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Foodwork or Foodplay? Men's Domestic Cooking, Privilege and Leisure

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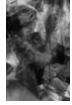
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Article

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Abstract

Market research documents a rising passion for cooking among men. Yet, some feminists argue that men see cooking as 'leisure' in part because they have distance from day-to-day care obligations. However, empirical research on men's home cooking is still limited. This article investigates the relationship between cooking and leisure among 30 Canadian men with significant household cooking responsibilities. Drawing on interview, observational and diary data, and poststructural conceptualizations of leisure, I ask, to what extent do these men understand cooking as leisure and why? Opposing the notion that women's cooking is 'work' and men's, 'leisure', I find that these men experience cooking as 'work-leisure' complicated by worries about others' preferences, health and approval. However, I also argue that participants *create* leisurely cooking by manipulating cooking spaces and time(s), and it is in the ease with which they do so that gender (as well as class and race) hierarchies become more visible.

Keywords

cooking, division of labour, domestic labour, foodwork, gender, leisure, men/masculinity, poststructuralism, work

Introduction

The ever-presence of the male chef on food TV and the rising number of books, magazines and blogs about men's cooking seem to indicate a growing enthusiasm for cooking among men in the West. Indeed, British and American men are spending about twice as much time in the kitchen as in the 1960s (Cutler et al., 2003; Wallop, 2009). More than this, they seem to be *enjoying* themselves there. According to market research, 52 per cent of British men see cooking as 'a hobby and not a chore' (Future Foundation, 2008: 5).

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Although this trend has some potential toward a more equitable division of domestic labour, some feminists have viewed it with little enthusiasm. It is not only that cooking is one of the more 'enjoyable' domestic tasks, which men have taken up more readily than less pleasant housework (Van Berkel and De Graaf, 1999). In terms of cooking itself, some scholars propose that men are able to enjoy the practice because of gender inequities (Hollows, 2003a; Julier, 2002). For one thing, home cooking is still primarily done by women. British, American and Canadian women spend more than twice as much time 'cooking and washing up' or in 'food preparation and cleanup' than their male counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2006; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007; Wallop, 2009). Further, women are primarily responsible for day-to-day household cooking, while men tend to cook on weekends, over a barbecue, on special occasions or for guests (Adler, 1981; Beagan et al., 2008; Murcott, 1983; Roos et al., 2001). As leisure is often associated with choice (Hollows, 2003b; Stebbins, 2009: 9), some scholars suggest that men are more able to see cooking as leisurely than women because they have more flexibility as far as when and how they cook, and less of their identity invested in feeding and caring for others (Aarseth and Olsen, 2008; Cairns et al., 2010; Hollows, 2003a; Julier, 2002).

However, our understanding of men's cooking is far from complete. For one thing, arguments about choice best represent the experiences of heterosexual men cohabiting with women (who might cook instead of them), leaving out the experiences of gay and single straight men (see also Kemmer, 2000). There is also considerable negotiation among some heterosexual couples, with some men cooking as much or more than their female partners (Bove and Sobal, 2006). Despite this, few studies focus on men who have significant cooking responsibilities in their homes (Aarseth and Olsen, 2008, and Carrington, 1999, are exceptions). Studies examining the meanings of cooking for men which include ethno-racial minorities are equally uncommon (Carrington, 1999, and Julier, 2002, are exceptions). Men from different backgrounds might draw to different extents from what Lupton calls the 'food as fuel' ethic and the 'food as pleasure' ethic, which she locates, respectively, in Enlightenment rationality, and in the Romantic valorization of the senses (1996: 143–51).

Given these issues, my goals in this article are the following: First, I empirically investigate the relationship between cooking and leisure among Canadian men of diverse ethno-racial backgrounds, sexualities and living arrangements who do a significant amount of cooking in their households. Drawing on poststructural conceptualizations of leisure, I ask, to what extent do these men understand cooking as leisure? Next, I investigate how and why participants understand cooking as leisure when they do. If cooking is still leisure for these men who are charged with its day-to-day accomplishment, *how and why* is it so? Before introducing my findings, I examine the existing literature in more detail.

Cooking, Leisure and Gender in the Literature

While a good deal has been written about the division of cooking among heterosexual couples (Beagan et al., 2008; Bove and Sobal, 2006; Kemmer, 1999, 2000; Lupton, 2000), the symbolic and social meanings of women's cooking (Charles and Kerr, 1988;

DeVault, 1991; Murcott, 1983), and masculinities and food/eating (see Sobal, 2005, for an overview), less research focuses on men's cooking, especially in the household. However, a few studies shed light on this issue and link gender and leisurely cooking. Bove and Sobal (2006) and Kemmer (1999), who investigated the division of cooking among heterosexual couples in the USA and UK respectively, determined that men tended to cook when they enjoyed the practice, while the job fell to women when neither partner wanted it. Similarly, Beagan et al. (2008) found among Canadian families that cooking responsibilities were usually taken up by women because feeding and family nutrition monitoring were still seen as women's work. Cairns et al. (2010) looked not at the division of cooking but at how American men and women felt about the practice. They suggest that expectations that women cater to family tastes and health (a finding echoed in Aarseth and Olsen, 2008, and Beagan et al., 2008) created a dilemma between personal pleasure and family care that women felt more acutely than men. It is not that women don't enjoy cooking; many have spoken about the satisfactions and pleasures of feeding themselves and others (Bove and Sobal, 2006; Wright-St Clair et al., 2005). However, women often experience negative *as well* as positive feelings because of things like time pressures (Hollows, 2003a; Short, 2006), difficulties combining cooking with child care (Short, 2006), and anxieties about the tastes and health of loved ones (DeVault, 1991). Lupton's (2000) study of Australian couples and Julier's (2002) study of American singles and couples also show a connection between women's carework and men's leisurely cooking. In both studies, some men were able to enjoy time in the kitchen because their female partners took care of other domestic tasks such as childcare, cleaning or food shopping. So far, this research suggests that men may find cooking more leisurely than women because they have more choice about when they do it, and because their cooking is more self/leisure-oriented than other/care-oriented.

Cultural discourses about cooking may also have an influence on men's enjoyment. Work by Swenson (2009), Hollows (2003a) and Parasecoli (2008) proposes that men's cooking on Food TV and in film is framed as a display of professional skill or leisurely entertainment, while that of women – even cooking show hosts – is framed as mundane work done for loved ones. This mundane foodwork may either go unnoticed, or, as Hollows notes (2006), may be criticized as a sign of conservatism or anti-feminism (see also Short, 2006: 93). Men's cooking or other domestic work, on the other hand, tends to be seen as progressive (Coltrane, 1989; Deutsch and Saxon, 1998). In brief, men may see cooking as leisure because when they do it, they are positioned as culinary artists, creative hobbyists or stereotype breakers.

However, there is also evidence for more nuance to these dichotomies. For example, Bove and Sobal (2006) and Lupton (2000) note that a few heterosexual men in their samples cooked to please others or show love, and Carrington (1999) found that several gay men in his study frequently attended to the preferences and health needs of loved ones. That is, some men's cooking, like women's, is care-oriented. In addition, Aarseth and Olsen (2008) observed a leisurely approach to cooking among one or two men in their study who cooked regularly, implying that there is more to the relationship between cooking and leisure than choice or a distance from necessity. This said, these observations were made among a small number of men in studies which did not focus on cooking and leisure.

In this article, I follow up on these various findings with a more systematic investigation of cooking, gender and leisure. I add to the literature in two ways. First, I investigate the relationship between cooking and leisure among men from a variety of ethno-racial backgrounds, sexualities and living arrangements who have significant home cooking responsibilities – a more heterogeneous sample than earlier studies which typically focus on white, heterosexual, married men. Second, I draw on poststructural notions of leisure which take into account leisure's contextual and flexible nature. This is an approach rarely taken in the cooking literature, where cooking enjoyment is often seen as fixed (i.e. participants are said to either like cooking or not, period) (Bove and Sobal, 2006, and Short, 2006, are exceptions). Before describing my findings, I give more detail about this poststructural perspective and how it advances our understanding of gender, cooking and leisure.

Domestic Cooking as 'Work-Leisure': A Poststructural Perspective

Research in leisure studies, not often put in dialogue with cooking studies, can help us tease out the complex relationship between cooking and leisure. Henderson and Frelke (2000), in their review of the literature on place and leisure, identify a '[leisurely] state of mind' as one of the common ways individuals experience leisure. Specifically, spaces and activities are not intrinsically leisurely or not, but may be experienced or even created as such depending on the individual and circumstance. For example, because of women's household responsibilities, it has often been more difficult for them to find the home a space of leisure than for men (Hollows, 2003a; Wearing, 1998). On the other hand, the domestic realm is not categorically unleisurely for those responsible for housework. Radway (1983) found, for instance, that women literally and figuratively escape domestic responsibilities by reading romance novels, even while physically remaining in the home. These types of experiences provide empirical support for poststructural leisure theory, which avoids dualistic categories (e.g. work/leisure, public/private) and eschews universalistic understandings of leisure meant to hold true across time and space (Aitchison, 2003). Poststructural scholars see leisure instead as contextual, flexible and fragmentary (Aitchison, 2003; Rojek, 1995; Wearing, 1998).

A poststructural approach is uncommon in empirical examinations of cooking, but there are exceptions. Marjorie DeVault, in her research on women's feeding practices, suggests that these practices are neither completely 'work' nor completely 'leisure' (1991: 5). The words 'work' and 'leisure' better describe men's experiences, she argues, because men have more typically experienced a temporal and physical separation between job and family, work and home. Although I argue below that the blurring of work and leisure applies to *men's* cooking as well, the point here is that even domestic activities themselves may sometimes be experienced as leisure in certain circumstances.

My data on men's experiences of domestic cooking can best be understood within this poststructural framework. In this article, I use the hybrid notion of 'work-leisure' to conceptualize cooking, as cooking can be variously experienced as pleasurable, meaningful, satisfying, freeing, rejuvenating or relaxing – characteristics often associated with leisure (Aitchison, 2003; Rojek, 1995; Stebbins, 2009) – or laborious, tedious or draining – characteristics associated with (some types of) work, both paid and unpaid (Oakley,

1975; Rojek, 1995). I list these characteristics of ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ with some hesitation, recognizing that they bring us back to a dichotomy poststructural theory attempts to avoid. This difficulty in establishing terms is part of what leisure scholar Chris Rojek calls the ‘paradox’ of trying to reconcile ‘leisure’, a bounded, modernist concept, with the fluidity and flexibility of postmodernism (1995: 146). Despite these theoretical complexities, these definitions are useful in understanding the cooking experiences of my participants *in context*, as I show below.

Sample and Methods

This article is based on research with 30 men living in Toronto, Canada, who cook a significant amount at home from basic ingredients.¹ Each participant completed a five-day meal diary indicating things like what was eaten for the main meal of each day, what the ingredients and cooking methods were, and who prepared it. After receiving completed meal diaries, I met each interviewee for a 1.5-hour in-depth interview. I also conducted participant observation in the homes of one-third of the participants, who allowed me to watch them cook a meal. After observations, I wrote field notes about things like the kitchen space, the participants’ affect while cooking, and any comments made about the food. I invited the partners of all cohabiting participants to fill in a short questionnaire about their feelings about their partners’ (the main participants’) cooking and about the division of labour in their homes.

In terms of analysis, I used a modified version of Grounded Theory (Punch, 1998). I coded interviews, diaries and field notes with the qualitative data analysis software, AtlasTi. By the end, I had created 67 codes. These codes identified sections of text referring to things like types of cooking (e.g. ‘cooking as leisure’, ‘cooking as necessity’) and structural conditions influencing cooking (e.g. ‘childcare conditions’). I also created participant memos which summarized the key motivations for, and meanings of cooking for each participant and listed illustrative quotes. Next, I re-read the memos and compared them to each other, reviewed the codes and their accompanying quotes, and pulled out recurring themes.

Participants were all residents of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), a metropolitan area of 5.5 million, but many had grown up in other cities or towns, elsewhere in Canada or abroad. Ages ranged from 26 to 58. Half of the participants were white (of European ancestry) and the other half were of Asian, Afro-Caribbean, Hispanic or of mixed background. Household incomes ranged from less than \$25,000 CAD to more than \$150,000, with the most common household income being in the range of \$50,000–\$100,000. Despite this income diversity, most men were middle class. Nine participants were single and living alone, with roommates or with a parent or child. The other two-thirds of the sample (21 of 30) were married or living with a long-term partner. Nine men had children with whom they were living, and one was the children’s primary caretaker. Four men were gay. Additional details are given in Table 1.

Participant Experiences of Cooking as Work-Leisure

From a poststructuralist position (e.g. Rojek, 1995), activities are neither essentially work nor leisure but *felt* as one or the other, or a combination of both, depending on the

Table 1. Demographic characteristics and cooking responsibilities of participants.

Participant pseudonym	Ethno-racial background (self-described)	Living with	Household cooking responsibilities	Age	Income (CAD)
Alex	French-Canadian/ Hungarian	female partner	shared	38	\$50–100,000
Andrew	Chinese	female partner	shared	33	\$150,000+
Ben	white	wife, son (14 months)	shared	36	\$100–150,000
Brandon	Chinese- Canadian	fiancée	all	31	\$150,000+
Chris	Chinese/ Canadian	alone	all	31	\$50–100,000
Dan	Black/African	wife, son (15), daughters (12, 8)	almost all (95%)	43	\$50–100,000
Dave	Canadian (white)	alone	all	27	>\$25,000
Edward	Chinese- Canadian	female partner	weekends	30	\$50–100,000
Frank	German	female partner	almost all (95%)	58	\$50–100,000
George	Mediterranean/ Greek	female partner	almost all (95%)	39	\$100,000–150,000
Graham	Anglo	wife, sons (26, 19)	almost all (90%)	56	\$150,000+
Hugh	Scottish, French	wife, sons (8, 7)	almost all (95%)	39	\$150,000+
Ian	British (white)	wife, daughter (14 months)	almost all (80%)	37	\$50–100,000
Jack	Italian/Irish	husband	almost all (90%)	45	\$50–100,000
Jonathan	White/Jewish	alone	all	26	\$25–50,000
Kevin	British	wife	all (98%)	43	\$100–150,000
Luis	Latino	alone	all	42	\$50–100,000
Marcus	Black/Jamaican	alone	all	46	> \$25,000
Matt	Filipino	female partner	shared	33	\$50–100,000
Nick	Mixed	alone	all	41	> \$25,000
Owen	English/French, Dutch/Ojibwa	wife	almost all (80%)	40	n/a
Paul	Italian	wife, sons (28, 24)	shared	53	\$50–100,000
Rick	Filipino	brother, sister- in-law	almost all (90%)	35	\$100–150,000
Stanley	Chinese	wife, son (8)	shared	35	>\$25,000
Stuart	German/Chinese	male partner	75%	48	n/a
Timothy	Italian	alone	all	32	\$50–100,000
Trevor	Chinese	wife	shared	29	\$150,000+
Wally	Trinidadian- Chinese	wife, daughters (3, 2)	33%	36	n/a
Will	African-Canadian	mother, son (15), cousin (22)	weekends	38	\$25–50,000
Zack	Caucasian	male partner	shared	28	\$50–100,000

context. My conversations with involved male cooks, all but three of whom cooked at least half of the home-cooked weekly meals in their homes, reflect this. Cooking for them was what I call ‘work-leisure’. Although I tried, I was not able to categorize participants as experiencing cooking as either leisure or work. For example, Dan,² a musician and stay-at-home father of three, was responsible for all of the care work in his home, including food shopping, cooking and cleaning. He talked about the stresses of cooking on a daily basis, especially when his family treated him like a ‘maid’. On the other hand, he found cooking rewarding. He compared it to music, saying: ‘If you cook and you put your heart into it ... it’s like you[’re] shar[ing] something meaningful.’ Hugh, also the primary cook for himself, his wife and his two young sons, expressed ambivalence about cooking as well. Although a self-described ‘foodie’ who delighted in beautiful meals, he acknowledged the difficulty of regular cooking for others. He was stressed about preparing meals that were both healthy and appealing to his boys and felt hurt when they did not like his food. He also echoed the sentiments of some housewives and second wave feminists about the tedium of housework (e.g. Oakley, 1975) when he said: ‘Sometimes it’s like if I ever make another sandwich I’m gonna die.’ While this was not the case for all the fathers in my sample, most expressed concerns about the healthfulness of their children’s diets. Childless participants also spoke about catering to their partners – even when it meant sacrificing their own desires (e.g. making meat-based meals for a partner despite themselves preferring vegetarian). While sacrificing meant giving up their own pleasures to some degree, these men did not talk about this as clearly negative. In fact, many who were their household’s primary cook spoke proudly about nurturing others through food or about having the role of family caretaker, which they saw as inevitably involving sacrifice or compromise.

Men who did not cook much for others (e.g. because they lived alone) also had mixed feelings about cooking. Many described cooking as satisfying and fun, but it also became tedious when they ran out of ideas, stressful when they were rushed, and laborious when they were tired. One single participant, Jonathan, claimed to cook mainly for ‘utility’ (to save money and eat healthily) but he also enjoyed cooking on some occasions, such as when he could ‘impress girls’ at potlucks. Even Stuart, the participant who was least enthusiastic about cooking, and described it as ‘something to get through so we can get to the meal’, seemed to get satisfaction out of the strict control that cooking gave him over his diet. To summarize, cooking was *work-leisure* for all of my participants – neither clearly and always work nor clearly and always leisure.

Leisurely Cooking in Context

That cooking was work-leisure for all of my participants – sometimes work and sometimes leisure – does not mean that the overall *balance* of work and leisure feelings was the same for everyone. A few men (four of 30) saw culinary activities most often as a necessary task. These men still cooked a great deal from scratch rather than opting for pre-prepared or restaurant food because of issues around health, food quality and cost. For the rest of the men in my sample (26 of 30), home cooking was more often experienced as leisure. The experiences of these 26 men will inform the rest of this article.

Although I recognize the limits of my qualitative sample, I should note that these 26 men were not easily distinguished from the other four in terms of demographics or degree of responsibility for household cooking. Many men who had primary or full responsibility for cooking in their homes still found it leisurely on various occasions. This is surprising because, as mentioned above, choice (i.e. lack of daily responsibility or necessity) is often associated with leisure (Stebbins, 2009: 9). The men who found cooking more often leisurely were also from a variety of ethno-racial backgrounds, including Anglo-Saxon backgrounds, which are sometimes characterized as having a more utilitarian, less pleasure-oriented approach to food. This group also included men with demanding work schedules, who, one might expect, had 'less time' to cook. What the men did have in common, I argue, was that they each, consciously or not, *created* leisurely cooking. Differently put, these men manipulated their cooking environments and situations to make them more leisurely. In the following sub-sections I examine three main ways in which they did this: first, by creating a gustatory and auditory leisure space; second, by merging the domestic and the social realms; and third, by taking the time to embrace the sensual aspects of cooking.

Creating a Gustatory and Auditory Leisure Space

A common way participants marked cooking as leisurely was by combining cooking with other symbols of leisure such as music or alcohol (Lincoln, 2005). More than half of my participants listened to music or the radio while they cooked, or accompanied their cooking with a glass of wine or beer. This was never acknowledged as a purposeful strategy for enjoying cooking, but it often came up when participants reflected on their cooking habits. Sometimes, the association made in passing, as when Alex observed: 'We cook and drink a glass of wine ... And then it's nice.' At other times, participants noted how important music or alcohol was to their cooking routine, as when Graham showed me the speakers he had had custom built into his kitchen cupboards. Paul's words emphasize the fact that the kitchen is sometimes a leisure space, and sometimes not, depending on the atmosphere that is created through music, alcohol or other things like socializing with loved ones: 'I really enjoy being in the kitchen ... Especially with [my wife] ... We talk and either got the radio on or we got some music playing.' The role of music in helping to create leisure even in a professional cooking environment (where cooking literally is 'work') was revealed by Will who had worked in a fast-paced professional kitchen. When I asked him whether it had been stressful, he said that he had really liked it, in part because: 'We had music in the background. The guys were having fun.'

In an examination of space and leisure, Lincoln (2005) found that teenaged participants created a club- or pub-type atmosphere in their bedrooms through music and alcohol, blurring the public and the private. The participants in my study used music and alcohol in a similar way to blur the realms of domestic work and leisure.

Combining the Domestic and the Social

Some participants also marked their cooking or meal planning time as leisure by including friends and loved ones in the process, as Paul's words conveyed above. This sharing

created a leisure-like atmosphere by bringing the mundane domestic activity of cooking into the realm of the social. Some participants shared cooking physically with partners, children, or friends. Paul talked about meal preparation with his wife as ‘quality time that we spend together’. Will, who had lived with his mother and son since his divorce, talked about cooking as ‘our version of family time’. Other participants shared their cooking with others who were not physically present. For example, Timothy shared meal ideas and experiences with his friends over the phone. He noted: ‘We’ll call each other up and be like, “I made the best salad the other day”.’ Dave took photos of appealing ingredients he had picked from his garden, and sent them over the internet to friends. Several men had cooking blogs in which they shared things like recipes, techniques and photos. By combining food preparation and socializing, these participants were not only creating leisurely cooking, but were, knowingly or not, also dealing with issues of time pressure. Matt put it eloquently:

If you silo them [work, leisure, cooking] and say well there’s my social time and we’re gonna go to a bar. And there’s my cooking time and I’m gonna cook. And there’s my work time and they’re completely separate, then there’s too much division, but if you can combine these and re-characterize them then ... you’re fed and you treat the social needs.

My participants not only shared the food they cooked with friends and loved ones, but they often shared the cooking process itself. While eating is recognized as a social activity (Warde and Martens, 2000), and the social aspects of collective cooking among female relatives (such as for holidays) have been acknowledged, these data show that food preparation also has social aspects for some men.

Taking One’s Time

Many participants also symbolically demarcated their cooking as leisure or pleasure by actively slowing down while doing it. Eschewing the notion that cooking should be done as quickly and efficiently as possible, these participants tried to engage in careful, deliberate cooking in such a way that they were able to enjoy the process. This was not always the case. Three participants (Will, Frank and Rick) spoke about the thrill of fast-paced cooking. However, most participants disliked and tried to avoid situations where they had to rush to cook and eat. George, who did almost all of the cooking for himself and his partner, contrasted his own feelings about cooking with those of his partner, who grew up in a family where food was ‘a rushed thing’. In his own family, cooking and food were to be savoured. Andrew spoke of searching out cookbooks that ‘don’t cut corners in the interest of saving time or for convenience’. In fact, the most enjoyable home cooking for many participants was the antithesis of rushing, of fast food, and necessarily took time. Many participants spoke of the ‘meditative’, ‘relaxing’ or ‘therapeutic’ nature of this type of cooking. Taking one’s time also allowed a greater sensual appreciation of the food which, in turn, enhanced the relaxing, even rejuvenating, nature of the cooking process. For Nick, working with fresh, colourful, aromatic food was a ‘pick me up’.

In her investigation of the TV shows and books of British celebrity chef Nigella Lawson, Hollows (2003b) argues that Lawson’s sensual, almost luxuriating approach to

scratch home cooking encourages audiences to escape contemporary time scarcity discourses. By taking the time to cook from scratch and indulge in culinary pleasures, Hollows argues, even very busy people may be able to *feel* like they have more time. Indeed, American sociologist Michael Flaherty's recent research suggests that people 'do time' in various ways, including slowing time down by 'savour[ing] the moment' (2011: 135). This is not to say that time is solely an individual phenomenon, and Flaherty points out that when time becomes institutionalized in social structures and cultural norms, agency over time is constrained. For example, in a British or Anglo-American context, where the Protestant ethic has led to the cultural veneration of productivity and efficiency, there may be greater social and economic sanctions for taking one's time than for rushing (Flaherty, 2011). Nevertheless, it is important to avoid reifying time and time constraints, and seeing them as beyond individual agency.

In this section, I outlined how some participants, who were from a variety of ethno-racial backgrounds and had various work schedules and demands, were able to enjoy cooking in part because they demarcated their cooking time and space as leisurely. Notably, almost all of these men did at least half of the cooking in their households, and several did virtually all of it. In other words, many of these men created enjoyable cooking even though it was a daily responsibility for them.

Privilege and Cooking Enjoyment

So far, we have seen that some men are able to engage in leisurely home cooking despite some ambiguity toward the practice and despite cooking being a necessity in their lives. However, my data also point to ways in which these enjoyable experiences may hinge on gender, race and class privilege. I explore this privilege below in two sections. The first section looks at the influence of childcare on leisurely cooking and explores gender privilege. The second section looks at the intersection of gender, class and ethno-racial background as it relates to family cooking culture and explores gender, class and ethno-racial privilege.

Childcare and Leisurely Cooking

That many men in my sample took their time in the kitchen, some despite heavy work schedules, supports the notion that individuals 'do' time differently (Flaherty, 2011) and that busyness is not an objective fact but an experience shaped by cultural narratives (Hollows, 2003b). Nonetheless, it seems that some people have more control over time than others. Differently put, while people have agency over time, people's experiences of time are still influenced by social forces. In terms of my research, the fact that many of my participants 'took their time' in the kitchen likely reflects some of the characteristics of my sample. For instance, of the 26 men who generally enjoyed cooking, only five were living with children under age 10 and one was living with a severely disabled adult son who needed care. The remaining 19 did not have to worry about having children 'under foot' in the kitchen, or about having to coordinate care and cooking, a difficulty expressed by female cooks in previous research (Short, 2006). In terms of the six men with children needing care, at least three of them seemed to enjoy a good deal of freedom

in the kitchen – including the freedom to take their time – because their wives were the primary caretakers of their children (a finding also noted in Lupton, 2000). The cooking narrative of Dan, a stay-at-home father of three and the only primary caretaker among the men, is quite distinct from those of the other fathers, and reveals how childcare may influence perceptions of time in the kitchen. Dan talked at length about the drawbacks of our rationalized, rushed society and about wanting to ‘slow down’ in his life. However, he favoured speed and efficiency when cooking. At first perplexing, this contrast becomes more intelligible when we consider that Dan frequently had to juggle cooking with family emotion and relationship management. Noting that it was ‘pretty common’ that ‘everyone’s in the kitchen fighting’, he talked about having to ‘wade through that while you’re trying to concentrate on everything’. In other words, while cooking with kids can be fun and meaningful, having children in the kitchen (or elsewhere in the home when one is their sole caretaker) may make it more difficult to relax and take one’s time, elements I show above to be important in leisurely cooking. Indeed, Southerton and Tomlinson find that mothers of young children often feel harried because of having to multitask, or squeeze a ‘density’ of experiences into a given timeframe (2005: 227–9). That Dan had similar temporal experiences in the kitchen shows that this may be more related to caretaking *roles* than to gender itself (and I explore this below in Discussion and Conclusions). However, the fact that Dan was rare in my sample in having to compromise leisure for care in the kitchen reflects the larger gendered division of labour, where women are still more likely than men to have primary responsibility for childcare (Kan et al., 2011).

Gender/Class/Ethno-racial Background and Family Approach to Cooking

Many participants connected their enjoyment of cooking to their ethno-racial background. For instance, George, a participant of Greek origin, contrasted his family’s passion for food with that of his partner Ellen’s Anglo-Canadian family, who, in his mind, saw cooking as ‘something you had to do just to stay alive’. Such a connection was least obvious in the case of white men from Anglo-Canadian backgrounds, but men of Filipino, Italian, West Indian, Chinese as well as British and German descent all spoke about the passion for food in their extended families and cultures. In brief, there was no clear indication that any particular ethno-racial background represented in my sample had more of a ‘food as pleasure’ orientation (Lupton, 1996) than any other. What my data do show, however, is the importance of the intersectionality of gender, class and ethno-racial background (Nakano Glenn, 1992) to a family’s approach to cooking. Looking more carefully at George’s partner Ellen’s situation, we see that her family’s utilitarian approach to food may have been the result not only of culture but of gender relations. In Ellen’s family, George observed: ‘[Food] was something that was usually associated with tension and anger ... Both of her parents worked at the same place ... [and Ellen’s mom] was just as tired as [Ellen’s] dad was but she would do the cooking.’

For other women in the lives of my participants, cooking was associated not with gender inequality but with class inequality. When speaking about his ex-wife Carmen’s

dislike of cooking, Luis, an immigrant from El Salvador, brought up Carmen's grandmother's experience as a domestic worker in that country:

Her grandmother was a maid working for rich people but she always worked in the kitchen. So her grandmother ... [who] really had no education whatsoever ... would never let [Carmen] go in the kitchen because she wanted her to have an education.

For Carmen's grandmother, cooking and education were antithetical. The result was that, as Luis told it, Carmen completely avoided the kitchen. My interview with Chris, the son of Chinese immigrants, revealed a remarkably similar story about the influence of Chris's grandmother on his mother, who took a very practical approach to cooking. In this case, we see the influence of class as well as ideas about 'modernity' on the family's approach to cooking. Chris told it this way:

My grandparents' philosophy when they were raising my mom and her siblings was that they really pushed for them becoming ... modern. It was more than just pushing them to go to university ... and moving to the West ... they were reluctant to impart anything traditional or what they saw as backwards. So my grandma knows how to cook but she never shared it ... She probably thought that if her children became successful, someone else would cook for them.

Here again, cooking and getting a formal education are framed as oppositional. In addition, if one succeeds in the labour market, one can delegate cooking to someone else (presumably from the social class that one has escaped). When I asked Chris and other Chinese-Canadian men in my sample about these ideas, they suggested that career success and learning to cook are not mutually exclusive. However, these men were all middle class, North American-raised and employed as professionals. The female relatives in these stories, in contrast, were from the underclasses (either as paid domestic workers, unpaid homemakers, or Asians in a western hegemonic system), and may have viscerally associated cooking with any oppression they encountered through their domestic work.

These inter-generational accounts shed light on why some women with particular backgrounds are hesitant to embrace cooking. The men in my sample expressed ambivalence about cooking mainly because of worries about their family's health and preferences, and because of the effort and tedium involved, which sometimes went unrecognized. But, there was little evidence of ambivalence among these men related to an association between cooking and oppression or inequality. In fact, confirming previous studies (Coltrane, 1989; Deutsch and Saxon, 1998), some men spoke about how their cooking was seen by others as a *solution* to gender inequality. Their cooking was a sign that they were 'progressive' or 'breaking gender stereotypes'.

In sum, the intersection of gender, ethno-racial background and class (Nakano Glenn, 1992) may influence feelings about cooking, which can then be reproduced across generations. Put differently, many of the men in my sample were privileged as middle class, North American-born or -raised men who had some distance from the oppression that can accompany paid and unpaid domestic work for women, especially women from lower classes and poorer nations, and this likely facilitated their cooking enjoyment.

Discussion and Conclusion

Four of my 30 participants saw cooking primarily as a means to an end. Yet, these men enjoyed some of its aspects in particular situations. The other 26 saw cooking generally as an enjoyable activity. Nevertheless, in situations when they were concerned about others' health and food preferences, when their efforts in the kitchen went unrecognized, or when they were tired or rushed, these men had mixed emotions about cooking. This is in keeping with poststructural approaches, which understand experience as fundamentally *context-dependent* – i.e. not subject to universalizing definitions (e.g. leisure always means 'x'), and not existing in fixed dichotomous relationships (e.g. work is the opposite of leisure). Cooking for my participants was neither 'work' nor 'leisure' but 'work-leisure'. The idea that men are more easily able to find cooking leisurely because it is less of an obligation for them, or because they are less oriented to the food needs and preferences of others (Cairns et al., 2010; Hollows, 2003a) may be true for men who cook less often, but was not true for several of the men in my sample who had more responsibility in the kitchen. Like Bove and Sobal (2006) and Carrington (1999), I find that some men's cooking, like women's, is care-oriented. This suggests that, as men take on more traditionally female roles, they may also take on more traditionally female *ways of doing* these roles, adding credence to structural theories of gender (Deutsch, 2007: 114, see also Coltrane, 1989: 489). On another note, the notion that people either 'like' cooking or not, implicit in some research questions (Future Foundation, 2008: 17), or expressed by research participants themselves (e.g. Lupton, 2000: 179), while potentially useful for understanding general trends in the division of labour, may be somewhat over-simplistic. Again, a poststructuralist view, which recognizes that activities may be more or less leisurely depending on the spatial and temporal context, makes this more clear.

In terms of why men experience cooking as leisure when they do, previous work associates leisure with choice and freedom (Hollows, 2003b; Stebbins, 2009: 9). Men's cooking is leisurely, some argue, because they have more flexibility than women in terms of when and how often they cook (e.g. Adler, 1981). But do men who have significant cooking responsibilities and lose this flexibility find cooking less leisurely? Not necessarily: many of my participants who had primary responsibility for cooking in their households still often experienced it as leisure. So, it may be true that men who cook only on weekends or over a barbecue are likely to enjoy it, but it is not the case that men who cook more often don't enjoy it – at least some of the time.

It is also important to reiterate, especially given recent concerns about diet-related disease (e.g. PHAC, 2009), that people can create enjoyable cooking situations. My participants did so by symbolically demarcating their cooking time and space as leisurely. They combined cooking with music or alcohol, fused the domestic and the social worlds by cooking with loved ones or friends, and slowed their cooking down to enjoy its sensual and meditative aspects. These points suggest that, although constraints like time pressures are real, especially in view of the rising number of lone-parent, dual-earner and single-adult households (Szabo, 2011), 'lack of time' is a cultural discourse to which people can react by 'doing time' differently (Flaherty, 2011). Similarly, the compartmentalization of the domestic, social and leisure spheres are norms which can be, and are, challenged.

Nonetheless, an individual's ability or even desire to cook in a particular way (e.g. slowly and deliberately) is not simply the result of individual will. As I showed earlier, it can be shaped by social roles, including relative responsibility for childcare. The men in my sample with few or no childcare responsibilities seemed to have more freedom to relax and take their time in the kitchen (supporting Lupton, 2000), while the most involved fathers had more trouble juggling 'slow' cooking and childcare. If women retain primary responsibility for childcare, this implies that men may more easily find cooking leisurely than women in general, at least in households with children. Approach to cooking is also influenced by family background as it relates to gender, race and class privilege. Cooking may feel more oppressive to those from poorer and racialized groups, especially women, who have been historically positioned as domestic workers, and this approach may be passed down to younger relatives.

In sum, the men in my sample, the great majority of whom had day-to-day household cooking responsibilities, experienced cooking as both work and leisure. Thus, we can no longer say that women's cooking is 'work' and men's 'play' (Adler, 1981: 51). However, this is not to say that gender – as well as race and class – hierarchies are no longer manifest in experiences of cooking. While men with quotidian home cooking responsibilities have limited choice in terms of how often and when they cook, they may have more freedom than their female counterparts from interruptions or negotiations with others in the kitchen, and from negative emotional associations with foodwork.

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Notes

1. I initially recruited participants on the basis that they cooked at least half of the weekly meals in their households and that their cooking used few packaged foods. I subsequently loosened the criteria (in terms of the division of labour only) to encourage ethno-racial diversity in the sample. Nonetheless, the sample is still mainly made up of men who do half or more of the household cooking (as indicated by the men themselves and their meal diaries, and, if partnered, as confirmed by their partners). Only three of 30 men did less than half of the cooking in their household, and about two-thirds (19 of 30) did all or almost all of it.
2. All names are pseudonyms.

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