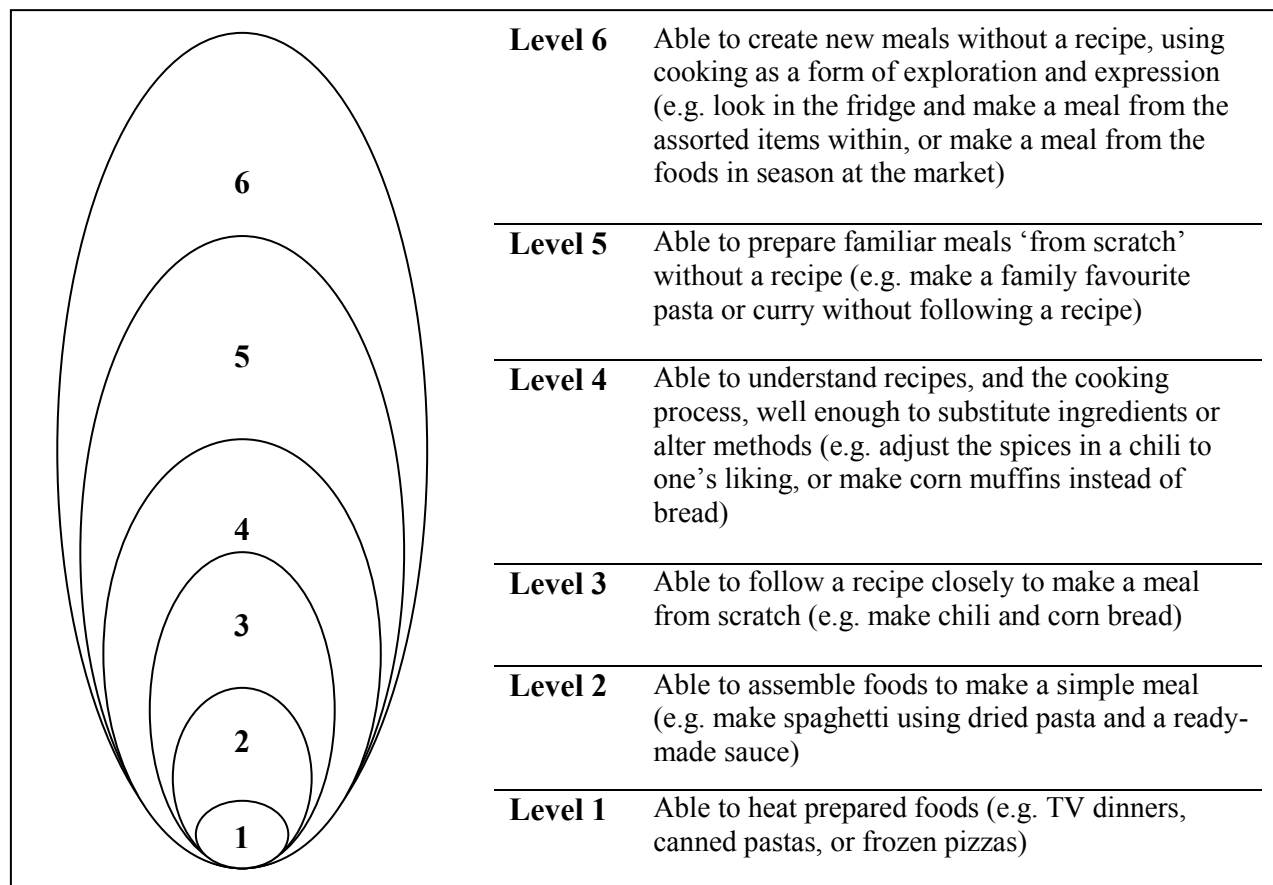
#### **4.7 Relating cooking skills and cooking practice**

Over the course of conducting this research I have struggled to understand the relationship between the skills of home cooks and what was described as a typical eating pattern. A moment of insight occurred when I learned that some parents with picky teens prepared meals that were well below their cooking abilities. This suggested that if there was a relationship between the cooking skills of family cooks and family food practices it was indirect. This retrospectively obvious insight led to the development of figure 4.2 below and the conceptualization of cooking skills as a range of competencies available to home cooks and set within specific culinary contexts.

Domestic cooks do not cook at 100% of their abilities on a daily basis. This marks the separation of everyday cooking from special occasion cooking. This figure is meant to show how cooking competency opens up a range of culinary possibility, and does not confine the cook to her or his highest level of competency.

The shell-like image on the left side of figure 4.2 represents a range of cooking competencies; from beginner to advanced. Those at level 1 have very basic cooking skills and rely primarily on commercially prepared foods or foods that others such as family members make for them. Many of the young teens in this study would be at a level 1 or 2 of cooking competency. A novice cook may be at a level 3 and can follow a recipe but is anxious about going 'off recipe'. At higher levels individuals are competent at all the preceding levels, in a given cooking context, and may choose to prepare meals at any of those levels depending on available time, energy, desire, ingredients etc.

It is important to note that cooking skills, and our self-appraisals of them, are relative and context dependent. For example one might feel highly competent (e.g. level 6) when cooking the typical family meal, but approach cooking a dish from an unfamiliar cuisine with uncertainty, carefully following a recipe (e.g. level 3). That is, cooking skill and one's self perceptions of them are relative to the cooking context (i.e. what is being cooked, the social situation, and the expectations of oneself and others).



**Figure 4.2** Conceptualizing a range of practical cooking skills

A useful metaphor to aid in understanding the context dependent nature of cooking skill is to think of cooking skills as similar to language skills. For example, I am highly competent at speaking and understanding everyday Canadian English. This competence decreases somewhat when speaking English at an academic level. I can only cautiously muddle my way through basic French, and am altogether lost in Vietnamese. In each case my competence (and corresponding confidence) is dependent on the language context (analogous to cooking context). In each case I could be expected to develop the skills and become more confident and competent given an appropriate education and length of experience.

This conceptualization of cooking skill as a range of possibilities, or a resource that can be drawn from, suggests that family food practices may be influenced by the cooking skills of the family cook, however more skilled cooks will not necessarily make

‘better’ or healthier meals. The context of the family meal will influence whether the cook prepares meals at the lowest (e.g. microwavable pizza pockets) or highest (e.g. a three course homemade meal) level of her or his ability. For everyday meals it is likely that home cooks prepare meals that use an intermediate amount of their cooking skills.

Table 4.4 below presents some of the contextual factors that participants described as influencing the use of their cooking skills. These factors have been grouped into personal, interpersonal or material factors. At the personal level are such influencing factors as special dietary requirements, personal food preferences, a desire to try new foods, the acquisition of new skills and the amount of time or interest one has in cooking. An example of the negative influence of the latter came from a single mother of a teen boy at the Vancouver site, when she described the influence of long working days on her desire to cook. She said, “It’s a long day and I get tired. So I don’t, I have a hard time coming home to face cooking” (bcv02m lines 47-51). Regardless of this woman’s level of cooking skills, the context of long working days negatively influenced the use of those skills as her interest in cooking declined with fatigue.

At the interpersonal level the food preferences of family members had a great influence on the use of adult participants’ cooking skills. Family preferences could encourage the use of cooking skills through the exploration of new foods and cuisines, or discourage the use of cooking skills if, for example teens preferred only very plain foods. Other interpersonal factors included the influence of a family’s culinary heritage, a desire to preserve foods for the family, social and special cooking occasions, assuming a greater responsibility for preparing one’s meals, and the division of cooking responsibilities in the family. An example of the latter came from two teen boys at the Kent site who were asked how their cooking skills affected what they ate. The 15 year old teen responded by saying, “I don’t think [our] cooking [skill] influences any of our eating habits. [I: Because?] Well, my mom cooks everything” (bck03sasb1 lines 930-935). In this example and others, the mother had assumed primary cooking responsibility for the family, limiting the use of other family members’ cooking skills.

**Table 4.4** Contextual factors influencing the use of participants' cooking skills

Influencing Factors	Facilitators	Barriers
<b>Personal factors</b>	<p><b>Adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dietary requirements of a family member's health (bck02m, bck11mf)</li> <li>- Dietary change (e.g. raw food or vegetarian) (bcv02m, bcv03m, bcv09m)</li> <li>- Preference for cooking from scratch (bck02m, bck07f), or homemade meals (bck10m)</li> </ul> <p><b>Both teens and adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desire to try new foods or cuisines (bcv09m, bcv08f), or personal food preferences (bck11d)</li> <li>- One's level of cooking skills (bcv07m)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health problems that make kitchen work difficult (bcv01m)</li> <li>- Stress, decreasing the desire to cook (bck06m)</li> </ul> <p><b>Both teens and adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of time or interest in cooking (bcv02m, bcv02s, bcv11sa, bck10d, bcv11m)</li> </ul>
<b>Interpersonal factors</b>	<p><b>Adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Influence of others' dietary approaches (bcv03m)</li> <li>- Food preferences of family members (bck03m)</li> <li>- Desire to preserve foods for later family use (bck04m, bck05m)</li> <li>- Special meals (bcv06f)</li> </ul> <p><b>Both teens and adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Culinary heritage (bck04da, bck04m, bck08m)</li> <li>- Social cooking with friends or family (bcv06sa, bcv08f, bck07s)</li> </ul> <p><b>Teens:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Responsibility to make one's lunches and snacks (bcv06sasb)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plain food preferences of children (bcv02m, bck02m bck09f)</li> <li>- Another adult in the home does most of the cooking (bcv04m, bck07m)</li> </ul> <p><b>Teens:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents cook everything (bck03sa, bck05da, bck07s)</li> </ul>

**Table 4.4** Contextual factors influencing the use of participants' cooking skills

Influencing Factors	Facilitators	Barriers
<b>Material factors</b>	<p><b>Adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial concerns, a need to control the food budget (bcv01m), or making do with whatever foods are available (bck11mf)</li> <li>- Cooking for an income (bcv09m)</li> <li>- Specialty kitchen appliances (bcv07m, bcv06f)</li> </ul> <p><b>Teens:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enabling kitchen appliances such as a bread maker (bck04sb)</li> <li>- Use of convenience foods, getting teens to cook (bcv05d, bck09s)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of money to buy desired ingredients (bck06m)</li> <li>- Lack of available ingredients to cook desired foods (bcv04m)</li> </ul>

Material factors that acted as facilitators to using cooking skills were a need to control the food budget, earn an income from cooking, and somewhat unexpectedly the use of kitchen appliances or convenience foods. For example in an interview with a 14 year old teen from the Kent site he described his cooking skills as, “basic...nothing fancy. I can’t bake a cake. Just cookies, something easy” (back04dasb1 lines 1238-1243). However, in a separate interview with his mother she mentioned that her son used the bread machine and made the family’s bread most of the time (bck04m1 line 224). In this situation it is likely that the labour saving effect of the bread machine facilitated the use of food preparation skills that the teen might not otherwise employ. Similarly, the use of convenience foods seemed to act as an entry point into the kitchen for some teens and facilitated the use and development of basic cooking skills. The material level barriers to using cooking skills described by participants included a lack of money to buy, or availability of, the ingredients for desired meals.

In this section cooking skills have been conceptualized as a range of competencies that are available to the home cook, and set within an influencing context. The domestic cook does not typically cook at the height of her or his abilities. Instead, the cooking context and the range of cooking skills that is available to the cook influence what meal is made and which skills are employed.

## 4.8 Summary

This chapter has presented the main research findings of this study. To recap, the key findings are:

1. The meanings of cooking and cooking skills are subject to interpretation, and resist clear definition.
2. The assessment of one's cooking skills is context dependent, resists quantification, and varies with the person(s) used as a comparison.
3. Home cooking was highly valued in participant families and continued to be the norm especially for main meals. Eating out was more acceptable and likely to occur at secondary meals.
4. Home cooking was primarily a responsibility of women in the household, though men were often involved, and in a minority of cases, primarily responsible.
5. The most significant way that participants learned home cooking as a child or teen was by passive observation of parents, followed by cooking classes. As adults, independent learning gained significance especially at key transition points in life such as moving away from home, getting married, or having children.
6. Home cooking was valued in part because it gave families *control* over the food supply, served as a way for families to *connect* internally and with others, and provided cooks with a sense of *confidence* enabling them to continue or depart with family and cultural culinary traditions. For teens, being able to cook was an important aspect of becoming *independent*.
7. Family food practices and cooking skills are not directly related. This was revealed when parents described preparing meals below their skill level to cater to the plain taste preferences of picky teens.

The last key finding listed above was surprising and enlightening for this author. This research project was initially intended to be based on developing an understanding of the relationship between cooking skills, family food practices and health. Because the relationship between cooking skills and food practices appears to be indirect and contextual this study was unable to detect a strong relationship between the self appraisals of home cooks and family food practices. The study was however able to shed

light on 1) what is happening in participants' homes with regard to home cooking, 2) who was doing the cooking, 3) how home cooking was learned and shared between generations, 4) as well as the subjective meaning of being able to cook a meal for one's family. This final insight provides at least a partial answer to the puzzling question of why anyone would go through the effort of cooking, and learning to cook, when ready to eat/heat meals are readily available and relatively affordable.



## **Chapter 5 Discussion and conclusion**

### **5.1 Discussion of findings**

In this section the research findings are briefly summarized and then compared to the research literature. This comparison will illustrate the contributions of this study to an area of research that has received little attention to date. The main findings of this study fall within the areas of: 1) what cooking skills are, 2) what is happening in the home with regard to cooking, 3) how are cooking skills learned and taught, and 4) the subjective significance of being able to cook. The contributions to the literature in each area are described below.

#### **5.1.1 What are cooking skills?**

When asked to describe their cooking skills, many participants in this study spontaneously differentiated their cooking skills from their baking skills, and a few delineated what counted as cooking from what counted as basic food preparation or raw food preparation. In addition, participants' self-assessments of their cooking skills were relativistic, and varied depending on whose skills were used as the comparison. The findings support other researchers' observations that 'cooking' and 'cooking skills' lack clear definition and the use of these terms often involves taken for granted assumptions (Lyon et al., 2003). In this study, some of those taken for granted assumptions were built into the use of the terms 'cooking' and 'cooking skills' in the interview questions. The findings from this study are in line with Frances Short's assertion that domestic cooking skills are complex; consisting of practical techniques, tacit skills (e.g. perceptual and organizational) as well as academic knowledge (e.g. of food culture, food chemistry, nutrition etc.) (Short, 2006). Short describes cooking skills as both task and person centered, with the person centered aspect of cooking skills being contextual and dependent on the "requirements of the cooking task" (Short, 2003a, p. 183). These findings contribute to the literature in two ways. First, they may sensitize future empirical studies on home cooking or cooking skills with an understanding that cooking skills are complex and resist easy definition, measurement and quantification. Second, the context dependent nature of participants' descriptions of their cooking skills may provide insight into a source of the popular concerns about domestic culinary deskilling. As reviewed by

Lyon et al. the context of domestic cooking has clearly changed over the last few generations, and “cooking from scratch might mean different things to different age groups” (Lyon et al., 2003, p. 172). As such, concerns about culinary deskilling may have, in part, arisen due to variable understandings of what counts as cooking and cooking skill for different generations of cooks, food writers and those writing on the state of society. For example, in the period of war-time food rationing in Britain the ability to be creative with limited ingredients and feed the family using whatever was available may have been one of the hallmarks of cooking skill. However, in the current food environment limited food availability is not a concern faced by the majority of the Canadian population, but limited time to cook is. As a result, convenience foods are now commonly used in making family meals, even in those meals that are ‘made from scratch’. This use, or even reliance on, convenience foods may be perceived as a sign of declining cooking skills when compared to a time when convenience foods were less commonly available.

#### **5.1.2 What is happening with home cooking?**

In this study, participants spoke about home cooking as something that was highly valued and felt to be important, especially for the main meal of the day where family members were most likely to eat together. While participants described home made family meals as highly valued, they also described using pre-prepared foods and eating out. This contrast was sharply exhibited by one family in Kent who described eating out for dinner only rarely, but eating out for lunches all the time (bck09mf1). This apparent contradiction is supported by the concepts of food rules and meal hierarchies described by Douglas and Murcott (Douglas, 1972; Murcott, 1982), which position some meals as more important than others. Short found that, in general, her study participants thought of weekend meals as more highly valued than weekday meals, and evening meals as more highly valued than daytime meals (Short, 2006). Some meals are perceived as more important than others and it is at these important meals where the effort of making home made meals for the family is more likely to occur. The findings from this study support the understanding of meals as framed within a hierarchy and may contribute to insight into the apparent inconsistencies between the daily food practices and meal aspirations of research participants.

Within participant families the women were nearly always responsible for the family meal preparation, though men did share these responsibilities in seven of the 22 families and took primary responsibility in two of the families. The teen participants were not usually responsible for preparing family meals. These findings are in line with previous studies conducted in Britain (Dixey, 1996; Lake et al., 2006), Canada (Beagan et al., 2008) and the United states (Brown & Miller, 2002) which found that in most cases it is still the woman of the household who is responsible for cooking the family meal. The families in this study divided cooking responsibilities in a variety of ways; there was no single way that families approached the division of food preparation labour.

### **5.1.3 How are home cooking skills learned and taught?**

In this study most participants identified observing their parents cook as their main source of cooking knowledge while living at home as teens, followed by taking cooking classes at school or in the community. As adults, participants were more likely to have learned by reading cookbooks, from friends or family or through course work. Specific life stages such as moving away from home, getting married or having children were cited as important periods for learning cooking skills.

The findings from this study are in line with research in Britain that identified mothers as the most important source of learning cooking skills, followed by school cookery classes, cook books and grandmothers (Caraher et al., 1999). This British survey showed a gender divide with men more likely to cite their spouses and fathers as sources of learning to cook, and less likely to cite school cooking classes or cook books. Short (2006) describes that there is very little research about learning to cook, and that the research using a public health lens, as with the British survey cited previously, typically focuses on sources of learning rather than how cooking skills are learned. In her research Short observed that the adult cooks she interviewed mostly spoke about informal learning, where the cooks did not set out to 'learn how to cook' or become a 'cook' (Short, 2006, pp. 36-37). The findings from this study support the premise that much cooking skill is acquired in a passive way by observing others cook without the explicit goals of learning to cook. This research may contribute to both the understanding of how cooking skills are learned and which groups may be most at need of supplemental education, such as those youth who live in homes where home cooking is not a common

occurrence and as a result do not have the opportunity to observe cooking on a regular basis.

This study builds on previous findings by suggesting that the significance of learning via watching ones' parents or taking classes in school diminishes in adulthood as cookbooks, experimentation, spouses and others become more important sources of learning. This study also supports previous research in England showing that TV food programs were not a major source of learning for viewers (Caraher et al., 2000). A key contribution of this study may be the finding that participants described learning cooking skills as especially important during periods of life transition such as when becoming independent and moving away from home, or taking on the responsibility of feeding a family. As applied life skills, cooking skills may be best taught at the stages of life where people need to put those skills to use. This implies a greater role for domestic cooking education for older teens and young adults who are gaining independence and taking on responsibility for feeding themselves and others.

#### **5.1.4 What is the significance of home cooking and being able to cook?**

One of the major findings from this study was insight into what being able to cook meant to participants. The major themes in adult responses were that being able to cook gave control to the cook over the family food supply, served as a way to connect the family through meals, enable a continuity or departure from culinary traditions, and increased the self confidence of the cook. For teen participants the major theme was that being able to cook was an important part of becoming independent from their parents.

A lack of empirical data has thus far hindered the development of coherent theory around the significance of domestic cooking skills (Caraher et al., 1999; Caraher & Lang, 1999). Referring to cooking as an embodied practice, Deborah Lupton (Lupton, 1996, p. 2) suggests that “the practice of cooking has...received little serious scholarly attention because of its transitory nature and link with physical labour and the servicing of bodies rather than ‘science’, ‘art’ or ‘theory’ ...it is therefore regarded as base or inferior compared with intellectual or spiritual activities” (p. 2). In the research literature there are descriptions of what cooking means to cooks, and hypotheses of what may be the significance of cooking skill to the individual and society. In a review of the sociology of food and cooking Bente Halkier (Halkier, 2009) found a plurality of overlapping

meanings of ‘what cooking is to cooks’ including; a necessary burden, a chore, a skilled practice, routine work, meaningful family integration, or a pleasurable pursuit. The descriptions of cooking from participants in this study, especially adults, reflect this—showing for example how cooking can be perceived as both a chore and a pleasure depending on the cooking context.

Tim Lang and Martin Caraher (2001) have hypothesized that cooking skills may be important because they enable an understanding of what a healthy diet is, empower individuals to exercise control over their diet, and are a vehicle for citizen engagement in the social norms of a society where food plays a central role in identity. Earlier, they also suggested that cooking skills were important because they confer the ability to cook from basic ingredients, and enable individuals to be informed as a result of understanding how to cook from basics, which is important when buying ready made foods and coping in a world of increasingly processed foods (Caraher & Lang, 1999). Each of the arguments made by Lang and Caraher were voiced over the course of interviews with adult participants in this study, with a particular emphasis on being able to take control over one’s diet and cook from basic ingredients.

In addition, this study contributes to the literature on the significance of cooking skills, by suggesting a more explicit role for domestic cooking in the areas of nutrition and health, family cohesion and community food security. As discussed in Chapter Two, the literature in these areas implies a significant role for domestic cooking and cooking skills in families, but does not generally make this connection explicit. This research makes a unique contribution by presenting the themes of participants’ descriptions of the significance of being able to cook as having a strong relationship to each of these literatures. The theme of control in adult participants’ responses was related to both health concerns, and desires for self-reliance; providing a link to both the nutrition and community food security literatures. As well, the theme of connecting to others as spoken to by adult family cooks was explicitly related to the psychosocial benefits of family meals. In addition, this research presents cooking skills as being important to self-efficacy, one’s ability to continue or depart from familial culinary traditions, and in the case of teens, gaining independence. As such, this research has contributed to an

expanded understanding of the significance of home cooking and cooking skills, opening up areas for future research.

## **5.2 Study limitations**

Despite the significant contributions of this study to the sparse literature described above there are several limitations to be considered when drawing conclusions from the study. First, this was a relatively small study with a sample size of only 22 families. Within those families, in most cases, only two people were interviewed—typically the mother and a teen. In six families fathers were involved, and more than one teen was interviewed in four families. As such, the descriptions of family food practices or attitudes did not typically represent all the members of the household. As this was a small study of qualitative design the findings cannot be generalized to the Canadian population as a whole though the insight gained may be transferable to similar types of families in Canada. Secondly, the participant families involved in this study were all volunteers, with the mother as primary contact, and were not randomly selected from the population. As such, the sample may have an overrepresentation of families who are interested in health studies or food in the family context and may not represent ‘typical’ or ‘average’ families. Also the honorarium offered for participation, a grocery gift certificate, may have attracted families were interested in food or had difficulty affording enough food (as was evident in the early recruitment low income single parent families). Finally, the study sample was economically diverse but excluded families without teens, and single people. It also did not include people who were homeless, transient, new immigrants, and those who could not be interviewed in English. Ethnic diversity was present in the sample, though the sample was not large or diverse enough to be representative of the diversity in the population.

## **5.3 Validity**

In response to the study limitations described above this section addresses potential threats to the credibility of the conclusions drawn from this study—or how my conclusions might be wrong (Maxwell, 2005, p. 106; Mays & Pope, 2000). What follows is an identification of specific validity threats and how these threats have been either ruled out or minimized.

1. **Recruitment bias:** Did the recruitment tools disproportionately attract those families with an interest in home cooking, cooking skill and food practices? A) The posters and pamphlets used in the recruiting did not mention cooking or cooking skills as these were subtopics of the larger *Family Food Practices* study. As a result the recruitment tools did not likely pre-select for those participants primarily interested in speaking about cooking. B) However, the recruitment signage did use the title of “*Family Food Habits Study*” with the byline of “*This study will examine how regional and social factors help shape people’s eating habits*” and as a result likely appealed to people with a general interest in speaking about their food habits. As mentioned earlier, about a fifth of the adults interviewed had taken culinary arts classes with three of them having undergone a culinary apprenticeship, presenting a level of culinary experience in the sample that may be higher than what would be drawn from a random sample. (Interestingly, three of the five adults with formal culinary training were men, and it was the women in the household who were the primary contacts with the researchers of this study.) This may suggest that the study participants were more interested in food and/or cooking than the general population. However, this selection bias may have been offset by involving more than one member from each family (from two generations), which increased the diversity of views within each participant family. It is evident from a review of the data that parents and teens often had different views on the same topics. Even if all the recruited families had a general interest in talking about food habits they spoke about this differently based on their unique social locations (income, gender, ethnicity, class etc.).
2. **Recruitment bias/Fair dealing:** Were the participants drawn from similar economic, social, age or gender groups such that they would be expected to have similar perspectives and food practices? The sample was purposively diverse, especially with regard to family income, including families across the income gradient. The study also included two generations from each family, families from a rural and urban location, as well as diversity in ethnicity and family type

resulting in a diversity of responses and food practices. While there was ethnic diversity in the sample there was not enough ethnic diversity or representation to attribute responses to ethnicity.

3. **Researcher bias:** Did I only select data that fit my preconceived notions of what was happening, or that stood out to me? To guard against this type of researcher bias 'rich data' were collected using audio recorders and verbatim transcripts. The transcripts were then coded according to a standard code list with definitions. The researcher who conducted the interviews coded the transcripts, and the postdoctoral fellow and I had frequent discussions about coding dilemmas as they arose. During the early analysis stage a block and file type of analysis (Grbich, 2007) was used enabling a form of quasi-statistics that highlighted which participants had given no response to a particular research question, and the proportion of participants that had responded in a given way (i.e. discrepant and negative cases). This quasi-statistical method helped to ground the research findings in the data. These quasi statistics were not included in the analysis section because the numbers could be misconstrued to represent statistical survey style results. As the interviews were semi-structured participants did not all speak to the same topics. Just because they did not speak to a specific topic, does not mean they would not have done so in another circumstance. As well, data came from a variety of individuals within families, and a variety of families at each site increasing the diversity of the responses reducing the risk of chance association.
4. **Reactivity:** How did the interview setting and the interviewers influence the data collected? With regard to the research setting, nearly every interview was conducted in the participant's home. Participants were able to choose the interview setting and time. Their home was a more natural, comfortable and convenient setting for participants than the researcher's office, and likely served as a physical reminder when participants spoke of their family food practices. Due to the home setting other family members were often around the house at the time of the interview, with little kids occasionally sitting in on the interview. While it



is likely that the home setting led to richer data as reminders of their food practices surrounded participants, it is also possible that participants censored some facets of their responses when other family members were in earshot.

5. **Reflexivity:** In research conducted from the epistemology of constructionism the researcher is understood as an unavoidable influence on participant responses. The goal is not to attempt to control for the influence of the researcher but to try to understand the influence of the researcher (reflexivity). In this study there were two interviewers, one for each study site. When discussing this issue with my colleague, who did the interviews for the District of Kent site, she noted how some participants had developed pre-formed opinions about her prior to the interview based on their construct of the ‘UBC researcher’—with some participants remarking that she was different than they expected. It was apparent that being affiliated with a major research university gave the researcher a certain amount of symbolic power in the eyes of some participants. This may be related to the participant’s prior exposure to post secondary education. In the northeast Vancouver site only one parent participant did not have formal postsecondary education. The interview with this high school educated participant felt slightly formalized as the educational and class differences between the participant and I created a space in the relationship. Both my colleague and I dressed in a casual manner and worked at establishing a casual rapport with participants in an attempt to minimize any real or perceived power dynamics based on our positions as UBC researchers, our class differences or other intersections.

During the interviews it became apparent to my colleague and me that our extra-researcher identities were influencing how we approached the interview relationship—affecting what pieces of conversation were followed up on, or passed by. For instance, my colleague in this study had a background in counseling and this influenced how she asked questions—a trait that some participants at the District of Kent site noticed and remarked on positively. For myself, I have a background in cooking and nutrition with each contributing to my identity. I noticed in the interviews and transcripts that I would tend to follow

up on discussions around cooking to a greater degree that my colleague did. I was also able to follow participants into discussions about specific cuisines, restaurants, cooking styles, or even food chemistry—encouraging the development of these discussions at the northeast Vancouver site. For both interviewers, our identities followed us into the interview setting. We did not notice any negative influence of these identities, simply that they steered the semi-structured interviews towards some topics and away from others within the overall structure of the interview guide. We were alert to any differences arising from having a male interviewer at one site and a female interviewer at the other, but did not notice any significant influence. Both interviewers were able to establish a casual and friendly rapport with the participants.

6. **Measurement bias:** Did the participants tell the ‘truth’, or did they tell us what was socially desirable (i.e. what they thought we wanted to hear)? In addition to a preliminary discussion of anonymity each participant was told that the researcher was interested in their point of view, and that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. Participants, especially teens, were interviewed privately as much as possible to limit the influence of other family members. In addition, the interviewers typically spent around two hours with each participant discussing a variety of topics using both photographic and oral prompts. It is unlikely that participants would maintain a falsehood throughout the entire length of the interview. That being said, participants may have wanted to present themselves favourably to the interviewer by embellishing or omitting aspects of their lives during the interview. While this may have occurred to some extent, the transcripts show participants speaking quite frankly with supporting detail. At any rate, this study was not in pursuit of a single ‘truth’, but in search of participants’ perceptions of their family food practices with a focus on domestic cooking. These perceptions are understood to be context dependent and changing.
7. **Procedural bias:** Did the honorarium affect the sample and data collected? Early in the recruitment for the northeast Vancouver site there were a relatively large

number of low-income single parents interested in participating in the study. This family category quickly filled up and I regretfully had to turn away many low-income single parents, who were clearly in need, in order to leave room in the sample for families from middle and upper income brackets. For the lower-income families the honorarium was clearly a motivating factor. Two of the low-income families at the northeast Vancouver site even scheduled the second interview around a planned grocery trip (the honorarium for parents was a \$100 grocery gift certificate). However, the honorarium did not seem to attract middle and upper income families to the same degree. Because the study used purposefully diverse, as opposed to convenience, sampling it is not likely that the honorarium skewed the sample. Once the participants became involved in the study the honorarium may have served as a motivator to complete the study, but there is no apparent reason why it would influence the responses of participants during the interview.

8. **Triangulation:** Triangulation occurs when the results from different methods or sources of data are compared within a study. This method does not assure validity of results but can lead to a more comprehensive and reflexive analysis (Mays & Pope, 2000). In this study triangulation occurred in several ways. First, data were collected using interviews (with at least two family members) and photo elicitation as well as interviewer observations. Using multiple data sources helped to create a fuller account of the food practices in the family especially where there were different perspectives from the teen and adult participants, or where the participant photos showed more than was revealed in their responses to interview questions. Another form of triangulation occurred as two different researchers were involved in the data collection. While including two interviewers in the study resulted in slightly different styles of interviews being conducted it proved to be quite useful when the postdoctoral fellow and I would debrief on the interviews and early analysis, learning from each other's perspectives and using this learning in later interviews.

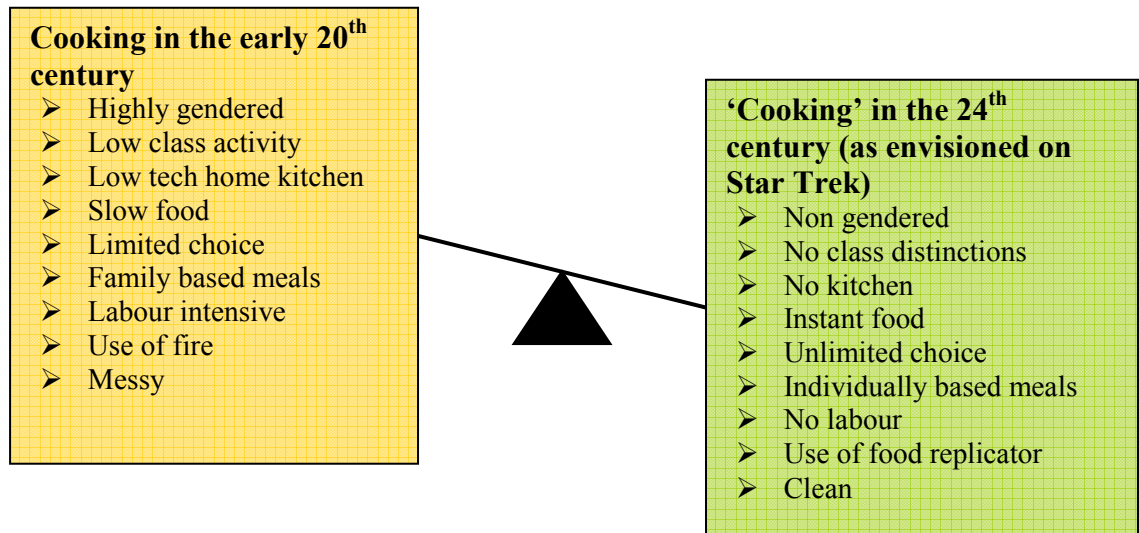
9. **Clear explanation of data collection methods:** As research methods influence the results attained, a clear and detailed description of the methods used for data collection and analysis have been provided in Chapter Three. This detail is included to enable to reader to assess the interpretation of the data.

## 5.4 Conclusion

When presented with concerns over culinary deskilling, the critical thinker may be bold enough to ask the question of “if so, is this a problem?” For example in the utopian vision of the 24<sup>th</sup> century, from the popular television show *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, cooking was no longer necessary as all meals could be instantly created with a ‘food replicator’ that rearranged particles to form any desired food. In this vision of the future the labour of home cooking was relieved with a technological solution. While it is unlikely that those raising the alarm over a perceived decline in domestic cooking skill would wish for a return to the 1900s when women in North America spent an average of more than six hours per day preparing, cooking and cleaning up after meals (Bowers, 2000), it is equally unlikely that they would wish for a future where home cooking as we know it ceased to exist—as with the future imagined in *Star Trek* (see figure 5.1 below). While labour saving technologies such as the futuristic food replicator, or the contemporary microwave, may relieve the burden of food preparation, the amount and type of home cooking done in the future will also depend on ethical and cultural choices (i.e. reasons for wanting to cook).

Domestic cooking occurs at the nexus of the family, the home kitchen, and the food system (see figure 5.2). Since the 1900s each of these elements affecting home cooking has undergone substantial change, in turn influencing domestic cooking. Families have tended to become smaller, more diverse in structure and more urbanized—influencing the role modeling of cooking at home. The home kitchen has changed to commonly include indoor plumbing, refrigeration and freezing, electricity and natural gas, as well as numerous appliances such as microwaves and food processors that make food preparation faster. The food system has changed massively becoming global in nature, much more industrial, more affordable, with more choice, and a broad range of foods designed for convenience. The changes in the food system have paved the way

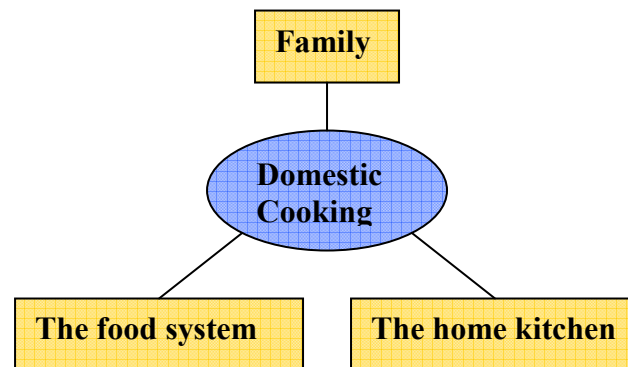
towards a Star Trek future, as the average family no longer needs to cook due to the availability of relatively affordable prepared meals, especially to those in urban centers where most of the population lives.



**Figure 5.1** Comparison of cooking in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> centuries

With the huge changes in families, home kitchens and the food system over the last century it should come as no surprise that there have been corresponding changes in domestic cooking. The exact nature of those changes is unclear due to a paucity of research on home cooking over time, but it is clear that home cooking has changed—from the amount of time spent on it, to who does it, to what kinds of meals are made, and the ingredients used. Compared to the 1900s, home cooking has most certainly declined in terms of time spent on the activity, but much of this is explained by the labour saved with modern kitchen technologies and the use of convenience foods such as ready-made bread or sauces. If home cooking was simply a chore then it would be reasonable to expect that the time spent on home cooking would continue to decline as people increasingly sought the convenience of eating out and using pre-prepared foods from the food industry. In this case, in evolutionary terms the home cook and kitchen may be subject to natural de-selection and on the road to extinction, with future generations living in a world without home cooks or kitchens.

If however, home cooking is more than just a required and laborious domestic task then it may well continue into the future, even when it is no longer a required activity to feed families. One can imagine home cooking shifting from a required to an optional activity, one focused on creativity, connection to food and the sociality of shared food preparation and meals—indeed this perspective of home cooking was voiced by several adult participants in this study (and is evidenced by food movements such as Slow Food, or the 100 Mile Diet).



**Figure 5.2** Domestic cooking in context

Given the significance of home cooking to participant families it may be more productive to think of home cooking as being in transition rather than simply in decline. Lang and Caraher describe a culinary transition as a cross cultural process where there is a shift in the pattern and kinds of skills required to produce meals for consumption (Lang & Caraher, 2001). Home cooking appears to be important for reasons that go beyond simply feeding the family, and thus there appears to have been a transition from families previously ‘having to cook’ to currently ‘wanting to cook’ even if it isn’t for every meal. This transition is likely most descriptive of those families in the middle and upper classes who can afford to eat out if they desire to do so—whereas working class and poor families may not have the financial means to eat out as often as they would like to.

It is important to note here that internalized social pressures and constructions of the idealized family may cause parents, especially mothers, to feel like they have to cook a meal for their family even when they would rather eat out and can afford to do so. Sociological and anthropological research have found that food plays an important part of

the construction of family identities and the negotiation of gender relationships in the home (Valentine, 1999). As mentioned previously the homemade meal seems to be constructed as the desirable norm in families, especially for the dinner meal. Charles and Kerr echo this sentiment, reporting that an important aspect of women's role within the family is to provide proper family meals, with the main meal being the most important and one that should be eaten together as a family—an important part of family life for which women are seen as responsible (Charles & Kerr, 1988, p. 17). Part of the intention behind making meals is to produce 'home' and 'family', with the family meal both representing family and creating opportunity for the involvement of family members in day to day activities that build family relations over time (Devault, 1991, p. 79). As such, parents may feel social pressures to make home made meals in order to fit into the role of the 'good parent'. Furthermore, because domestic cooking has historically been shouldered predominantly by the women of the household, women may feel pressured to make meals for one's family as part of being the 'good mother' or 'good wife'. These are socially constructed ideals that may change over time, but for now parents may feel like they have to cook, even when they would prefer not to and can afford to buy industry prepared meals for the family. Thus, 'wanting to cook' may fall into a grey zone and not be as free of a choice as one might think. For example a woman may 'want to cook' meals for her family not so much because she enjoys cooking, as much as it fulfills her self concept of being a 'good mother and wife'.

In the previous chapter participants were shown to spontaneously define the terms 'cooking' and 'cooking skills' differently and more narrowly than the researcher. This finding may be significant in that it shows that what counts as 'cooking' is subject to interpretation, one that may be out of sync with current food practices. Thus when cooking skills are lamented as being in decline we must first ask "what skills," "what is cooking," and "compared to when and whom?" It may be that while a solid case cannot be made for a decline in domestic cooking skills, a more convincing case can be made to say that families are not cooking as much or in the same way as in previous generations. But is this a problem?

## **5.5 Implications for research, practice and policy**

Much of the concern about culinary deskilling can be attributed to a presumed relationship between domestic cooking skills and dietary practices. However, while there are some studies showing a positive association between taking cooking courses and food practices, or family meals and food practices, the relationship between cooking skills and healthy eating is neither clear nor well established (Caraher & Lang, 1999). This uncertainty is due to both the small amount of research conducted in this area, and the complexity of factors affecting food practices, both of which suggest a need for further research.

This thesis has highlighted how domestic cooking, cooking skills, and our perceptions of these are each influenced by context. The research literature would benefit from further study investigating how each of these is influenced by various contextual factors. For example, a study designed to improve our understanding of how the domestic cooking practices and skills of young adults are influenced by the context of participation in a school-based home-economics or cooking course may utilize the qualitative methods of interviews, journal keeping, focus groups, and/or participant observation. The study could follow a purposefully diverse group of students as they participate in their first home-economics or cooking course. Prior to participating in the course each student could be interviewed to determine their previous exposure to domestic cooking (or food preparation), their home cooking practices, attitudes towards cooking and motivation for enrolling in the course. During the course students could be asked to keep a journal detailing what they have learned from being involved in the course, if they have tried what they learned at home, and if so, what was the outcome. At regular intervals the researcher could participate in the class, observing how students take up and make use of the skills they are taught. An optional focus group could lead the student participants into a discussion of how their home cooking (or food preparation) practices and skills are influenced by participating in the course at various stages. A follow-up interview after the completion of the course may probe students' perceptions of the impact of participating in the course. A study of this type may be able to shed light on the influence of the context of participating in school-based home economics or cooking courses on the



cooking practices and skills of youth. Other contexts for further study may include such family-based factors as family values and meal habits, gender roles, culture or ethnicity.

Among the findings of this study, the revelation that family cooks do not usually use all of their cooking skills when making daily meals supports the conclusion that domestic cooking skills are not directly related to family food practices. The research literature has clearly established that food practices are complex and food choices are influenced by a number of factors; however the degree to which, or way that, domestic cooking skills influence family food practices remains unclear.

A potentially productive study design for further investigation into this area may be that of a longitudinal study that tracks the food practices of study participants over time, comparing family food practices before and after skills are gained in domestic cookery. In this type of study it would be important to understand the inherent difficulties in measuring cooking skills, and it may be advisable to try to develop assessment methods that would be sensitive to a change in participants' cooking skills, rather than attempting to measure participants' level of cooking skills. Because domestic cooking skills are life skills set in the family context it would be best to observe and survey family food practices during a relatively stable phase of family life, a period free of other major changes in the influences on family food practices (i.e. life stage changes, income or occupation changes, changes in home location or food access etc.). The study design could potentially involve a relatively small number of families who are in comparable life stages. The food practices of each family could be documented using such methods as in-depth interviewing, observation, family focus groups, food diaries, or food frequency questionnaires. After an establishment of baseline food practices, each family (or just the primary cook) could attend cooking skills workshops focused on culturally relevant cooking skills, meals and cuisines. A participant evaluation of the skills building workshops would indicate how they were perceived. Following the skills building sessions, the families' food practices could be reevaluated with attention to any changes, and the potential relationship of these changes to participants' improved cooking skills. It may be best to do a two stage follow-up evaluation of the families' food practices with the first follow-up being shortly after the skills workshop, and the second occurring after six months to a year in order to assess the durability of any observed changes in family

food practices. It would also be useful to have a control group of similar families who do not receive the skills development workshop, facilitating an understanding of how much family food practices change over time without the intervention. This type of longitudinal study design may be effective at elucidating the relationship of domestic cooking skills to family food practices.

This research began with a focus on concerns over culinary deskilling and posed the question of “should public health departments and schools be giving more attention to cooking skill as a life skill and important influence on food practices, better enabling citizens to follow a health promoting dietary pattern?” This study has shown that home cooking remains significant to participant families. The adult participants were choosing to cook, even when they didn’t strictly need to cook in order to feed the family. The study noted that most home cooks do not maximally use their skills in preparing day-to-day meals, suggesting that equipping home cooks with high-end skills will not necessarily change their food practices in a positive way. That being said, referring to figure 4.2 there may be a minimal threshold level of cooking skill that is required in families before they can follow the healthy eating recommendations in Canada’s Food Guide (perhaps a level 2 or 3 of cooking skill in figure 4.2). This interpretation suggests that public health departments and school boards should indeed consider basic cooking skills as a requirement for being able to follow the healthy eating guidelines in the food guide, and as such these skills should be a part of life skills training programs. However, it is not currently clear what qualifies as “basic cooking skills”, or what minimal threshold of cooking skills is required to make meals based on the advice of the food guide. Further research may help to build a case, and curriculum, for teaching basic cooking skills in schools and community centres. This future research may consist of first developing a set of culturally appropriate and basic meals that reflect the advice in the food guide. After this, the preparation of each meal could be broken down into a set of teachable skills. In this type of research it would be important to include tacit and perceptual skills and resist focusing solely on mechanical skills. Once established, this basic skill set could then be evaluated perhaps by involving independence seeking teens. After taking skills building workshops the teens’ food preparation skills could be evaluated to assess if they are able to prepare a set of basic meals that draw from the advice in the food guide. A

comparison study may be done to assess if teens that have very minimal food preparation skills are able to follow the advice in the food guide.

Basic cooking skills may be thought of as life skills that empower families to take control of their food practices within an increasingly complex and distanced food environment. As life skills, the teaching of cooking skills may best be approached by first considering the life stage and culinary needs of the target audience. For instance, nearly every teen in this study spoke about cooking skills as being important to their independence when they would move out. This suggests that in practice, targeting older teens with the purpose of preparing them to become independent in meal preparation may be an appropriate public education strategy. Similarly many of the adult participants, notably the women, spoke about learning cooking skills after entering a marriage or having children, suggesting that cooking skills as practical skills may be best taught at, or just prior to, periods of life transition that call for the use of cooking skills. Another life stage to consider targeting is seniors, especially single men, who may find themselves in the new position of having to prepare meals for themselves after many years of having meals provided for them.

Should school boards in British Columbia institute mandatory cooking classes for students? Mandatory cooking classes may have the benefit of exposing a broad section of the population to domestic cooking, however mandatory courses may also have the undesired effect of turning portions of the population off cooking by forcing them to participate in cooking activities before they are ready to do so. A stronger case may be made for increasing the opportunities for the population to learn domestic cooking skills in both the school and community environment on a voluntary basis. As life skills, opportunities to learn cooking skills will be most meaningful when those skills are needed. One policy suggestion to school boards and public health departments is to develop optional and low cost cooking courses that are targeted at the particular needs of people at specific life stages. For example, a course for high school and university students may be most productive if targeted at enabling the students to develop their culinary independence, instead of promoting healthy eating. Similarly a course targeted at new families may focus on making meals for children while balancing the demands of work and family life. This type of life stage and needs based approach to teaching

cooking skills may be an effective way of equipping broad segments of the population with the basic cooking skills needed to follow the dietary advice in Canada's Food Guide.

In closing, this thesis makes a case for further research to better determine how various contexts influence domestic cooking and cooking skills, the relationship between cooking skills and family food practices, as well as what "basic cooking skills" are. Implications for policy and practice include taking a targeted life stage approach to teaching cooking skills, and creating more opportunities for broad sections of the population to learn basic domestic cooking skills in schools and community environments. The research literature would also benefit from detailed study of current and historic domestic cooking practices and attitudes, which would facilitate the evaluation of generational differences in domestic cooking and family food practices.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Interview guides

### *First Interview Guide*

**Note:** The questions should be interpreted as topics that will be covered in the interview. The order will vary depending on issues raised by the participant and by the participant's specific situation, including age. Probes will be used to encourage participants to elaborate.

Start by explaining interview procedures, informed consent (if not already obtained), confidentiality

#### **I. Introduction**

1. To start with, can you tell me a bit about yourself and your living situation? (Probes: Job/school? Who you live with? How long in your current living situation?).
2. Can you tell me about a typical day's eating for you? (Probe at least some eating experiences around where, with whom, who decided what to eat, who prepared it, interactions with others around eating, etc. Try to get a sense of the 'eating style' of the person, including taken-for-granted things like whether eating happens at a table or on the sofa, etc)
3. If you think back over the last few days, how does that compare to what you told me? (Probe How typical is the way you ate? try to get at why it may differ if it does)
4. If you were inviting someone you really wanted to impress for a meal, what would that look like? Where would you eat? What would you eat?

#### **II. Perceptions of own eating habits**

5. When you think about your food habits overall, what do you like about how you eat? (What do you think is 'good' or works well about the way you eat? What concerns or issues do you have about the way you eat?)
6. What tensions or disagreements are there in your household around food and eating? (Probe: especially inter-generationally.)

#### **III. Influences on food practices – place**

7. How does grocery shopping get done in your household? (Probes: Who? Where? How often? How is it decided what should be bought? What foods if any are produced at home?)
8. Why is food purchasing done where it is? (Probes: use of supermarkets, convenience stores, specialty stores? Influence of perceived food quality, variety, costs? location, convenience? politics, ethics? Other reasons for choice of shopping location?)

One of the things we are interested in is how people's food practices are affected by where they live.

9. To what extent do you think people in this area tend to eat in particular ways? Say compared to other places? (Probe: How does the way you eat compare to others you know? Family, friends, people from other places?)
10. If someone were visiting     (place)     and wanted to know how locals tend to eat, what might you say? Where would you recommend they shop or eat out to get a taste of local ways of eating?

#### **IV. Influences on food practices – health, economics, ethics**

11. What does the term 'healthy eating' mean to you? How 'healthy' do you think your eating habits are? Why? Is this an issue for you? (Probe: where have you learned what you know about 'healthy eating'?)
12. Does anyone in your family have a health problem that is affected by diet? If so, what is the health condition, and how long has it been an issue in your family? What difference, if any, has it made in your household? How did/do different family members react to this situation?
13. How do you balance health and other priorities such as taste, cost, convenience, time, etc when deciding what to eat?
14. **How would you describe your cooking skills? How does this influence your eating patterns? The household eating patterns? (Probe: how do your cooking skills relate to the healthfulness of your diet? What is a typical 'meal' that you might prepare? Who do you prepare food for? What is the difference between everyday cooking and cooking for special meals? What does "cooking from scratch" (or basic ingredients) mean to you? What's an example of something you would make "from scratch"? How typical are your cooking skills compared to your friends?)**
15. How do you think your eating patterns are influenced by your economic situation? Are there times, or have there been times, when you have had more or less money? How have you eaten differently? (Probe: How might you eat differently if you had more money available? Less money?)
16. In what ways are your eating practices affected by concerns about the environment or ethical issues? (Probe: politics, justice, farmer welfare, local, sustainable, organic, etc)

#### **V. Influences on food practices – culture, upbringing**

17. How do you think your eating patterns have been influenced by your upbringing? How do they reflect your ethnic or cultural background? In what ways is this important to you (or not)?

**18. How did you learn what you know about cooking? Who taught you? (Probe for adults: How do you pass on your cooking skills to other family members? To whom and at what age? What would being able to cook a meal for yourself and/or your family mean to you? )**

19. How have your eating patterns changed over time? Can you give examples? (Probe: compared to when you were younger? More recent changes? If there has been a change in family composition) Why did these changes happen? What influences were there for change? (Probe: how did you learn to make these changes? If the participant has lived in different places, probe how moving to current community influenced/changed eating patterns)

I've finished all my questions. Is there anything you'd like to add in relation to what we've been talking about?

Thank you. This has been very helpful...

### ***Second Interview Guide***

**Note:** The focus of this interview will be on the photos the participant has taken, and on the photos we are asking them to sort for us, with discussion about their reasoning. Begin by reviewing informed consent, explaining the use of photos in the interview

Talk through the photos the participant has taken. Ask for the story behind each one. In particular, ask about the ones depicting healthy/unhealthy foods, 'naughty' or indulgent foods. (The following questions are guides; use as appropriate depending on what photos the participant has taken)

1. You took photos of \_\_\_\_\_ as healthy foods – can you talk about why? (probe: Why do you believe those are healthy? to what extent do you eat those? When, why etc?) Repeat for photos of unhealthy foods.
2. You took photos of \_\_\_\_\_ as indulgent or naughty (the word the participant used) foods – can you talk about why? (Probe: to what extent do you eat those? When, why etc?)
3. You took a photo of \_\_\_\_\_ as something your [mother / father / brother / sister / son / daughter] would eat – why did you pick that food? (Probe: gender issues? Age issues?)
4. Talk to me about eating out – why did you take this particular picture? (Probe: How often do you eat out? What kinds of places? Other people's homes, restaurants, fast food, take-out, convenience foods at work/school? What situations? With whom? Who decides where/when/what you will eat?)
5. For photos of foods at home, what involvement did you have in preparing these foods? How do these photos reflect your level of skill at cooking?

6. You took photos of \_\_\_\_\_ as places where you'd normally buy food. Why there? (probe: why not [corner store, supermarket, farmer's market – use knowledge of local food environment])?

Discuss other photos as relevant. Try to get at reasoning.

7. What is missing in your local area in terms of food? If you could add a food store or restaurant, what might it be?

Do meal image sorting activity, creating 3 piles representing meals/foods the participant would be very comfortable eating, meals/foods they are neutral about, and those they would be uncomfortable eating. Discuss their choices. Then, using the images of meals:

8. Which of these do you think is more typical of parents versus teenagers? Which is more typical of men versus women? (Re-sort each time, note piles and discuss as sorting)
9. Which of these would you feel comfortable preparing yourself? Which would you not be comfortable preparing? (probe: foods they would like to be able to prepare but feel they cannot? How they feel their cooking skill relates to their concept of healthy/unhealthy eating)

Do restaurant image sorting activity. Try to focus on the participant's level of comfort with each kind of place, not whether they like the specific food depicted.

10. Have you ever been served a meal (in a restaurant, in a home or in some public place) that you felt was 'over the top,' that made you feel uncomfortable? (discuss) At the other end, if you were being served a meal, what kind of meal would you consider totally inadequate?

Is there anything else you'd like to add concerning the photos or the topics we've been discussing? Thank you so much for your help!

## **Appendix B: Adult consent form**

# **THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**



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### **Consent Form for Adult Study Participants**

## **LOCAL FOOD CULTURES AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AS SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF NUTRITIONAL HEALTH: EXPLORING FAMILY FOOD PRACTICES**

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**Sponsor:** This project is funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR)



**Introduction:**

People living in different Canadian communities, and in different socioeconomic situations, have different health problems. These health differences may be linked to variations in health behaviours such as the foods people eat. We know that food habits differ between Canadians in different parts of the country, in rural versus urban areas, and by age, cultural group, education, and income. However, we do not have a good understanding of how and why these geographic and social differences cause differences in health behaviours.

We are conducting this research study in 10 different Canadian communities to learn more about this. You have been invited to participate because you live in one of the communities included in the study, and your family meets the criteria for inclusion in the study. (Families participating in this study must include at least one teenager and one parent who are willing to participate, can converse in English, and have lived in this community for at least 2 years).

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to examine how local food cultures, socioeconomic status, and the family context interact to produce the everyday food practices of adolescents and their parents.

**Study Procedures:**

Your involvement in this study will include several components, involving a total of 3 to 5 hours of your time.

1. First interview. In a private interview, a researcher will ask you to talk about what you and other members of your family eat, and how those eating habits relate to things like your culture, community, health concerns and personal preferences. You will also be asked to talk about how food-related decisions are made in your family, including who makes the decisions and how family members influence each other. The interview will last approximately 1 to 2 hours, and will be tape-recorded.
2. Taking photographs. At the end of the first interview, we can provide you with a disposable camera and a list of photos to take over the next week or two. The list of photos will include, for example, eating at home, eating away from home, a favourite food, a disliked food, a healthy food or meal, and places where you buy food. When you have completed the photography, you will contact the researcher who will pick up the camera and have a duplicate set of photos developed (one set for the researchers, one for you).

3. Second interview. About one week after your camera is picked up, you will have another private interview with the researcher to talk about your photos and explain why you made the choices you did. You may also be asked other questions to follow up on issues discussed in the initial interview. This interview will last about 1 hour, and will be tape-recorded.

**Potential Risks:**

Participation in this research may cause you some inconvenience due to the time involved. There is also a possibility that differences of opinion within your family or personal eating problems may be highlighted through the research. If this occurs and is a problem for you or your family, we can provide you with a referral to counselling services.

**Potential Benefits:**

By participating in this study, you may gain insight into factors that shape your food choices.

Your participation in this study may also benefit Canadian society by helping us understand why people eat the way they eat. This will help us in developing health promotion strategies to help people to eat well.

If you wish to receive a summary of the study findings, please complete the “Study Findings” section on the Signature page at the end of this letter.

**Confidentiality:**

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential throughout the study and whenever we report the findings of the study. Any tapes, notes and interview transcripts will be labelled with a code number and/or false name, and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Your name will be recorded only on this consent form and on one master list that links your name to your code number and/or false name. The consent form and master list will be stored in a separate locked filing cabinet, accessible only to members of the research team. Any computer files relating to this research will be stored on password protected computers only members of the research team can access. When we report the findings of this study, we will not report details about you or your family that would allow others to identify you.

**Remuneration/Compensation:**

In order to compensate you and your family for the time and inconvenience involved in participating in this project, your family will receive a \$100 honorarium. This will be in the form of a gift certificate to a grocery store where your family shops.

**Future use of data:**

We do not have specific plans for use of the data collected for this study other than what is described in this form. However, the investigators may wish to use the data in future studies on similar topics (e.g., with different cultural groups), or for teaching purposes

(e.g., qualitative research methods courses). Your identity will be kept strictly confidential in any of these situations.

**Contact for information about the study:**

You are welcome to ask any questions, at any time, regarding any aspect of this study. You may ask questions of the researcher who is interviewing you, and/or you may contact one of the Principal Investigators: Dr. Gwen Chapman 604-822-6874 or Dr. Brenda Beagan at 902-494-6555.

**Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:**

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to [RSIL@ors.ubc.ca](mailto:RSIL@ors.ubc.ca).

**Consent:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences to your relationship with the University, health care, or community services. Honoraria will be pro-rated for those who withdraw before completion of the project.

## Appendix C: Photo guide

### Directions for Taking Pictures of Food For Participants in The Local Food Cultures Research Project

Please take as many pictures as you can (about 20 to 24 would be good) of things about food in your day-to-day life – whatever you think would help someone else understand how food fits into your life. Some ideas, for example:

- foods and drinks you really like or really dislike
- foods that you think are healthy or less healthy
- foods that you consider indulgent or ‘naughty’ or ‘treats’
- foods *other* members of your family would typically eat (but not you)
- places where you usually eat food at home
- meals that you eat at home
- places where you usually eat *away from home* (a restaurant, someone else’s home ...)
- places where you usually buy food (stores, take out food places ...)
- your kitchen
- the insides of your fridge, freezer, pantry or cupboards

Maybe even:

- restaurants you could never imagine eating in
- food stores you could never imagine shopping in

These are just examples to give you ideas of the kinds of photos you could take. Do not feel you have to take all of these! The point is simply to take some pictures that will help us talk more with you about food in your everyday life.

**Please return the camera on:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### General Directions for Using the Camera

1. To take a picture, look through the viewfinder, press the small grey button on the top of the camera on the right side.
2. Before you take the next picture, wind the big grey button with the rough edges on right side on the back of the camera until it stops. The counter on the top of the camera should have decreased by one. The number on the counter at the top of the camera tells you how many photos are left to be taken.
3. This type of camera does not take close-up photographs. Make sure the object you are photographing is at least 1 metre (3 feet) away.
4. Try to avoid taking pictures of people.
5. If using the camera indoors, turn on the flash first. After you take the picture, turn the flash off until you take the next picture.

## **Appendix D: Code list and definitions for the *Family Food Practices* project**

### **Code: Adult**

Talking about things distinctive to adults. Will usually be accompanied by other codes like eating style(s), foods, eating place(s) etc.

### **Code: Alcohol**

No definition

### **Code: Ambience**

Speaking of the atmosphere or the mood of an eating place

### **Code: At Home**

Usually used with another code like eating places, or foods, or eating style(s) or food environment to indicate the set up of the home etc

### **Code: At Other's Homes**

No definition

### **Code: At Work or School**

Eating your own food at work or school, or eating at the on-site food establishments (e.g. cafeterias)

### **Code: Body Knowledge**

Speaking of an awareness of one's body and how it responds to foods, stress, the environment etc.

### **Code: Body Weight/Image**

When people talk about their bodies in reference to social norms, or personal or social ideals around body type. Speaking of calories with the subtext being around weight gain

### **Code: Breakfast**

What participants describe as their first meal of the day or as breakfast. Here we would also include 'brunch'

### **Code: Caretaking/Catering**

Actions done with the intent of meeting the needs or preferences of others. May also include parenting, when a parent is trying to shape teen behaviour through the use of rules, guidelines, teaching etc.

### **Code: Change**

Speaking of difference from a previous state, substitution of one for another, before and after, or "change"

**Code: Class**

Reference to income, education, social trajectory: with regard to one's place within the social sphere, or of others in relation to self.

For example:

“There is. And that explains some of the eating that you have here. It’s not just the prison but just I would think this is a maybe not depressed but it’s an economically challenged area... Well, I mean what do you do when you’re economically challenged? You usually don’t go out and buy organic lettuce.” [bck07mf1]

**Code: Comfort Eating**

Eating to manage emotions, to create a sense of well being, might be double coded with "emotions"

**Code: Comfortable/Uncomfortable**

When a participant talks about feeling comfortable with particular foods or ways of eating or types of eating establishment or preparing food. Will usually be accompanied by one of those codes. E.g. Comfortable & food preparation. This will often come up early in the card sort activity.

OR

Where participants talk about discomfort, or even aversion, around for example, foods, eating style(s) or eating places. Will come up particularly with the card sorting activity. "I would not be comfortable cooking that by myself." Or "I don't think most kids would be comfortable in that restaurant." Etc

**Code: Conflict**

When participants speak about conflict with others.

**Code: Connecting through Food**

When people talk about the strengthening of social bonds over eating. Includes "commensality", and "creating family"

**Code: Contrast**

When participants speak about one topic by comparing it with another topic

**Code: Control**

Speaking of regulating or restraining oneself or others

**Code: Convenience/Ease**

When ease of use, access, preparation, or purchase are described as key features regarding a persons food or eating

**Code: Cosmopolitan Eating**

Having to do with cuisines from many parts of the world; knowing about "international food, cooking methods, eating styles", embracing a diversity of eateries. This will usually be coded eating style(s) as well, but is such a distinct way of eating, and seemingly a signifier of class and region, that it is worth pulling out.

**Code: Cravings**

Speaking of strong desires for specific tastes or foods

**Code: Culture/Tradition**

When people speak about eating styles, foods, patterns, celebrations etc. that are associated with specific cultures, or with tradition. A sense of 'this is how my people eat.' E.g. Could be an ethnic cuisine, or a regional one.

**Code: Dealing with Differences**

How people deal with the interpersonal relations and difference in preferences, goals, ideals, decision-making particularly in relation to food, including the processes, outcomes and negotiations made, as well as individual and executive decisions.

**Code: Decision Making**

How the decisions are made re: grocery shopping, meal planning, and where when and why people go out to eat

**Code: Eating Alone**

Eating that happens without social interaction (could be alone in a crowd, or just alone)

**Code: Eating in Motion**

Will usually be paired with "eating place(s)." Eating in the car, on the bus etc., eating between destinations, eating while walking, eating while running around the house getting ready for work...

**Code: Eating Places**

Where people talk about eating. Will usually be paired with codes like "at home" or "restaurants etc" or "at work/school" or "at others homes" or "in motion." May also pair with "adult" or "teen/child" etc.

**Code: Eating Style(s)**

Participant discussion of how people eat. Could be own eating style (self), the eating style of people around here (local), the eating style of teens vs adults, the eating style of men vs women, the eating style of 'those people' e.g, by class or culture etc etc. Views of how people eat, where they go, the types of foods and eateries frequented. Could pair with codes like "eating alone." May incorporate what used to be "Food as leisure" though that may also fit with "Food philosophy" or "Food symbolism."

Could include such things as food sharing, when people who do not eat together or live in the household together, but give food to them to take home.

**Code: Eating with Others**

Face to face eating with others with explicit social interaction

**Code: Emotions**

Speaking of feelings. Will often be about when they eat in response to moods or feelings. Or how a food makes people feel when they do/don't eat in a particular way. Pleasure is included here, though will usually be coded as taste or god project.

**Code: Exposure to New Foods & Ways of Eating**

When people speak of being introduced to new foods or ways of eating

**Code: Familiar/Unfamiliar**

When people talk about being familiar with particular ways of preparing foods, or particular foods, or types of eating places etc. E.g. may be offered as a reason for why someone is comfortable with particular eating style(s) or eating places. Or a reason for a narrow repertoire re food. So typical might be a descriptor for a food or way or eating, "because it is familiar" might be the reason.

Also is it is when When people talk about being unfamiliar with particular ways of preparing foods, or particular foods, or types of eating places etc. E.g. may be offered as a reason for why someone is uncomfortable with a particular eating style, food or restaurant type. Or a reason for not wanting to try new foods. E.g. "I don't think I would eat there because it'd be unfamiliar."

**Code: Family**

Not for participant description of the family - use Family Context for that. Use this for indicating who is being talked about when using codes like "food identity" or "eating style(s)" etc. Distinguishes such things from "individual" or "self" or "others"

**Code: Family Context**

Speaking of the makeup of the family, what people do, where they work etc

**Code: Food Availability**

Speaking about food that is available in the house, in there area, at particular times (e.g. pay day) etc. (not food insecurity)

**Code: Food Environment**

Descriptions of where food is available in their area (e.g. local shops, farmers markets etc.) as well as restaurants and places to eat. Usually paired with "Local" though could also be with "Rural" or "Urban" etc.

**Code: Food Identity/Philosophy**

How a family or individual views themselves, in terms of the way they eat. Related to food philosophy. E.g. "We are not big eaters." "I am a picky eater." "He's a meat and



potato guy." May also be applied to a group, possibly by class or culture, or region, or paired with codes like "Local". E.g. "There are a lot of Tim Hortons people around here.

In regard to philosophy it is also:

"When people speak of a set of beliefs or guiding principles in relation to food and eating (e.g. choosing to eat additive free foods, primarily local foods, cruelty free meats, reduced packaging). Could include mindful eating, raw foods, traditional eating, etc. May incorporate what was once "conscious choice," with its notion of intentionality. May include food symbolism.

The core beliefs/values that guide or shape a person's current eating practices. This code differs from "ideals/aspirations" in that it deals with what is currently happening, not what the person would like to have happen."

e.g., " I can't live my life in that heightened state of anxiety over everything. At some point you kind of have to just do your best and be happy with that. "

Deliberately deciding to act in specific ways, to act with intent (e.g. "I decided not to shop at Costco anymore")

### **Code: Food Preparation**

The activities involved in preparing meals and foods

### **Code: Food Presentation**

When attention is given to how the food is arranged and presented, its attractiveness, how appealing it is to the eye

### **Code: Food Restrictions/Special Diet**

e.g. cutting down or back, controlling, limiting, or reducing food or calories; or any specific special diet whether for health, religious/moral, or body image reasons. May be double coded with vegetarian, could also include raw foodist, detoxes, traditional diet. When people talk about following a particular diet.

### **Code: Food Struggles**

When participants speak about the psychodynamic relationship of oneself to food. Emphasized here is intrapersonal dynamics, whereas the code 'Conflict' indicates the interpersonal struggles one has with others in relation to food.

### **Code: Food(s)**

Will almost always be paired with other codes like "typical" or "special", "comfortable" or "uncomfortable (e.g. during card sort). Maybe "self" or "teen/child" or "adult." May be paired with familiar" or "unfamiliar." Perhaps "culture/tradition." This code is not to be used every time participants mention food, but in places where food is being specifically talked about in relation to the above codes.

For example I coded the below as: 'culture/tradition, special, foods, good/bad, food preparation, etc'

M: That's easy. I don't know if it's my European background but I always will have a platter like on marble board or tile. Hunk of good cheese, a hunk of good bread, a hunk of salami and some olives, good olives, deli olives and I always do that. And then I put my little edible flowers with it. And maybe slice up tomatoes and cucumbers if I have them handy from work. [bck01m1]

### **Code: Gender**

When participants speak about social constructs in relation to female/male, and in relation to femininity and masculinity, as well as when participants give concrete examples of what they perceive as what girls/women do and what boys/men do.

Particularly used when participant does the card sort activity into piles by gender. May come up other times. Participant is specifically attributing by gender - certain foods or food practices or eating styles are women's.

E.g. from bck03m2 "I think men in our culture have been brought up by mothers who say, "You need hearty food". So, that's often a meat and potatoes based diet."

E.g. from bck03m2 "I think women tend to be more exploratory in their eating and they are generally more willing I think to try new things. Maybe that's because we read women's magazines [laughing] and they have all these good recipes."

### **Code: Good/Bad**

An assessment or evaluation or judgment. When people speak about foods, eating styles or food preparation, etc in broad or nonspecific positive words that satisfy their standards (re: good eating habits, eating well, food quality, eating styles etc.). Will always be paired with other codes it is qualifying. E.g. "good" and "eating style(s)" or "good" and "food(s).

OR

When eating patterns, or kinds/qualities of foods creates a negative physical or emotional reaction; when people use broad negative terms that includes judgment. Will usually be used with another code like foods or eating style(s).

Judgment related to this code is forming an opinion based on comparisons to a social or personal standard, deciding if it is "bad" or "good" or "not/good enough" etc.

### **Code: Grow/Gather**

Gardening, hunting, fishing, harvesting/gathering, picking berries, (e.g. Freegan)

**Code: Health Concerns**

When people speak of eating in certain ways because of personal or familial health concerns (e.g. diabetes, heart disease, cancer, obesity, eating disorder). This code could also include eating in relation to other types of health concerns that are not disease focused, but related to wellbeing and/or mental health and may be based in alternative health paradigms rather than western biological approaches to health.

**Code: Healthy/Unhealthy**

What people themselves describe as healthy, giving a clear indication of when eating or foods etc are related to health. Pairs with codes like "foods" and "eating styles." May indicate relationship to health by using language like nutrition, nutrients, trans fats, etc.

OR

What participants themselves describe as unhealthy. May be paired with eating style, foods, food preparation etc.

**Code: Homemade/From Scratch**

"When the participant talks about "homemade" as a quality of their food life/desires etc.

**Code: Hunger/Appetite**

When people refer to the physical sensation of hunger.

**Code: Ideals/Aspirations**

When participants speak about either personal or social standards and ideals - either as a point of comparison or to strive towards. Refers to 'what I'd like to be doing, but I'm not' 'What I should, want to do, would if I could'. It may also be used when people describe other people's aspirations.

**Code: Indifference**

When participants say things like 'I don't care', 'It doesn't matter to me', or 'whatever.' This is to capture an attitude toward food. One of complete lack of interest. In contrast, neutral/indifferent is used when someone does not have strong feelings one way or another about a food, or eating place, or ethical issue re food etc. The current code is in fact a fairly strong feeling, just one of indifference, can't be bothered.

**Code: Individual/Self**

Paired with the code "food identity" replaces individual food identity. But more broadly, can be used whenever someone is talking about themselves as an individual. E.g. an individual eating style.

It is also used when a participant is speaking of him or her self.

**Code: Interpersonal Influences**

Interactions (e.g., conversations, role-modelling, influence) between people, particularly how this affects what and how they eat.

This code may have some overlap with "dealing with differences" -- with "Interpersonal influences" the expectation is that there is explicit interaction between people, and there may not be differences in preferences, desires, etc."

**Code: Junk Food/Fast Food**

When people talk about fast food, and/or when they discuss something as being junk food. This is not our interpretation of something as being junk. (Prepared/processed might be used instead.)

**Code: Knowledge**

speaking of knowing what, where, who, when, why etc. often used in conjunction with other codes e.g. knowledge + local + food environment. Or knowledge + preferences + family.

**Code: Learning/Teaching**

Where, when, how, and from whom food skills are acquired.

**Code: Life Stage**

Having to do with stages of emotional or physical development re: infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adult, adult, elderly, and how these shape food patterns. E.g. when kids are toddlers they eat anything; children are picky eaters; teens are able to cook for themselves etc

**Code: Local**

Pertaining to the area where the participant now lives. Usually paired with codes like "eating style(s)." to convey participant views of how people eat around here, where they go, the types of foods and eateries. It gives a sense of eating patterns etc for the area - not necessarily the participant or even his/her friends (use Peer for that). May pair with "food environment" to convey

**Code: Local Food**

Speaking about food that is grown "locally" which may mean regional farms, farmers markets, community gardens, community supported agriculture, home gardens, picking berries, foraging, hunting and fishing within one's region. This is a food movement, a politics about food, not simply a description of how people eat around here (use local + eating style(s)). This is for when people talk about the importance of sustaining local food production etc.

**Code: Lunch**

What people describe as their midday meal.

**Code: Marketing**

Awareness of how foods are promoted to encourage purchase, brand loyalty; plus the ways that participants may sell their own foods

**Code: Memories/Nostalgia**

Speaking of recalling experiences, emotions, smells, tastes etc. Nostalgia conveys a sort of sentimental yearning for the past either one's own past, or a more general conception of a time when things were better

**Code: Methods Issues**

No definition

**Code: Money/Cost**

When people speak of budget, affordability, financial pressures, the cost of food or eating out, particularly as it influences eating patterns.

**Code: Narrow Repertoire**

Opposite of variety, uniformity/monotony of food choices (e.g. the 'meat and potatoes' or 'roti dinner' eater)

**Code: Organic/Natural**

Speaking of 'organic' or 'natural'; e.g. speaking of additive free, non-sprayed, unadulterated foods, or growing without pesticides herbicides etc.

**Code: Othering**

Speaking of the differences between US and THEM (e.g. 'we don't eat like them'). Usually diminishes the Other. It is the process of conveying that someone else, usually a whole social group, is lesser, exotic, weird etc.

**Code: Others**

Whereas Othering is the process of conveying that someone else, usually a whole social group, is lesser, exotic, weird etc here others simply refer to who is being talked about.

**Code: Peers**

When participants talk about the people in their age, social, professional, or friend groups, perhaps their eating style(s).

**Code: Photo Sort - Food**

Use to code the whole section of the transcript where participants is talking through the sorting of the cards depicting foods.

**Code: Photo Sort - Restaurants**

Use to code the whole section of the transcript where participant is talking through the sorting of the cards depicting eating places..

**Code: Physical Activity**

Speaking of being active, exercising (or not)

**Code: Place(s)**

This is used when someone is talking about the effect of place on eating. So someone might talk about how people eat 'here' (which would also be local), but might also talk about how having lived in various places has affected their eating patterns. E.g. from bc03m2 in terms of eating, "I guess I could say that having lived in different places in BC has broadened me I think more than some of the people that I know."

**Code: Politics/Ethics**

Environmental issues, Fair Trade, Food Security, Sustainable Agriculture/Fisheries, Animal Welfare, Farmer's Rights, Awareness of global issues as related to personal practices

**Code: Preferences**

When participants state their likes and dislikes, or those of other people and how preferences shape their or the family's eating.

**Code: Prepared/Processed**

The flip side to "organic/natural," this is when people emphasize prepared, packaged, processed foods. This may be in terms of things they will eat, or in terms of things they would not eat, or may come up when they contrast their own eating to others, etc.

**Code: Preserving**

When people talk about canning/freezing/storing away/salting/smoking/pickling/drying.

**Code: Priorities**

When people speak about giving precedence, or ranking, life activities esp. related to food and eating. e.g., cost matters, but we won't sacrifice quality. Some may make their priorities preoccupations, as in those aspects of food dominate their thinking (e.g. "I always check the amount of calories in the food before eating it")

**Code: Quality/Fresh**

A focus on the attributes of a food or meal, holding up to a high standard, or when people talk about "quality". Speaking of "Fresh", or newly/recently made, purchased, bought, grown, caught etc.

**Code: Resistance**

When participants speak about opposing or rebelling against ideas, authority, philosophies, eating styles, expectations concerning food etc.

**Code: Restaurant(s)/Eating Out**

Talk about food service establishments away from home or others' homes, may be places participant is comfortable or uncomfortable, may be paired with special or typical, with self or others or family, or local etc. This code also includes 'take-out' eateries, ordering food to have at home or to take home. 'Eating Out' is not meant to indicate at somebody's home.

**Code: Ritual**

Speaking of intentional repeated activities (e.g. the saying of grace, religious fasting etc.)

**Code: Roles/Responsibilities**

Where participants talk about what they see or what others see as their jobs around food. Encompasses descriptions of the division of labour, but goes further to a sense of taking this on as a responsibility. "He is the cook in the family." "I always have to make sure they eat vegetables.

**Code: Seasonality**

Speaking of what foods are, or are not, available at specific times of year; or speaking of paying attention to these yearly cycles. May also be how food desires or patterns shift seasonally.

**Code: Shopping**

"Grocery shopping, buying food.

**Code: Sit-down Meal**

A meal where time and space has been set aside (alone or with others) and typically had at a table.

**Code: Snacking/Grazing**

**Code: Sources of Information**

Where knowledge is attained e.g. books, TV, mothers, school, experts etc.

**Code: Special**

When something related to food is deemed special, as opposed to typical or everyday. Will usually be used with "foods" or "eating place(s)" or "eating style(s)." Could also pair with "food preparation" for example, if participant is describing special ways of cooking something. Or with "entertaining" if describing a special meal with having people over.

**Code: Spirituality/Religion**

When people describe what or how they eat as being influenced by their religion or spirituality

**Code: Supper**

This is a late afternoon/early evening meal. We are using the term 'supper' versus 'dinner' because sometimes 'dinner' is meant as lunch.

**Code: Supplements**

Vitamins/Minerals, herbal, or non-food components re: items like pills/powders/liquids used to supplement the diet for health benefits

**Code: Taste**

When people speak of the physical tastes of food (sweet, salty, sour, bitter, umami). May pair with codes like "Priorities" for example, in discussing decisions get made about what to eat.

**Code: Teen/Child**

Talking about children or adolescents in relation to food. Could pair with "food preparation" or "learning skills" or "foods" or "eating styles" or "eating places" for example.. Described by teens themselves, or by parents reflecting on their own teen years or their children/teenagers.

**Code: Time/Schedule**

Use when people are talking about time in relation to food. E.g. time pressures, needing quick meals etc. Includes how schedules (work, school, leisure etc) affects their eating patterns.

**Code: Treats/Desserts**

Indulgent food or what participants name as 'sweets' or 'goodies' or how they define desserts.

**Code: Typical**

Descriptions of the patterns of what is usual, everyday, for the person or family. How people usually eat, normal eating patterns and foods, in contrast to special foods. Will often pair with codes like "foods," "eating style(s)," "eating place(s)" and so on.

**Code: Upbringing**

When people discuss how their eating patterns, tastes, skills, etc. have been influenced by their family of origin, or how they were brought up. Usually influence from family members, but not exclusively. E.g. a neighbour who routinely prepared Korean food for the kids etc.

**Code: Urban/Rural**

Use for when people are specifically talking about food, food availability, eating style(s), shopping, food patterns etc in urban areas. May be contrasted with rural eating patterns, but not always. But it conveys some idea of how urban-ness shapes food practices.

E.g. "People eat out all the time in the city, and everyone competes to know all the best places to eat."

OR

Use for when people are specifically talking about food, food availability, eating style(s), shopping, food patterns etc in rural areas. May be contrasted with urban eating patterns, but not always. But it conveys some idea of how rural-ness shapes food practices.



E.g. from bck03m2 " I think a lot of it has to do with what's available to eat. If you raise cows, you're going to eat beef. If you have a big garden, you're going to eat what you plant and you're going to can those things. A lot of people here can be almost self-sustaining. ... I don't hear a lot of people say, "Let's go to Vancouver for Ethiopian." They don't have time to do that, they've got to milk the cows in four hours."

**Code: Variety/Balance/Moderation**

Speaking of seeking out diversity when buying, eating, or growing foods; seeking to balance different kinds of foods or food values in the diet

**Code: Vegetarian**

Speaking of vegetarianism, choosing vegetarian foods, or abstaining from meats or other animal foods

## **Appendix E: Family memo template**

When writing a memo we would like to know your overall impressions, your reflections on the family as a unit and how individuals within the family may have presented similarly and differently.

1. **What are the demographics of the family and context? (Who was interviewed? Who else is in the household? Ethnicity? Occupation? Education? Income? and Location of where they live - description of neighbourhood or do they live on a farm?) Please do this point in form.**

**Interviewed:** x  
**Household:** x  
**Ethnicity:** x  
**Occupation:** x  
**Education:** x  
**Income:** x  
**Location:** x

2. **What did they say about their food philosophy(ies)/eating style (individual and family). What is it that they embrace, reproduce or resist?**
3. **What is food about for this family? (Interviewer/coder impressions).**
4. **What shapes the family food practices/philosophy? (For example, is it social class, peers, school, work, income, their community). Do you see a food trajectory? (This may be related to health, age, life-stage, marriage, travel, etc).**
5. **What do they have to say about place and local environment?**
6. **What are the intra family dynamics around food?**
7. **How are cooking skills perceived, learned, and transferred? What is the impact of cooking skill on family food practices?**
8. **Is there anything in the field notes that would add to your memo?**

9. **Photos**

## **Appendix F: Storied episode**

**Title:** New foodscapes help to shape woman's self image

**Plot:** Girl grows up eating a conservative meat and potatoes diet supplemented with “boxed” convenience meals that she learned to prepare for her family at a young age. When she is old enough to leave home she leaves behind this dull culinary tradition, branching out into new ways of eating. She explores the world's cultures through her relationships and meals, placing food as a centerpiece of her life's table, the enjoyment of which she teaches and nourishes in her children.

### **Prelude**

*This story is derived from the transcript of an interview with a single mother of two teens living in East Vancouver. The text has been lightly edited and ordered into four acts. The interviewer's questions and utterances have been omitted for fluidity.*

### **Act One – Dinner at home**

Hmm, well I never had ethnic food very much, maybe the odd Chinese food dinner night with my parents, but when I was young it was pretty meat and potatoes, Alberta steak. So, it was a pretty meat and potatoes kind of an upbringing—almost English food. You know, there was the Scottish side of the family influence. My mother was very much a hamburger helper kind of a cook.

### **Act Two –Setting out, taking chances**

So I, you know and that's actually how I cooked when I moved out of the house. Although I did swear that I was going to buy real butter and I wasn't going to use powdered milk you know and the kinds of things that my mom did, there were a few changes I made.

Certainly you know, actually when I became a vegetarian, before I became a vegetarian I cooked like my mother did which was from a box. But I didn't really vary my cooking much until I became a vegetarian and then I started to explore ethnic foods, Indian in particular - Asian, and then started cooking different kinds of things more often. So yeah I think my cooking skills have broadened my eating for sure because I'm willing to try so many different kinds of cooking styles. It gives me the chance to try different ethnic foods.

So as I moved out and became sort of more in charge of my own foods ethnic foods were a big thing for me. It's also the same time I became vegetarian so that was exploring different ethnic foods particularly Indian and Asian, and that made me look further a field. And it was like a new world opened up to me. I had no idea that these foods were so yummy. And so I think what it did is just make me really open so you know I've gone through phases where I'm just about I'm willing to try just about anything. You know I've gone to sushi bars and had things that stare back at me. But I'm willing to try it once

just to see. Maybe it's fabulous. Yeah so a willingness to take chances I think is probably what's been the defining for me over the years as I get older and more open to new stuff.

### **Act Three – Sense of self**

Yeah I love to cook yeah so yeah I think I have pretty good cooking skills. I can certainly follow just about any recipe and it pretty much turns out the way it should generally [laughs]. I'm willing to take a few risks too and sort of go off the book and try a few new things and yeah that's good. A few new ingredients or, but I love my recipe books. They sort of they get my creativity flowing just in giving me some ideas and then I can move off of the recipes from there.

But yeah I think probably more than anything is just that my openness to food over the years just, yeah it just continues to increase the more I know about food the more I... you know I'd love to, I have this fantasy that I entertain every once in a while of going to a country like Mexico (because my ex is from Mexico), going to a country like Mexico and just traveling around and cataloguing all the amazing dishes. And he was a photographer so he would take the photographs. And I would write the recipes and their histories and their cultural references and all of that. I just thought that would be a fabulous idea. Didn't do it you know, maybe someday when I retire [laughs] I'll travel around the world and write recipes in my little book.

### **Act Four - Motherhood and family**

Mm so yeah you know I mean our food world is in part defined by their age too [referring to her two children]. You know as they're getting older we're able to eat a wider variety of stuff because they're more willing to accept it. Some day [my daughter] will eat cooked vegetables. Yeah so there's that kind of dynamic too, but yes, I mean things are always changing because they grow older and I push them to places - so it's something that defines our eating mostly is just constantly pushing the [laughs] the envelope. "Try this, try this".

I think you know [my son's] so open now that he could go anywhere. I think for him it's going to be about more exploring his cooking skills and his capacity to do a wide variety of foods. With [my daughter] I'm just hoping that we'll reach a stage, and I'm hoping it's going to come soon, that she shifts into that mode as well where her palette is sophisticated enough that you know she can appreciate Dijon mustard on her sandwich instead of just margarine. If that that begins to change for [her] there'll be a new, yet again, another awakening for all of us. Because when she becomes open to trying new things then it gives more permission for the rest of us.

And I think it's a value that I'm passing along to them [her teen children] is that food's important and that it's a way to express yourself and not just a way to be healthy and feed your body but it's also it can be fun.

**The end**

**Reflections:**

I chose this particular interview for this activity because it occurred to me, while conducting the interview, that the participant was telling me her story and articulating a vision of herself. In that sense the story was already there in the transcript, I just packaged it into a continuous narrative.

The plot is a chronicle of one aspect of the participant's life. The narrative form is one of transformation, almost a Cinderella type tale, where a girl is raised in a bleak culinary household and her coming of age is told through exposure to new cultures and ways of eating. She has grown into an experienced woman with a strong sense of the rich role that food plays in her life. She wants to pass this sense of culinary freedom and the richness of sensory and cultural exploration to her children. She finds herself struggling sometimes against the dietary finickiness of her teens, especially the younger daughter.

This story flows well because it was framed as a story by the participant. I can imagine that the same storied telling would not have come together so smoothly using the transcripts from other interviews – especially those of teens who are often not that reflective and tend to respond in short unconnected fragments without attention to a greater narrative framework.

## Appendix G: Recruitment poster



**Food, Nutrition and Health**  
Faculty of Land & Food Systems  
2205 East Mall  
Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4  
Phone: (604) 827-5764

### FAMILY FOOD HABITS STUDY \*VOLUNTEERS NEEDED\*

*This study will examine how regional and social factors help shape people's eating habits*

We are looking for families who have at least one teenager (age 13-19 years) and one parent who:

- 1) Are willing to participate
- 2) Can converse in English
- 3) Have lived in this neighborhood for at least 2 years

Each family member who participates in the study will be interviewed two times, and asked to take some photographs of foods they eat or don't eat (we can provide a disposable camera). Participation will take a total of 3-5 hours spread over 2 visits.

**Participating families will receive a \$100 grocery store gift certificate, and teenage participants will receive a \$20 gift certificate to a movie theatre or CD store.**

**For more information, please contact:**

Family Food Habits Study (604) 827-5764 or familyfoodstudy@hotmail.com

People who are interested in participating will be asked to provide information about family characteristics. We will use this information to ensure eligibility and to help us obtain a variety of families for the study.

Study investigators: Dr. Gwen Chapman (UBC), Dr. Brenda Beagan (Dalhousie University), Dr. José Johnston (University of Toronto), Dr. Elaine Power (Queen's University), Dr. Helen Vallianatos (University of Alberta)

## Appendix H: UBC research ethics board's certificates of approval



The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
**Behavioural Research Ethics Board**  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

### CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b> Gwenneth E. Chapman	<b>INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:</b> UBC/Land and Food Systems	<b>UBC BREB NUMBER:</b> H07-01685
<b>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:</b>		
<b>Institution</b> UBC Other locations where the research will be conducted: subject's home; quiet public places near subject's home (e.g., coffee shop)		<b>Site</b> Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)
<b>CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):</b> Elaine Power Josee Johnston Helen Vallianatos Brenda Beagan		
<b>SPONSORING AGENCIES:</b> Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)		
<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> Local Food Cultures and Socioeconomic Status as Social Determinants of Nutritional Health: Exploring Family Food Practices		
<b>REB MEETING DATE:</b> August 9, 2007	<b>CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE:</b> August 9, 2008	
<b>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:</b>		<b>DATE APPROVED:</b> August 29, 2007
<b>Document Name</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b><u>Protocol:</u></b>		
Grant application appendices	N/A	March 1, 2007
Grant application	N/A	March 1, 2007
<b><u>Consent Forms:</u></b>		
Parental consent	1	July 13, 2007
Adult participant consent	1	July 13, 2007
<b><u>Assent Forms:</u></b>		
Teenage participant assent	1	July 13, 2007
<b><u>Advertisements:</u></b>		
Recruitment poster	2	August 15, 2007
<b><u>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</u></b>		
Photography Instructions	1	July 13, 2007
Interview Guides	1	July 13, 2007
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures		

were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

*Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board  
and signed electronically by one of the following:*

---

Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair  
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair  
Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair  
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair



*The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
**Behavioural Research Ethics Board**  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3*

## **CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK AMENDMENT**

<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b> Gwenneth E. Chapman	<b>DEPARTMENT:</b> UBC/Land and Food Systems/Human and Animal Nutrition	<b>UBC BREB NUMBER:</b> H07-01685
<b>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:</b>		
<b>Institution</b> UBC		<b>Site</b> Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)
<b>Other locations where the research will be conducted:</b> subject's home; quiet public places near subject's home (e.g., coffee shop)		
<b>CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):</b> Elaine Power Dean Laurence Simmons Josee Johnston Sonya A.M. Sharma Deborah I. McPhail Helen Vallianatos Brenda Beagan		
<b>SPONSORING AGENCIES:</b> Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)		
<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> Local Food Cultures and Socioeconomic Status as Social Determinants of Nutritional Health: Exploring Family Food Practices		

**Expiry Date - Approval of an amendment does not change the expiry date on the current UBC BREB approval of this study. An application for renewal is required on or before: June 23, 2010**



AMENDMENT(S):		AMENDMENT APPROVAL DATE: October 23, 2009	
Document Name	Version	Date	
<p>The amendment(s) and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.</p>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board</i></p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 20px auto;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">           Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair            Dr. Ken Craig, Chair            Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair            Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair            Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair         </p>			