

**FOOD IN TRANSITION:
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' DISCOURSE
ABOUT FOOD PRACTICES**

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about the food practices of UK university students. 'Student food' often carries a negative connotation of being 'improper' or 'unhealthy'. This thesis investigates the accounts of food practices offered by undergraduate students at the University of Nottingham.

This thesis introduced Goffman's ideas of self-presentation of everyday life to examine the main theoretical approaches in the study of food and eating. Students' discourse about food practices at three stages was examined: food practices at home, in university accommodations, and in private accommodations. This thesis shows students' self-presentation through their discourse about the transitions in food practices in these three living situations. The focus in students' discourse shifts gradually from constructing institutional images to personal images, as students acquired more autonomy in food practices. When talking about the period before university, students' self-presentation emphasised 'institutional images' or 'family images'. When they talked about food practices after entering university, their 'personal images' gradually became more prominent.

This thesis also provides an account of students' discourse about science, technology and food, using a case study of Genetically Modified (GM) food. Students' discourse about GM food was associated with their self-presentation as Natural Science or Humanities and Social Science (HSS) students. This thesis concludes that students' discourse about food has shown that their self-presentation was often constructed according to what they expected their audience to consider as appropriate for university students in UK society. The university period was portrayed as a transition

in developing their personal images as they learned to present themselves as responsible independent beings in the society and located themselves within particular communities of knowledge.

This thesis suggests that university students' food practices are shaped by various factors. The assumption that students do not care about their food and eating should be challenged. Furthermore, this thesis also demonstrates the way in which people talk about GM food. This is to show that, in order to understand people's views about GM food, it is important to take their self-presentation into account when interpreting their responses.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE THESIS

GM	Genetically Modified
HSS	Humanities and Social Science
SSK	Sociology of Scientific Knowledge
STS	Science and Technology Studies

CODE NAMES USED IN THE THESIS

MS	Male Natural Science
FS	Female Natural Science
MH	Male Humanities and Social Science
FH	Female Humanities and Social Science

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The development of this thesis

This thesis has had a life of its own. I shall start by documenting the ways in which I initiated it, and then present the way in which it evolved into a completely different study.

It all started from my previous MSc course in food biotechnology. As an international student studying food science, I was intrigued by the alleged opposition of the UK population towards genetically modified (GM) food. The ways in which GM food issues were portrayed on my MSc course were that, GM food is 'the way forward' for the increasing population of the future. GM food was described as a technology that can solve many current problems in food science, such as reducing the use of pesticide and herbicide, increasing food security and solving the problem of famine. Public opposition towards this technology was held to be related to people's lack of knowledge about the technology or, indeed, about science more widely. As a science student, I was unknowingly imbued with the notion of the 'deficit model' as discussed in Science and Technology Studies (STS). Puzzled by the public opposition towards GM food in the UK, I decided to pursue further research on people's thinking about GM food.

In my later study in food marketing, I conducted research to compare people's thinking about GM food in the UK and the US (Lin, 2005). This was because the consumer acceptance of GM food was said to be different in the two countries. Whilst the GM food industry was said to have experienced strong opposition in the UK (Barling et al., 1999, Lusk et al., 2002), in contrast, the US market was said not to have encountered such a

problem (Heffernan and Hillers, 2002, Rowe, 2004). Therefore, I set out to investigate whether these alleged differences actually existed between 'consumer perceptions' of GM food in the two countries. At the time, it seemed straightforward to conduct a survey study adopting a questionnaire approach. The assumption was that, if there is a statistical difference between people's perception in the two countries, the alleged difference in their views can be confirmed. By confirming this difference, I believed that the reasons that shape people's thinking about GM food could be unravelled. In this survey, therefore, people's 'attitudes' were examined to investigate the reasons behind this alleged difference. However, the assumption that US consumers are more positive about GM food than UK consumers was found to be over-simplified: UK consumers do not necessarily think of GM food as less acceptable than US consumers. According to this study, consumers in both countries self-reported to 'slightly agree' that they would purchase GM food in daily shopping. US consumers claimed to be willing to purchase GM food that has improved nutritional value whereas UK consumers were found to be willing for an improved taste. Furthermore, US consumers were found to be indifferent rather than being positive about GM technology. After this study, I remained intrigued by the factors that shape people's thinking about GM food, which this survey was unable to answer. As a result, further research was attempted.

I decided to focus on UK people's thinking about GM food. Bearing this idea in mind, I started my PhD in the Institute for Science and Society (ISS) at the University of Nottingham. I intended to conduct an exploratory study of people's thinking about GM food. The public debate about GM food has been largely framed as associated with biotechnology or the biotechnology industry, in particular by non-governmental organisations such as Friends

of the Earth (2006). Furthermore, some researchers, for example, Gaskell et al. (2006) have adopted this framing to investigate people's views about GM food. Gaskell et al. undertook a survey in 2005 to investigate biotechnology in Europe. In their survey, people's thinking about GM food was related with other applications of biotechnology such as gene therapy or pharmacogenetics. People's thinking about GM food in Gaskell et al.'s study, is likely to be restricted in this framing, i.e. regarding GM food as a product of biotechnology. Therefore, this study initially set out to challenge this popular framing of GM food by putting it back into a broader context of food in general. It was designed to investigate whether people think about GM food differently from non-GM food and the implications of the existence – or not – of this difference.

University students were selected as the study population of this thesis. The rationale behind choosing a university student population is discussed in Chapter Four. Uncertain of what I might find in this study, no assumption was made prior to the data collection. Nevertheless, my personal attitude was still broadly aligned with the deficit model. However, after my previous study (Lin, 2005), I was less certain about the alleged UK opposition towards GM food. During the data collection, it was found that GM food is not a major concern for most of the university students. As a result, many of them simply did not have much to say about it. Furthermore, the data on students' food practices¹ were found to be worth investigating, as several themes emerged in their discourse: I was particularly interested in the ways in which students talked about their transitions in food practices before and after entering university. Therefore, I reconsidered and remade the objectives of this study. Instead of

¹ In this thesis, the term 'food practices' refers to all of the activities that are related to food. A plural form of 'practices' is used to stress the broad range of the activities and actions; no other implication is suggested.

examining university students' thinking about GM food, the main focus has shifted to investigate students' transitions in food practices to university. This involves examining students' discourse about their food practices before university, and at an early, and a later, stage of their university life. Nonetheless, students' discourse about GM food was not completely omitted. This is because of the difference found between students' discourse about the 'science' and 'non-science' aspects of food.

When talking about their food practices in everyday life, students' academic disciplines did not seem to affect their discourse. However, when talking about GM food, a difference was observed between students' discourses depending on whether their background was in Natural sciences or Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS). This observation can contribute to the current STS literature, within which the study of food remains marginalised. In the development of this thesis, literature from sociological perspectives was studied for the first time. Through understanding some sociological approaches to food, the ways in which I looked at, and wrote about, food as a research topic were also changed, which is discussed in more detail later in the following section. As a result, I have come to understand why people are unsure about the technology in the GM food debate. It cannot simply be explained by their 'ignorance' about 'innovative technology' or natural science in general. Therefore, GM food was made as a case study to explore students' discourse about science and technology applied to food. The revised objectives of this thesis are to understand:

1. The ways in which university students talk about the transitions in their food practices in different living situations.
2. The ways in which university students talk about the application of new technology to food.

The literature that investigates university students' transitions in food practices usually looks at only one or two particular point(s) in university students' life (this is discussed further in Chapter Three). This literature has therefore assumed – consciously or otherwise – that students' food practices over the university period are static. This thesis tries to examine university students' discourse about food through a retrospective account. This is to retrieve the dynamics in the transitions of students' food practices during this period of time.

1.2 Food as a research topic

Food is an essential substance in people's everyday life. In my past experience as a food scientist, food as a research topic used to be regarded on a micro-level. It was all about microorganisms, biochemistry, food manufacturing and food biotechnology. In that period of my life, the main objective of the research was to understand the chemical reactions in food ingredients and the ways in which they can be manipulated under different circumstances. For instance, the research in my previous study investigates the formability and form stability of protein-polysaccharide complexes (Lin, 2003). This was to understand the optimum conditions for various colloid systems formed by protein and polysaccharide. The colloid systems are widely used in various food manufacturing processes and therefore the understanding of their properties has been increasingly important.

Food as a marketing research topic covers a broad range of interests. As mentioned previously, my interest in this domain focuses on GM food. I was trying to understand what people in the US and the UK think about GM food (Lin, 2005). The ways in which data were analysed in the survey

study were rather straightforward, they were treated as the direct answers to the research questions. Most of the findings were interpreted based on the existence of statistical 'significant differences'. The results in this study were supposed to facilitate decision-making in food product developments or policy making. In my previous study, great effort was given to investigating the reasons which shape people's thinking about GM food but the implications that are embedded in people's professed 'attitudes' were not considered due to the nature of the data. The statistical differences were unable to provide much information about the underlying implications.

At the beginning of the present study, I struggled to adopt a sociological approach towards food and eating. I often found myself thinking that the sociology of food and eating reported what is already known and obvious. It was only later in my study, I started to see the ways in which food sociologists examine the underlying social relations embedded in the apparent food practices in everyday life. The ways in which I read the sociology of food have also changed. What I used to find 'obvious' appears to be less so now. For example, my interpretation of the literature about women's responsibility in family food preparation has changed. I used to consider it as simply an issue of inequality in gender. It is only after I developed further as a researcher in sociology of food that I came to realise that it is more complicated than that. It involves not only the division of labour in family food and eating. Food activities can also be associated with the power relations amongst family members (Murcott, 1982), or a way of 'doing family' (DeVault, 1991). Further discussion about this is continued in Chapter Three.

1.3 Intended contributions of this thesis

This thesis intends to contribute novel insights to two fields: The sociology of food and eating and Science and Technology Studies (STS).

This thesis is grounded in sociology and social anthropology of food and eating. Goody (1982) identifies three main approaches: the functional approach, the structural approach and the cultural approach. In her review paper, Murcott (1988) focuses on the structural approaches and the materialist responses. This classification was later modified as functionalism, structuralism and developmentalism in the book *Sociology of Food: eating, diet and culture* (Mennell et al., 1992). Beardsworth and Keil (1997) also adopted a similar categorisation in their book *Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the study of food and society*, as the functionalist approach, the structuralist approach and the developmentalist approach. It can be observed that the categorisations of theories pertaining to the sociology and social anthropology of eating have remained somewhat unchallenged, though some authors are aware of the limitations of these categorisations. For instance, Murcott (1988) points out that the authors she grouped together in her review paper, under the heading of 'materialist responses', do not necessarily share belief in theoretical common ground. However, they are all against the idealistic structuralist approach. Murcott acknowledges that her categorisation is perhaps an over-generalisation and that it simply provides a shorthand to summarise the core responses to structural approaches. A summary of the main contributors to this field of research is discussed further in the following chapter. By bringing in Goffman's (1959) ideas of people's self-presentation in everyday life, this thesis will propose a new perspective on the sociology of food. This new element will contribute to the current research direction which still examines food and eating within the three existing theoretical categories

after nearly two decades. Through Goffman's lens, this thesis examines not only students' food practices but also the reasons why they decided to present themselves as such in this study.

This thesis also reports the transitions which university students go through in different living situations after they leave home. University students' diet has long been considered as unhealthy (Cason and Wenrich, 2002). As a result, many studies have tried to understand university students' diet and the health implications behind it; some even seek to 'improve' university students' diet. Many researchers (e.g. Cason and Wenrich, 2002, Cluskey and Grobe, 2009, Edwards and Meiselman, 2003) claim that the eating habits students developed throughout their university life is very likely to have an important impact on their later lives. For instance, university students are believed to be more vulnerable to weight-gain in their first year. Much research has been carried out to investigate this alleged weight gain. Some fear that it might lead to future weight problems (Anderson et al., 2003) whereas others are concerned that it might result in dietary restraint, which may lead to life-long eating disorders (Delinsky and Wilson, 2008). Nonetheless, there is a lack of sociological examination in this domain of research. This thesis argues that a sociological account can provide policy makers with an additional perspective to the existing knowledge about students' food practices. This thesis looks into the ways in which students talk about their food practices, trying to understand the rationale behind their discourse and interpret their thinking about food and eating. I believe that a better understanding of students' discourse may help to address the current concerns about their diet. A discussion of the existing literature about university students and eating can be found in Chapter Three.

Food and eating have also attracted attention from STS scholars. Therefore, another aim of this thesis is to bring food issues into STS. The application of genetic modification to crops has drawn public attention in the UK since 1996, when the first plant transformation was achieved. During that period of time, the debate surrounding GM food was intense in the British media (Shaw, 2002). As a result, GM food issues were widely discussed in the public domain. Since that time, the GM industry has experienced a huge setback in the last two decades (Barling et al., 1999). On the one hand, GM advocates believe the potential benefits of this technology are limitless (Barling et al., 1999). On the other hand; opponents are concerned about the unforeseen consequences that GM technology might pose to the food chain and the ecosystem (Moses, 1999, Phillips, 2002). The debate about GM food is still ongoing in the UK but the attention it receives from the media has rapidly faded in the past ten years (Marks and Kalaitzandonakes, 2001). This might partly contribute to university students' exhibiting little concern about the issues surrounding GM food. As the media has quickly lost its interest in GM food over the past decade, university students did not receive as much information about GM food as they grew up. However, by presenting students' accounts about GM food, this thesis aims to shed some light on the ways in which they think about science and technology applied to food. Furthermore, the findings of this thesis will contribute to the understanding about the ways in which people think about science and technology when it is associated with food. This, in turn, may benefit policy makers' understanding of people's views on similar issues.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of nine chapters including this introduction.

Chapter Two, **SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF FOOD AND EATING**, summarises the literature in sociology and social anthropology of food and eating. Secondary literature was first largely used to help identify the major works that have been done in the field. After these works were identified, the original studies were reviewed. As a result, the literature review in this chapter can appear somewhat partial. This chapter also briefly summarised Goffman's ideas about people's self-presentation in everyday life. This thesis tries to examine the three long-established theoretical approaches in the sociology of food and eating through Goffman's lens.

Chapter Three provides the conceptual framework in which this thesis is situated. This chapter starts with a review of the sociology of food, gender and family. This is because the first stage of the transition in students' food practices examined in this thesis is the period when they lived at home with their parents. Therefore, a review focusing on this part of the literature was undertaken. Several studies investigating university students' transitions in food practices are also reviewed in this chapter. It was discovered that rather limited scholarly attention has been drawn to this domain. Within the small literature that was available, no sociological account was found. Most contributions in the field were made by food marketing scientists. This chapter then turns its attention to a sociological study conducted by Kemmer et al. (1998a, 1998b). Their study was reviewed here because it stresses that changes in the relationship between cohabiters is very likely to result in changes to food practices. This thesis tries to explore whether such changes of social relationship would affect students' discourse about their food practices.

Chapter Four documents the methods and the research development of this thesis. This study adopts the semi-structured interview method. The approach this study adopted was drawn from what is commonly known as 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Unlike Glaser and Strauss' version of grounded theory, this thesis only aims to contribute to the existing bodies of knowledge in food and eating rather than developing a whole new theory using this method. Due to the limited scale of this thesis, the findings should not be generalised, and doing so is not attempted. This chapter also includes a discussion about the analytical strategy adopted in this thesis. Ideas from a broader sense of 'discourse analysis' were adopted but the method is described as 'thematic analysis'. This was then followed by the discussion of the limitations of the methods.

Chapter Five to Chapter Seven are the first three data chapters that examine the transitions in students' food practices from home to university. In their discourse, two types of images stood out, namely institutional images and personal images. On the one hand, institutional images are the images constructed about the institutions they live in or used to live in, which were framed as independent entities in their own right. Students' personal images, on the other hand, were the images which they constructed about themselves in a particular living situation.

Chapter Five discusses the ways in which university students talked about food and food practices at home. This includes the different framings students adopted to talk about their parents' and their own roles in family food practices. In their discourse about their food practices at home, students drew more attention to institutional images, i.e. their family images. Their personal images were described as conforming to their family images.

The second stage of students' living situation to be examined in this thesis is university accommodation. Chapter Six discusses the ways in which university students constructed the institutional images of university halls and their personal images in that living situation. Students' discourse about their choice of two types of university accommodations was examined namely catered and self-catered halls. The ways in which they talked about university halls were then demonstrated. The construction of both institutional and personal images was also found in this living situation. Institutional images were stressed in students' discourse about their lives in halls at an early stage, when they first moved into university accommodation. However, as more experience with food was gained, students' personal images became more salient in their discourse.

Chapter Seven examines the last stage of students' transitions in food practices, that is, within private accommodation. University students talked about their food practices in this living situation stressing only their personal images. Institutional images, i.e. the images of their private accommodation, were rarely constructed. Students' personal images were described as independent from the institutional images in this living situation. All the participating students constructed their personal images as considerate and appropriate members of the university student population and society.

Chapter Eight, the last data chapter, examines the ways in which university students talked about science and technology applied to food through a case study of GM food. The ways in which university students talked about 'science' as a uniform body of knowledge are presented. Furthermore, Natural Science, and Humanities and Social Science (HSS), students' discourse about science in food is also analysed. Science students

constructed their images as conforming to appropriate 'university science students'. Likewise, HSS students also constructed their images as conforming to 'appropriate non-science students'. This chapter demonstrates the way in which students' self-presentation affects their discourse about food and concludes that when analysing discourse, people's self-presentation should not be overlooked.

Chapter Nine summarises the change of focus in the construct of students' discourse. The construction of their institutional images was stressed when students talked about their food practices at home. The focus was then gradually shifted to the construction of their personal images when talking about their food practices at university. This process is described as a continuous transition in this thesis. This is followed by a discussion of the construction of self-presentation to summarise the ways in which Goffman's approach provides a new perspective to examine the three long-established theoretical approaches to the study of food and eating. This chapter then turns its attention to the difference between Natural science and Humanities and Social Science (HSS) students' discourse when talking about GM food. The difference in their self-presentation is explained by reference to C.P. Snow's (1959) famous 'two cultures'. It is found that, fifty years after Snow's lecture, the gulf between scientists and literary intellectuals is still present in the UK student population. Chapter Nine also states an overview of the implications of this thesis, on both sociological and non-sociological levels. A final reflection on the thesis in general can be found at the end of this chapter.

This thesis started with the intention to investigate UK university students' thinking about GM food. In the process of data collection, it was discovered that this was not a viable research topic. Therefore, the research questions

were reconsidered and remade. Attention was then turned to investigate students' discourse about their transitions in food practices in relation to university. Furthermore, the ways in which the data were analysed changed the research trajectory from focusing on food per se to a focus on people's presentation of selves in everyday life. In the end, this thesis has found itself coming back to a long debated problem in social anthropology and the sociology of food and eating: whether food should be considered on a symbolic or a material level? This thesis proposes that studies about food and eating should examine both the material and symbolic meaning of food. Neglecting one or another would inevitably result in grasping only a part of the bigger picture about people's food and eating.

CHAPTER TWO: SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF FOOD AND EATING

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the prevalent categorisation of research trajectories in sociological and social anthropological literature of food and eating. Academic attention was initially drawn to food and eating by social anthropologists. Sociologists only followed suit at a much later stage. However, this chapter does not attempt to separate anthropological and sociological work regardless of their obvious differences. This is, as Murcott puts it, because of the 'closeness of the two disciplines in their general intellectual inheritance' (Murcott, 1988:2). In the literature of sociology and social anthropology of food and eating, a dominant categorisation of the research trajectories can be found, namely the functionalist approach, the structuralist approach and the materialist/developmentalist approach.

This categorisation has been widely used in the literature of sociology of food and eating since it was proposed by Goody (1982) and Murcott (1988). The debate amongst the three approaches, particularly between the structuralists and the materialists/developmentalists, has also been reported. Through introducing Goffman's (1959) ideas about self-presentation of everyday life, this thesis hopes to add an interactionist perspective to the existing literature. Hence, Goffman's presentation of self in everyday life is also discussed in this chapter.

2.2 Theoretical approaches to food and eating

In her book *The Sociology of Food and Eating*, Murcott (1983c) suggests that food, as an intellectual research topic, has mostly been left to social anthropologists, social historians, and social nutritionists. In the nineteenth century, research on food was largely done by anthropologists. Their interests focussed upon questions of taboo, totemism, sacrifice and communion (Goody, 1982). Murcott suggests that sociological interests in food have only blossomed into an individual area of sociology in its own right at a later stage (Murcott, 1988). Since the mid-1980s, increasing attention has been given to the study of food and eating in the UK. Nonetheless, further scholarly attention is still required, as Murcott (1983c) notes in the introduction of her book, which collects a number of essays to fill this gap. Fifteen years later, however, Beardsworth and Keil still begin the introduction to their book with the subtitle 'FOOD AND EATING: A CASE OF SOCIOLOGICAL NEGLECT?' (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997:1). They repeat Murcott's observation that food, as a research topic, has long been neglected by sociology. They believe that the complex interrelation between food and society deserves a place in the major themes of contemporary sociology. Food, they argue, is a fundamental part of human experience and society. Since a high level of interest has been given to this area by various disciplines, Beardsworth and Keil are puzzled by its relative neglect in sociology.

This literature review was conducted in a 'reverse' manner. As more scholarly attention was given to food firstly by social anthropologists; their literature covers a broad range of food practices. Some of these are beyond the scope of this thesis. Hence, secondary literature was used to facilitate identifying major theoretical approaches. Theoretical approaches

to food and eating are often put in three major categories: Functionalist approach, structuralist approach and materialist/developmentalist approach. In his book, Goody (1982) first proposes the classification of the functional approach, the structural approach and the cultural approach. Murcott later proposes the structuralist approach and the materialist response in her review paper (Murcott, 1988). This classification then evolved and was adopted by the succeeding works in the sociology of food and eating. In the book *The Sociology of Food: Eating, Diet and Culture* (Mennell et al., 1992), the three theoretical approaches were put together and referred as functionalism, structuralism and developmentalism. In this book, Mennell (1992) objects to Murcott's (1988) classification, which places Mennell under the 'materialists' category. Mennell suggests that the co-authors of this book, including Murcott, have achieved an agreement to describe this category as 'developmentalists' (Mennell et al., 1992:14).

The classification in Mennell et al.'s book (1992) was later adopted by Beardsworth and Keil (1997), who describe the theoretical approaches to the sociology of food and eating as the functionalist approach, the structuralist approach and the developmental approach. It can be seen that this categorisation has been modified slightly over time. However, the core concept of this categorisation remains somewhat unchallenged.

In order to present the prevail categorisation in the sociology of food and eating; this thesis has borrowed the terms used in Beardsworth and Keil's book: the functionalist approach, the structuralist approach and the materialist/developmentalist approach.

2.2.1 The functionalist approach

Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and Audrey Richards are the two most frequently mentioned anthropologists working in the functionalist tradition and writing about food.

Radcliffe-Brown was strongly influenced by the work of Émile Durkheim. In his book *The Division of Labour in Society*, Durkheim (1894) argues that differences amongst people can provide a source of attraction as much as similarities or at least those differences that complement one another. In short, people seek through their interactions in society to make up for what is lacking in themselves. This is how a division of labour is formed- an exchange of services. Durkheim further argues that the role of the division of labour is not only to make the existing societies work: it is the reason that such societies even exist in the first place. In his book *The Andaman Islanders: a study in social anthropology*, Radcliffe-Brown's (1922) follows Durkheim in stressing that food is the centre of all social activities amongst the Andaman Islanders, including all the social sentiments. He describes a series of ceremonies performed by a growing boy or girl, involving giving up certain relished foods. This means the 'social value' of food is brought home to the growing child at his/her most impressionable age. The series of ceremonies can be seen as a form of moral education carried out by the whole society in the name of tradition. In his book *Historical and Functional Interpretations of Culture in Relation to the Practical Application of Anthropology to the Control of Native Peoples*, Radcliffe-Brown (1958) argues that there are two methods of dealing with the facts of culture, which he refers to as the historical and the functional. The historical method is when the researchers try to 'explain' a culture, or part of it, by showing the ways in which it was shaped as a result of historical development. As for the functional method, Radcliffe-Brown claims that it

is based on the assumption that a culture is an integrated system. Each element of that culture plays a specific role, or serves a specific function, that is demanded by the culture. The functional method, according to him, aims to understand the 'law of function'. Therefore, he concludes that 'we can "explain" any given ritual or ceremonial by showing what are the sentiments expressed in it and how these sentiments are related to the cohesion of the society.' (Radcliffe-Brown, 1958:41)

Audrey Richards' early work was influenced by Bronislaw Malinowski, her supervisor. Malinowski was a Polish anthropologist, who provided a highly detailed ethnographic account of food production and allocation systems in the Trobriand Islands. He further described the complex patterns of belief and social reciprocity that articulate these systems (Beardsworth and Keil, 1990). Malinowski is widely considered as one of the most important anthropologists in the twentieth century. He stresses the importance of detailed participant observation and argues that anthropologists have to experience the everyday life of their observing subjects. Richards' first book (1932) *Hunger and work in a savage tribe: a functional study of nutrition among the Southern Bantu* followed Malinowski's work closely. She set out to investigate the need for food underlies social institutes in some of the southern African societies. However, she adopted a different approach in her second book *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia* (La Fontaine, 1985). Richards (1939) analyses the food production, the preparation and the consumption of the Bemba. She tries to place their traditional nutritional culture into a broader context. Throughout this book, she emphasises the symbolic significance of food and nutritional practices. Richards seeks to discuss the 'symbolism of cooked food' and the way a transaction in food expressed the pattern of social relations. According to Richards, food activities are essential in the maintenance of social

structures. 'The giving and receiving of cooked food has become symbolic of the legal or economic relationship which entails it' (Richards, 1939:127). She argues that it is through food that some 'social sentiments', like kinship, obligation and reciprocity are expressed. In this book, she pays more attention to the structure of social relations, in a way that is influenced more by Radcliffe-Brown than Malinowski (La Fontaine, 1985).

The core concept of functionalism can be portrayed through a common analogy between a society and an organic system, such as a living body (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). Functionalist writers argue that a living system is made up by a set of specialised organs, which play unique roles in the system's maintenance and continuity. By the same token, the society is also made up of a set of institutions and features which provide their unique contribution in order to maintain the social system (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997).

The functionalist approach has received various criticisms. According to Goody (1982), there are three problems: the Popperian problem of validation and acceptability; the ease with which relations and sentiments are posited; and finally the absence both of a historical dimension and a non-functional component. These criticisms, Goody (1982) argues, are also applicable to the structuralist approach, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Broadly speaking, Popper's (2003) view about empirical science is that it is in continual revolution. Popper believes that the making of knowledge starts with inaccurate theories. In the pursuit of objective knowledge, Popper argues that theories should undergo a series of rigorous falsifications in order to advance closer to the truth. According to Popper

(2003), the 'truth' can never be found; we can only admit all empirical scientific statements as falsifiable in one sense only. It is through falsification that we can move theories towards greater accuracy (Wallis, 2008). The functionalist approach would be considered as problematic in Popper's view because it cannot be tested, which makes its validity questionable. Furthermore, the functionalist approach seeks to give meaning to the 'meaningless' and thus food preparation symbolises a social or an economic relation. Goody (1982) argues that the introduction of such broad-ranging terms such as 'meaning', 'symbol', or 'expression' loses its concreteness and sometimes its credibility. Moreover, the relations and sentiments of food activities are posited on the basis of observed acts. Goody (1982) questions such notions for they only constitute generalising but not explanatory accounts and 'invest a set of functional principles or structural forms with power of this kind simply on the basis of evidence derived from their supposed manifestations' (Goody, 1982:15). According to Goody, this is another trap that functionalists might have fallen into, 'the error of misplaced concreteness' (Goody, 1982:15).

2.2.2 The structuralist approach

Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas are the two main authors being put under the label of structuralists in the literature of social anthropology and sociology of food and eating. Whilst the functionalist approach tries to understand the ways in which various components in the system interrelate with each other as a whole, the structuralist approach claims to look into 'deep structures' (Beardsworth and Kell, 1997). Therefore, instead of focusing upon the practicalities and the social processes involved in food practices, the structuralists examine the rules and conventions that shape the ways that food items are considered and handled. It is assumed that

these surface rules of food are manifestations of deeper, underlying structures (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997).

Lévi-Strauss started out examining a wide range of anthropological and ethnographic materials (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). Goody (1982) observes that Lévi-Strauss assumes a homology between the deep structures of human mind and society. He believes the homology can be discovered through researching the 'surface features' (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997, Goody, 1982). Hence, Lévi-Strauss' attention to food focuses on the behaviour of cooking, which he claims to be unique to the human species. In his book *The Raw and the Cooked* (1970), Lévi-Strauss links two universal human behaviours: cooking and speaking, both of which he claims to be essential for human expression. This conviction is summarised in Murcott's review paper (1988). Murcott observes that unlike the functionalist approach, which focuses upon the analogy between society and its members' place in the community, Lévi-Strauss stresses the analogy between cultural surface features, cooking in this case, and speech. Murcott further reports that Lévi-Strauss argues that humans are a species of 'nature' and 'culture' simultaneously and we face this paradox in our everyday life. Whilst we all need to eat for survival, which is similar to other animals, we also try to distinguish ourselves from other animals. Hence, the act of cooking is a means that humans use to manage this paradox (Murcott, 1988). Lévi-Strauss argues that 'nature' can be transformed into 'culture' through cooking. From these ideas Lévi-Strauss formulates the 'culinary triangle' (Fig.1), with which he explains the transition between nature and culture in human society (Lévi-Strauss 1966).

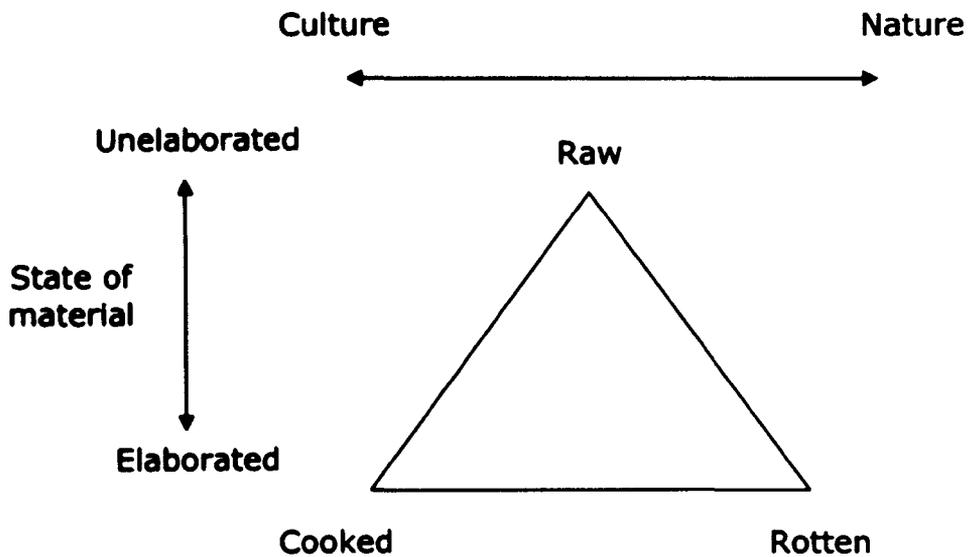


Figure 1 The Culinary Triangle. After Lévi-Strauss (1966).

In this triangle Lévi-Strauss (1966) borrows the binary opposition from structural linguistics² as the basis of his analysis. The binary opposition is supposed to reflect the opposition between 'nature' and 'culture', and such oppositions construct the basis for cultural contrast. This triangle consists of a pair of binary oppositions. The first opposition is between the state of food material, the unelaborated and the elaborated. However, cooking is only one way of transforming food ingredients. Food can also be transformed by the process of putrefaction in nature. Therefore, Lévi-Strauss (1966) introduces the second binary opposition: between nature and culture. The culinary triangle was developed further taking account of different food preparation and preservation methods, including roasting, smoking, and boiling.

² The linguistic concept of binary opposition of phonemes, which 'constitute the meaning in languages and are constructed from the oppositional qualities of contrasting phonetic sounds' (Wood, R.C, 1995:9).

The culinary triangle has received extensive attention and criticism amongst sociologists and social anthropologists. In his book Mennell (1985) argues that 'the general reader may well consider the culinary triangle a farrago of nonsense' (1985:9). Mennell questions the simplistic manner in which the triangle is presented and argues that it did not help Lévi-Strauss' argument. Mennell claims that in order to explain this triangle, Lévi-Strauss has to rely far too much upon commonsensical arguments, which 'hardly needs a structuralist sledgehammer to crack that empirical nut' (Mennell, 1985:10). The culinary triangle is most challenged by Lévi-Strauss' attempt to analyse social behaviour in various societies based on this model and the claimed universalism attached to it. Despite the criticisms, Lévi-Strauss has raised an important question of the similarities and differences between humans and animals. Furthermore, Murcott (1988) acknowledges his contribution in finding similar patterns in the ways in which people think about food. For instance, all people classify what they eat, and food has its symbolic meanings in different parts of the world. This is what Lévi-Strauss (1963) claims to be universal principles underlying social structures. In his book 'Totemism', he expressed his conviction that the natural species are chosen as food not because they are 'good to eat' (bonnes³ à manger) but because they are 'good to think'⁴ (bonnes à penser) (Lévi-Strauss, 1963:162).

The second structuralist author to be introduced here is Mary Douglas. Her general interest is considered to be more extensive and the study of food and eating is simply a part of her broad-ranged topics (Murcott, 1988). Although she recognises food as linked to biological as well as social factors,

³ The adjectival plural of French is untranslatable (Leach, 1974).

⁴ Although grammatically incorrect, the term 'bonnes à penser' was translated as 'good to think' rather than 'good to think with' by Rodney Needham.

it is the latter that interest her. She focuses on deciphering the courses, composition and patterns of meals, which she argues must constitute one level of any interpretation (Douglas, 1975).

Douglas (1984) objects to Lévi-Strauss' reliance on the binary opposition and his belief in universalism. She contends that the meaning of food should be studied in small scale exemplars.

He (Lévi-Strauss) takes leave of the small-scale social relations which generate the codification and are sustained by it. Here and there his feet touch solid ground, but mostly he is orbiting in rarefied space where he expects to find universal food meanings common to all mankind (Douglas, 1975:250).

Douglas also comments that Lévi-Strauss' attempt to 'generalise (the meaning of food) by using linguistic theoretical assumptions tend to produce explanations of tastes and preferences that seem too trivial or too bizarre' (Douglas, 1984:8). She argues that food categories encode social events. In order to see how a particular series of social events are coded, a series of micro-scale social systems have to be understood. Douglas believes works carried out on a micro-scale would 'allow opportunities for experimenting with new perspectives' (Douglas, 1984:8) because this helps to elude the problem theoretical investigations often face - the tendency to stay within the prevailing paradigms. Regardless of all the criticisms she has made about Lévi-Strauss' approach, Douglas (1982) also sees food as a system of communication. However, she has never forgotten that whilst food can be seen as a symbol, a metaphor or a vehicle of communication,

it is, above all, a substance that is essential for survival (Beardsworth and Kell, 1997).

According to Douglas (1975), food categories express 'hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries' (Douglas, 1975:249). Therefore, she is convinced that a social analysis of food-culture relationships should be a basis for building a bigger picture in social interactions. In her book *Implicit meanings*, Douglas (1975) explores this conviction through coding the daily menu. This coding system is used to analyse family eating patterns, from which she draws complicated social interactions. For instance, Douglas presents the difference between the structures of lunches on various occasions. She argues that lunches usually consist of what she refers as a 'tripartite' structure⁵ (Douglas, 1975:257). On the weekday, the lunch often constitutes of one main element with two or more less stressed elements. On the other hand, Sunday lunch usually has two main courses, both of which are composed of the tripartite structure. In the first course, it is usually meat or fish (stressed element) with two vegetables (less stressed elements). In the second course, the stressed element would be pudding, accompanied by unstressed elements such as biscuits or cream. Furthermore, Christmas lunch has three courses, all of which are made of the same structure. Therefore, Douglas concludes that the importance of the occasion is signified by the composition of the meals. She then proposes a formula for a 'proper meal'. She argues that when A is the stressed main course and B is an unstressed course, a proper meal is A plus 2B. Both A and B have the same structure of a+2b, in which a is the stressed item and b the unstressed item in a course. She observes that a weekday lunch is A, whereas a Sunday lunch is 2A. Special

⁵ The structure of the menu being examined in Douglas' work is mainly within elite/European tradition.

occasions such as Christmas, Easter, it is A+2B. Through the analysis of the meals, Douglas concludes that the 'pre-coded message of the food categories is the boundary system of a series of social events' (Douglas, 1975:259). She emphasises that our everyday life is highly ordered and this order penetrates into all social activities.

Douglas elaborates on people's relation with food, which she claims to be more than simply a relation to objects but also to their own bodies. Food is considered according to our ideas about what is safe and acceptable for our own bodies and this betrays how we consider our bodies in their objective aspect. Furthermore, Douglas (1982) suggests that the food system is only one of the systems that families employ for caring for the body, and that the culinary tradition is only one part of the individual experience. No system, according to her, should be considered separately from other systems.

Douglas undertook small-scale fieldwork with Michael Nicod investigating day-to-day eating habits in Britain (Douglas and Nicod, 1974). A rather intriguing method was adopted in this work. Nicod lived with four working-class families as a lodger and observed their eating habits. This method has successfully avoided the limitations of the other approaches such as imposing questions.

A fieldwork rule of never asking questions was developed, because to the smallest inquiry the menu showed a direct response. Once he [Nicod] asked the north London hostess whether she liked frozen peas; next day they appeared on the table (Douglas and Nicod, 1974:744).

The representativeness of this study, however, has been challenged due to its small scale. Murcott (1988) comments that although representativeness can sometimes be traded off against in-depth data collection, this study did not convincingly justify its loss of the former. In her review paper, Murcott (1988) did not elaborate on this comment but it can be interpreted as that she does not think the collected data is much in depth and thus the sacrifice of representativeness is not worthwhile. Nonetheless, Murcott (1988) stresses that their efforts in this important methodological innovation should not be invalidated by this limitation.

Douglas is also being criticised for the lack of generalisability of her approach. Wood (1995) argues that her attempts to tackle her criticism against Lévi-Strauss' theoretical universalism, which was said to have led him into making certain grandiose assertions, many of which are untenable, have made her vulnerable to theoretical generalisation. Regardless, Murcott (1988) proposes that Douglas' work has undoubtedly provided one of the most outstanding contributions in the study of food habits.

The structuralist approach has been subjected to numerous criticisms. By focusing on the idea of food as a medium of communication, structuralists are said to have overlooked other external factors that act as constraints on social action such as biological factors (Goody, 1982). In other words, they have been criticised for giving undue weight to the symbolic sphere of food practice but the material factors were more or less neglected. (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997, Goody, 1982, Murcott, 1988). Furthermore, structuralists have also been criticised for being interested in food patterns but choose to shy away from the cause of the formation of such patterns (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). In addition to these, the methods adopted in the structuralist approach are also questioned due to lapses in empirical

rigour (Murcott, 1988). Murcott (1988) reports that Lévi-Strauss, Douglas and their successors have been discussing modern eating habits relying too much upon their personal experience and anecdotes. Murcott suggests that structuralists have made such great efforts to the development and testing of rules that their ideas can sometimes appear as something imposed by whim, which 'distracts more than it enlightens' (Murcott, 1988:14).

2.2.3 The materialist/developmentalist approach

The limitations of the structuralist approach have triggered a series of responses from the materialists/developmentalists. Unlike the functionalist and the structuralist approach, the materialist/developmentalist approach does not represent either a coherent body of theory or an explicit perspective. A wide range of approaches were initially put into this category in Murcott's review paper (1988) because they exhibit some common features, one of which is that they share dissatisfaction with the structuralist approach. Nonetheless, it ought to be noted that there is considerable common ground between the structuralist and the materialist/developmentalist approaches. The latter do not deny the importance of symbolic meanings of food nor do they fail to acknowledge the connection between nature and culture. Since there is no coherent body of theory in this category, the following materialist/developmentalist authors were chosen to be discussed here because they are most frequently mentioned in the literature of sociology of food and eating.

The first author to be discussed here is Marvin Harris. Harris is one of the most critical anti-structuralists. His opposition to Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas is obvious in his writing (Harris, 1986). He objects to the structuralist approach which he regards as a runaway idealist approach.

Moreover, he entitled his book *Good to eat* (Harris, 1986) challenging Lévi-Strauss' (1963) famous dictum that food is 'good to think' rather than 'good to eat'. He starts the book with a chapter named 'Good to think or good to eat', voicing his doubts in Lévi-Strauss' philosophy with an important question: whether the symbolic or the practical (material) comes first? Harris (1986) argues the latter comes before the former. He believes the extent that symbolic meaning is embedded in people's decisions in food is an autonomous process that can be understood as a process of selecting food for nourishment.

'I hold that whether they (foods) are good or bad to think depends on whether they are good or bad to eat. Food must nourish the collective stomach before it can feed the collective mind' (Harris, 1986:15).

Harris (1987) characterises his approach to the study of food and eating as 'cultural materialist' approach whilst he refers to the structuralist approach as a 'cultural idealist' approach. Two main conceptions are embodied in his approach. The first is that all the factors in people's life contribute to the food being consumed. This includes biological, psychological, environmental, technological, political and other factors. Secondly, Harris (1987) does not deny the symbolic meaning of foodstuffs but maintains that human's nutritional needs must be satisfied before that.

Cultural materialist strategies are based on the assumption that biopsychological, environmental, demographic, technological and political-economic factors exert a powerful influence on the foods that can be produced and consumed by any given human population. However difficult to

measure, there are nutritional needs that must be satisfied and psycho-chemical limits of taste and toxic tolerances that must be observed (Harris, 1987:58).

Harris (1987) demonstrates opposition to Lévi-Strauss' (1966) culinary triangle by arguing that there has not yet been any empirical evidence supporting this model. Moreover, he argues that even if the culinary triangle were sufficient to represent a universal structure of food, as Lévi-Strauss suggests, it still does not fully explain the differences between societies in selecting certain foods over others. Therefore, Harris challenges the arbitrary connection between food objects and their meanings, which are proposed by the structuralists. Harris' continuous criticism of the structuralist (and sometimes functionalist) approach of being too 'cultural idealistic' led him to adopt a more 'down-to-earth' approach (Murcott, 1988).

Harris remains unconvinced by Douglas' micro-sociological approach towards studies of food and eating, even though both of them reject Lévi-Strauss' universalism. Harris (1987) criticises her study as devoid of consideration of the ways in which food can be linked to economic, nutritional and dietary factors. Douglas (1984) believes that a micro-sociological approach has its strength in cultural analysis where they are 'interested in measures of behaviour that are independent of income or wealth' (Douglas, 1984:22). Harris (1987) responds to this claim with another question, 'But why would anyone propose to study foodways in stratified societies independently of income and wealth?' (Harris, 1987:60)

Broadly speaking, Harris is intrigued by the differences in food habits between various societies and cultures. He believes that the major

differences in world cuisine can be a result of ecological constraints and opportunities (Harris, 1986:16). Hence, he set out to calculate the costs and benefits that underline food preferences and avoidances. This is to show that people's food habits are determined by the most efficient manner of consumption. The way in which Harris (1986) calculates the 'efficiency' of consumption is not limited only to monetary terms, but also includes ecological and nutritional factors. In his book Harris analyses different cases of food conventions in different cultures, which he claims to have chosen the 'most baffling cases to show how they can be explained' by his calculation (Harris, 1986:17).

Douglas' response to Harris can be found in her book *Food in Social Order* (1984). She thinks Harris' approach can be potentially powerful for interpreting long-term changes but is inevitably weak for understanding short-term relations between social factors and perceived needs (Douglas, 1984:8). She also challenges Harris' assumption of rational economic decision-making for explaining cultural adaptation, which Murcott also questions. In her review paper, Murcott (1988) has made three important observations on Harris' work. Firstly, she questions his selection of case studies, which she finds to have excluded food from other than animal sources. She also suspects that Harris has avoided the case that can seriously challenge his philosophy, namely the learned preferences for elaborate eating amongst the European aristocracy in the eighteenth century. Second, and most importantly, according to Murcott, Harris' insistence upon the calculation of cost and benefits to include both ecological and nutritional factors can be problematic. Agreeing with Douglas, Murcott argues the rationality behind this calculation is not well supported even on an individual level, let alone on a cultural level. She furthers her argument by assuming that, even though individuals or

cultures did act rationally, the amount of information one has to receive in order to arrive at a decision that is the most economic is nearly impossible to imagine. Thirdly, Murcott points out that though Harris has drawn his instances from history, he has failed to address the changes over time.

Harris' approach is subjected to a stronger attack by Fiddes (1991) who rejects his somewhat simplistic idea that humans are biologically programmed to prefer animal foods. Fiddes (1991) argues that food preferences are more likely to be a subject in the social realm rather than a biological one. Harris' attempt to explain human's food preferences in a biological sense was criticised for his 'determined denial of a social component to social activities' (Fiddes, 1991:171). Fiddes points out that meat avoidance is prevalent in some cultures and practiced by some individuals voluntarily. Moreover, Fiddes argues that even biological research does not support Harris' argument and he is 'deserted by science' (Fiddes, 1991:179).

Similar to Harris, Sydney Mintz (1985) also regards the material aspects as coming before the symbolic meaning of food.

I don't think meanings inhere in substances naturally or inevitably. Rather, I believe that meaning arises out of use, as people use substances in social relationships (Mintz, 1985:xxix).

Similar to Harris' approach, which focused on only one food substance, Mintz also chose to examine just one food substance - sugar. In his book *Sweetness and Power*, Mintz (1985) examines UK sugar consumption, particularly between 1650, when sugar started to become common, and

1900, when sugar entered the diet of every working class family. After 1650, the quantity of sugar consumption rose dramatically in the UK, much faster than the increase of the population. In this book, Mintz set out to investigate how sugar was transformed from luxury to necessity and the relation between sugar use and symbolic meaning, intending to associate a colonial product such as sugar with the growth of world capitalism. He attempts to show how production and consumption are closely bound together, and the ways in which consumption has to be explained by people's social behaviour. Though Mintz rejects the idea that anthropology is all about history, he stresses the importance of a historical perspective. He argues that without history, the explanatory power in anthropological works can be seriously compromised (Mintz, 1985:XXX).

Like Harris' approach towards meat, Mintz assumes people's liking for sugar is in-built predisposition. In his book, Mintz splits the discussion of sugar into production and consumption, which Murcott (1988) criticises him for not recognising that the two cannot really be seen as independent of one another. After all, it is demand that induces supply and supply stimulates demand. The discussion of sugar production and consumption was followed by the introduction of power, which further complicates the picture. In the case of sugar, Mintz believes that power can be linked to production and consumption in the use of, and access to, sugar. He discusses the ways in which sugar was used in the UK and how it has changed over time along with people's diet. Mintz is convinced that an understanding of the history of sugar demands an analysis of power relations between the 'old' and the 'new' worlds.

Mintz (1985) argues that power plays an important role in people's access to sugar. He claims 'the proclaimed freedom to choose meant freedom only

within a range of possibilities laid down by forces over which those who were, supposedly, freely choosing exercised no control at all' (Mintz, 1985:183). Hence, the increase of availability is one of the major reasons that sugar became widely used. Furthermore, he also stresses the relationships between the availability of sugar and the geo-political factors that made its use possible. He argues that the influence of power comes at all levels and thus uses power as an integrating element to bring together other parts that, for convenience, he split in his book, such as the separation of sugar production and consumption.

Like many other materialists/developmentalists, Mintz does not only emphasise the decoding of eating patterns and of people's decisions about food, but also stresses the importance of decoding the formation of these patterns from a historical perspective. Sharing Harris' belief, Mintz (1985) insists that the practical is prior to the symbolic, whose importance he also recognises. He emphasises the importance of including considerations of history, social organisation, pattern of consumption and power.

Mintz's work has received criticisms for basing too much of his argument on speculation, which he also recognises in his book (Mintz, 1985). Murcott (1988) identifies this limitation as more prominent in his concluding discussion, where he links modern eating patterns with people's daily timetables. Mintz argues that the busy timetable of modern society have resulted in people being more susceptible to the 'sucrose sellers'. However, Murcott (1988) points out that this is only part of the picture. Whilst Mintz argues that the 'official workday' has not changed much in the last hundred years in the UK, Murcott argues that it is important to see the difference between the 'official workday' and an 'actual working day'. Furthermore, Murcott claims that Mintz has overlooked gender as a factor in people's

eating pattern. Food is, after all, still largely considered as women's responsibility in the family setting. She further identifies that Mintz might have neglected the variations over people's life course. She argues that the experience of time can differ considerably between older and younger people.

British social anthropologist Jack Goody is the third materialist/developmentalist author to be reviewed in this chapter. Different from Harris and Mintz, Goody's (1982) approach examines cuisine as a whole rather than looking at any particular aspect of food or a single food substance. His major work of food and eating pays much attention to the cuisine in two ethnic groups in northern Ghana, where he conducted his fieldwork. He is intrigued by why 'high' cuisine and 'low' cuisine have developed in some cultures but not others. Goody's comparative approach has led him to consider more closely the social and political differentiation within societies. He argues that the differences in social organisation in the two ethnic groups studied affect the course of events in the colonial and post-colonial worlds. As a result, the nature of production and consumption was also affected. Nonetheless, regardless of the variations surrounding food in general, Goody reports that the actual shape of the cuisine in the two societies is rather similar.

Goody (1982) then turns his attention to literacy and the ways in which it can play a role in the high and the low, both in social structures and cuisines. He believes that literacy can have multiple social consequences. He first points out that literacy can be an instrument of oppression. He reports that prior to the rise of modern mass literacy, people's access to the written word was socially stratified. Access restriction, therefore, can serve to sharpen the distinctions in people's life-style and taste, including

all their food activities. On the other hand, he reports that printed cookbooks and recipes have helped to breach the hierarchical organisation of cuisine in England since the 'secrets' of the rich households are now revealed.

Goody (1982) then draws attention to the organisation of households and structures of kinship, focusing in particular on gender division of labour. Goody discusses that in most African societies, routine day-to-day cooking is often done by women. Moreover, food preparation for the aristocracies and elites is often handled by male professionals.

In Goody's eyes, structuralists are removed from the 'real world'. Similar to Mintz, Goody believes that structuralists fail to recognise the importance of historical perspective in understanding how food habits and patterns are established. Nonetheless, Murcott (1988) challenges Goody's approach for being critical of structuralists' neglect of historical account whilst his own analysis appears to retain 'a rather static feel'. Furthermore, Murcott (1988) observes that, due to the wide spectrum Goody tries to write, his book inevitably loses in depth and detail. This critique is also picked up by Wood (1995), who argues that Goody sidestepped engaging in-depth analysis of structuralists' contributions to the study of food and eating.

Goody's observation of the gendered division of labour was one of themes in Stephen Mennell's book *All Manners of Food* (1985). Unlike the other authors who have been reviewed so far, Stephen Mennell was trained as a sociologist rather than a social anthropologist. Food and eating were rarely considered as a serious intellectual topic in the sociological tradition at the time. Hence, Mennell's view of the structuralist approach, which is a branch of social anthropology, is more dismissive than other anthropologists

(Murcott, 1988). According to Murcott, Mennell did not reject the symbolic meaning of food and eating. Rather, it was simply assumed without giving much analytical consideration. Moreover, Murcott observes that Mennell is particularly impatient with structuralists, for their 'highly improbable mode of analysing symbols' (Murcott, 1988:29). He is also suspicious of the tendency of social anthropologists who seemed 'to exaggerate the homogeneity of cultures' that the distinctions between social strata were overlooked (Murcott, 1988:30).

Mennell's theory and method are largely inspired by Norbert Elias, whose contribution in the sociology of food and eating was said to have been often underrated. In his book, Wood (1995) has summarised the key ideas of Elias' work in 1982. According to Wood, Elias discusses the process of state formation and the formation of individual personality and conduct. Elias argues that in Western societies, the civilisation process has been a progressive shift from the exercise of external constraints that were imposed on people to internal constraints which people exert upon themselves. Elias is convinced this shift affects people's life on all levels (Wood, 1995). Applying Elias' approach to examine food and eating, Mennell attempts to understand the contrasts and similarities of two cuisines. His major concern is how so called 'figurations' or sets of social, cultural, economic, political arrangements change over time in a series of competing ideas and interests. In his book Mennell (1985) provides a comparative account of eating and taste in England and France. The book set out to investigate the reasons why a haute cuisine was developed in France but not England. Although similar to Goody's (1982) comparative analysis, Mennell adopts a rather different approach. The two societies Mennell investigated are relatively similar compared to the spectrum of the societies Goody chose to study. This allows Mennell to examine the two

societies in more depth rather than simply looking for variations in social conventions and practices. Mennell discovers that the differences between French and English cookery and culinary taste are more subtle than the alleged reciprocal stereotypes. At the same time, the two cuisines cannot be seen as completely separate due to their historic influence on each other. Mennell (1992) believes that because the two societies are not entirely independent, the contrasts and similarities can only be understood as developmental.

Mennell (1985) reports surprising similarities in each social stratum across most of Western Europe in the Middle Ages. The formation of 'national cuisines' emerged alongside the formation of 'nation-states'. Mennell reports that, as the Middle Ages waned, the food supply chain was improved; this was followed by other improvements such as the progressive division of labour and the extension of trade. In the Middle Ages, the nobility used to demonstrate their superior social status by having more food that is difficult to obtain. Once access to food was more secure, what used to be rare food substances became widely available outside the nobility. Therefore, the nobility in both France and England could no longer demonstrate their superiority in society by having more food due to their physical limitation. One can, after all, only eat more up to a certain amount. As a result, instead of consuming a large quantity to demonstrate their superiority, the nobility started to emphasise the quality of the food they ate. However, the development of cuisines in the two nations is strikingly different regardless of their similarities. The French tradition of haute cuisine was formed under the pre-revolutionary aristocracy. Aristocratic life in France between seventeenth and eighteenth century centred so much on the royal court that it became a series of competitions. As the French nobility were occupied in elaborate social

display, they started to engage less and less in state affairs. Elaborate social activities became their major means of self-expression. As for the English nobility, their focus was placed upon getting more political power instead of the elaborate display of court life. Furthermore, Mennell points out that the interlocking of urban and rural life in England also contributed to the shaping of the less elaborate English country cuisine. As opposed to the 'courtly' quality of French cuisine, the development of conceptions of 'good food' in England is much affected by the idea of the English gentleman who spent a substantial amount of time in the countryside. He was supposed to enjoy eating food produced on his own land, where he was likely to have less access to different varieties of food commodities than through the markets in urban areas. Hence, country men were used to eating their own produce and not being too choosy. For the same reason, country kitchens would also have fewer sources for elaborate cuisines. It was the freshness and the quality of the food that was valued in English cuisine.

Mennell (1985) projects the differences in the formation of nation-states upon the formation of national cuisines. For instance, he argues that the time-consuming sauce of the French versus the simpler dressed meat and pudding of the English can be linked to the differences in the development of social stratification in the process of state formation. Mennell argues that the difference between the developments of national cuisines does not only lie in the economic and demographic facts. Explanations also have to be sought in the cultural domain.

In the final chapter, Mennell (1985) discusses the evidence that time would 'diminish contrasts' and 'increase varieties' between certain food habits, attitudes and beliefs. For instance, the contrasts between everyday eating

and seasonal eating have been diminished by advances in the food supply chain. At the same time, varieties of food were also made widely available. He further extends the concept to professional cookery and everyday cooking. Mennell reports that, after the Revolution, French haute cuisine became an influence on many other European countries, including England. *According to him, traditional English peasant dishes were absorbed into the haute cuisine and the growth of restaurants and hotels encouraged 'culinary democracy', which allows people to blur social stratification whilst eating out. However, he stresses that this does not suggest that eating out is free from the influence of social class.*

Mennell's writing in food and eating has been criticised for being inconsistent and ambiguous. Murcott (1988) expresses her doubts of the ambiguity both in Elias' and Mennell's writing. On the same note, Wood (1995) criticises both Elias' and Mennell's messages and the conceptual ideas, which they are trying to deliver, for being unclear. This lack of clarity, according to Wood, is exacerbated by the lack of coherent attempt to develop themes. Moreover, Murcott (1988) points out some style problems in Mennell's writing, such as he does not always answer the questions he initially posed and he sometimes introduces his key ideas in the middle of a paragraph. What is more, since Mennell's work based largely upon Elias' theory, Murcott suggests that it is important to understand Elias' thesis to fully appreciate Mennell's work. Elias' thesis, according to Murcott, 'is deceptively simple but might be rather unfamiliar to many' (Murcott, 1988:33).

Similar to Goody, Mennell have committed the same mistake for which he criticises the structuralists. Although a central point of his criticism is that the structuralists have failed to explain how tastes change and develop

over time, his approach failed to analyse the change in food preference in relation to the range of social and political factors. As a result, his case study was less convincing in its discussion of the nineteenth and twentieth century than the earlier analysis (Murcott, 1988).

Mennell's (1985) attempt to deal with both primary and secondary sources at the same time was considered to be too ambitious. This was said to have resulted in his analysis of the written sources getting taken out of context. Murcott (1988) observes a lack of systematic analysis whilst examining the written sources. According to her, this has led to his reliance upon his personal view in the analysis, failing to consider other factors in that particular context. By the same token, his over-generalising of a personal view was also found in his comparison of domestic and professional cookery. He was criticised for neglecting the importance of power relations in the domestic environment. Notwithstanding all the criticisms Mennell receives from her, Murcott (1988) stresses that his effort in putting food and eating at the centre of academic attention in sociology should be acknowledged.

The categorisation of the three theoretical approaches to the study of food and eating has remained unchallenged in the past two decades. As a result, this long-standing categorisation has influenced many authors who are interested in food. This thesis aims to introduce Goffman's ideas about people's self-presentation of everyday life into this tradition, in the hope that it can provide a new way to examine the ways in which people talk about food.

2.3 The presentation of self in everyday life

It can be seen from the previous discussion that the categorisation of theoretical approaches in the literature of sociology and social anthropology of food and eating was much based on ethnographic observation, documentary evidence and common sense in everyday life. Most of the authors are interested in the facts about food per se rather than the ways in which it is presented. Therefore, this thesis intends to examine this categorisation with interview data, which was co-produced in face-to-face interaction by the researcher and the researched. In so doing, it might contribute to the studies of food and eating through the interactionist viewpoint.

In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) treats face-to-face interaction using a dramaturgical metaphor. He reports that when an individual interact with others, the role of expression is to convey impressions of self:

[T]he expressive component of social life has been treated as a source of impressions given to or taken by others (Goffman, 1959:241).

In this book, Goffman refers to face-to-face interactions as theatrical performance, which he argues to involve two types of activity: the expression one gives and the expression one gives off. According to Goffman, the previous one involves verbal symbols or the equivalents, which one uses to communicate ideas that are attached to these symbols. He argues that this is a traditional form of communication. The latter form of communication, which is the focus of his book, involves a broad range of activity. This form of communication is expected to be performed for

reasons other than the information conveyed in this manner. Goffman argues that the communication of our everyday life is based on inferences. One can only extrapolate others' reality based on the information he/she receives. It is therefore sensible to assume that most people try to present themselves the ways that they want to be seen by others. Similarly, people also try to present their feelings towards others in the ways that they want their feelings to be perceived. In order to sustain this interaction in our everyday life, a certain level of harmony has to be achieved. Goffman further argues that it is always in an individual's interest to be in control of the others. This control is mainly achieved by influencing the definition of the situation. This individual can express in the way that gives out the impression that will result in others to act voluntarily with the individual's plan. These can be done consciously or unconsciously. There are different reasons for people to deliberately express themselves in a certain way. He reports that it is mainly because of the tradition of one's group or social status, which requires them to express themselves in a particular manner. A well-designed impression might result in other people being impressed by the images being created but it might also lead to misunderstandings of the situation.

Moreover, Goffman also reports that knowing that people have the tendency to present themselves in a favourable light, the others might divide the information they receive from others into two parts: the verbal assertions and the expressions of that individual, i.e. what that individual 'gives off'. A given example was the following:

In Shetland Isle one crofter's wife, in serving native dishes to a visitor from the mainland of Britain, would listen with a polite smile to his polite claims of liking what he was eating;

at the same time she would take note of the rapidity with which the visitor lifted his fork or spoon to his mouth, the eagerness with which he passed food into his mouth, and the gusto expressed in chewing food, using these signs as a check on the stated feelings of the eater (Goffman, 1959:18-19).

Fully aware that others will check all the signs that the individual expresses, Goffman argues that it is likely that he/she will make sure all aspects of behaviour consistent to ensure others that this impression is reliable.

In this book, Goffman has provided a detailed analysis of people's everyday interaction and the ways in which it is performed. Human actions are very much dependent upon time, place and the audience. This thesis intends to use the concept of presentation of self to examine university students' discourse about their food practices. This is an attempt to fill a gap in the three theoretical approaches towards the study of food and eating.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has summarised the categorisation that has been widely employed in the literature of sociology and social anthropology of food and eating: the functionalist approach, the structuralist approach and the materialist/developmentalist approach.

The functionalist approach towards food and eating is said to assume that all the social interactions revolve around food (Goody, 1982). In so doing, according to the functionalists, the members are socialised into their places in that society. The two authors that are mostly mentioned in this category

are Radcliffe-Brown and Richards. Radcliffe-Brown claims that each element plays a specific role, or serves a specific function, that is demanded by the culture to which it belongs. The functional method, according to him, wishes to understand the 'law of function'. In Richards's works, she tries to put traditional nutritional culture into a wider social context. She stresses the symbolic significance of food and nutritional practices. She further argues that it is through food that some social sentiments are expressed.

The structuralist approach, different from the functionalists, does not try to understand the ways in which various components in the society interrelate as a whole (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). Instead, the structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas pay much attention to the rules and conventions within which food is handled and considered. The assumption is that through examining these rules and conventions, i.e. the surface structures, underlying structures, i.e. deep structures, can be unravelled.

Unlike the functionalist and structuralist approach, the materialist/developmentalist approach does not present a coherent body of theory. It is united by its dissatisfaction with the structural approach. Both Harris and Mintz disagree with Lévi-Strauss' idea that food is 'good to think' rather than 'good to eat'. They argue that the material aspects of food have to come before its symbolic meaning. Furthermore, both Harris and Mintz chose to examine only one food substances: meat and sugar, respectively. Harris (1986) argues that people's decisions about food are the result of environmental constraints and opportunities. He believes that people are predisposed to prefer a more cost-efficient consumption pattern. Therefore, he believes that major differences in world cuisines can be explained by his calculation. Mintz (1985) examines the change of sugar

consumption in the UK. He argues that the soaring rise in sugar consumption in the UK is a result of various social and cultural activities. Different from Harris and Mintz, both Goody and Mennell consider food or cuisines as a whole, instead of emphasising a particular food substance. Goody (1982) is interested in the reason behind the shaping of 'high' and 'low' cuisines in different cultures and therefore attempted to understand it with a comparative study. He believes that the difference in social organisation affect the course of events in the two ethnic groups studied. As a consequence, the nature of food production and consumption was affected. Mennell (1985) also carried out a comparative study. He links Elias' notion of state formation to the shaping of national cuisines from a historical perspective.

Within the three different theoretical approaches, the debate about the importance of symbolic meaning and the material significance of food has been highlighted. On the one hand, the functionalist and the structuralist approaches have placed much emphasis on the symbolic meaning of food and therefore overlooked its material implications. On the other hand, the materialist/developmentalist approach has not completely rejected the structuralist approach but some authors have neglected the symbolic meaning of food to a certain extent. These authors have failed to recognise some of the social implications that are associated with food and failed to consider food as a material substance.

This categorisation of the theoretical approaches towards food and eating has been found to be largely based on ethnographic observation, documentary analysis and day-to-day life experience. This thesis believes that an interactionist account is still lacking. Therefore, this chapter also introduces Goffman's concepts of self-presentation of everyday life

(Goffman, 1959). Goffman treats face-to-face interaction using a dramaturgical metaphor, through which he argues that people have the tendency to present themselves as favourable. Therefore, this thesis proposes a study to examine people's food discourse in order to provide data that is co-produced by the researcher and the researched. In so doing, this thesis hopes to complement what has been overlooked by the three theoretical approaches.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the conceptual background for this thesis. In this thesis, university students' discourse about their food practices at home is regarded as the first stage of their transition to independent decision-making about food preparation and consumption. Hence, the literature in sociology of food, gender and family is reviewed in order to document what it already known about the role that food plays in the family context and the interaction of family members.

There are few previous studies of students' transitions in food practices on leaving home to attend university. Although the importance of understanding students' transition in their food practices to university⁶ has been underlined in some of the literature, the research that has been carried out seems to have treated students' food practices during their time at university as static, rather than as continuously evolving. Hence, the process of 'transition' is still under-explored.

Finally, this chapter discusses the study conducted by Kemmer et al. (1998a, 1998b) about food transitions in marriage/cohabitation. Their study demonstrates the ways in which people's transitions in life can have major impacts on their food practices and may be a model for better understanding other transitions. Therefore, this study stresses that further empirical data are required on UK students' transitions in food practices to university.

⁶ Students' "transitions 'to' university" is used throughout this thesis to stress the transitions from home through university period.

3.2 Sociology of food, gender and family

In order to investigate university students' transitions in food practices, their discourse about various life stages were examined. The first stage of students' life being investigated is the period of time when they lived with their family. Therefore, the literature in sociology of food, gender and family is reviewed. The first British sociologist to be discussed here is Murcott.

In her paper, Murcott (1986) notes that households are not necessarily constructed as families. A single person household, for instance, cannot be regarded as a family. She further argues that, a single person might also live in a variety of households, which are not his/her family. Student accommodation, for example, consists of unrelated members. Since this thesis examines both households composed of families and unrelated students, it is important to identify the distinction between the two. To avoid confusion, the term 'household' is not used to present the data in this thesis. When the term 'family' is used, it refers to a group whose members are related by blood or marriage. Student households are referred to as the 'private accommodation'.

Murcott (1982) conducted thirty-seven unstructured interviews with expectant mothers in South Wales. She provides an influential analysis of the significance of the 'cooked dinner'. Murcott argues that whilst the two words 'cooked' and 'dinner' are found in the dictionary, the term 'cooked dinner' is not. Nevertheless, it is used in a distinctive manner to describe a unique phenomenon. The cooked dinner, according to Murcott, 'is usually composed of meat, potatoes, at least one additional vegetable, and gravy' (Murcott, 1982:677). Furthermore, the 'cooked dinner' is said to be essential to family health and welfare. Murcott argues that the 'cooked

dinner' possesses the structural, cyclic and symbolic features that distinguish it from other forms of food in domestic setting. The women in Murcott's study are reported as rather specific about the makeup of the cooked meal.

The structural features of the cooked dinner are said to be: heavy rather than light, big rather than small, hot rather than cold, savoury rather than sweet. It is considered as a meal in its own right as oppose to snacks. The structural features of cooked meals are closely linked to their cyclic and symbolic features. Cyclically, the cooked dinner was described as only taken once in any one day, but not necessarily every day. Three or four days out of seven was said to be enough or proper. The importance of having cooked dinner on Sunday, but not on Saturday, was emphasised by Murcott's interviewees. This cyclic feature in Murcott's analysis reiterates Douglas' idea (1982) of the patterns of the Sunday lunch.

From the symbolic perspective, Murcott (1982) reports that the preparation of cooked meals reflects women's roles in the family as well as their marital status. She observes that women are usually responsible for food preparation in domestic setting. This is not to say that men do not cook at all but the roles they take on are portrayed as different from women (Murcott, 1982, Murcott, 1983b). Not only this, Murcott (1982) further discusses that 'in preparing the cooked dinner, in discharging this obligation, women are still required to do so in accordance with the needs, tastes or requests of those to whom they are serving it' (Murcott, 1982:692). She reports that women's decisions about what to eat usually arrive at a compromise between various members of the family, along with other considerations. Their knowledge of family preferences emphasises not only their roles as wives and mothers but also their specific position

within a particular household. Murcott concludes that the cooked dinner can be seen as an expression of the relationship between the cook and those who are cooked for in that particular household. She notes that:

[T]he cooked dinner in the end symbolizes the home itself, a man's relation to that home and a woman's place in it (Murcott, 1982:693).

To some degree, Murcott's work has extended Douglas' approach towards gender, something Douglas took for granted in her analysis. Furthermore, Murcott takes a step further to associate food and eating in the family to power relations in households and marriage, and even a wider gender relationship. Her analysis has encouraged many following researchers to pursue their interests in food and eating in the gender domestic context.

Charles and Kerr's book *Women, food and families* (1988) investigates women and food. It is, therefore, also about men, children and families. In their study, two hundred women, with at least one pre-school age child, were interviewed twice between 1982 and 1983. The interviews covered a wide range of different topics about food within the family. Consequently, the scope of this book is rather broad. They examine women's thinking about 'proper meals' and the ways in which the rationale behind this thinking embodies their ideas of 'proper families'. They also discuss the relationship between women and men, women and children, women and themselves, in the family. They discover that food practices and other daily activities are bound to unequal relations of power and status. Therefore, they extend this finding and investigate the power relations within different kinds of families. This is where they introduce social stratification into the discussion of family and food. Charles and Kerr found that food does not

only carry messages that reflect the social relations of the family, but also recreates these relations in their daily lives. Charles and Kerr conclude that 'the provision of food and drink within the family are determined by, and in turn reproduce, social and sexual divisions of labour' (Charles and Kerr, 1988:224). Therefore, they argue that class, gender and generational divisions are reflected in, and reproduced by, the pattern of food consumption. They suggest that food is not only to satisfy people's physiological needs. The ways in which it is obtained, handled, served and eaten are largely socially constructed.

DeVault conducted a similar study in the USA. In her book *Feeding the Family* (1991), DeVault argues that the act of 'feeding the family' produces 'family'. She observes that feeding work reconciles different schedules in the family and the projects of the family members. According to DeVault, feeding also provides points of interaction when family members come for group events. In so doing, family as a social space that is customised for its family members is created. The work of producing family by feeding, nonetheless, is said to have been largely invisible, so much so that the women in her study seemed to have found it difficult to explain why they prioritise their husbands' tastes and preference and take this for granted. DeVault reports that the women in her study talked about 'ideal feeding work', drawing from what they learned from literature and the media, from advertising and from professional social services and health care. Women's concepts of 'ideal feeding work', according to DeVault, both reflect and organise their concepts of 'family'. Thus women sometimes express regrets if they do not feed their family according to these concepts. However, women would also integrate such messages from the media image with more idiosyncratic ideas according to their own experiences with their family; developing their own routines that are customised for their families.

A rather consistent picture has been produced by the study of food, gender and family. According to the authors that have been reviewed so far, women are likely to be the ones who are held responsible for food preparation. They have the tendency to subordinate their own preference and taste to men and, to a lesser extent, their children. Recent contributions from studies in the sociology of food and family appear to have predominantly considered the complex relations between food, gender and family life. However, the literature has relied heavily on women's accounts. Many of the authors reviewed in this chapter have shown that women's relationship with food is more than simply their personal ideas about food. Hence, women's relationship with food should not be reduced only to that between food and their roles in the family. Murcott (1986) points out that her earlier work about the 'cooked dinner' relied on women's accounts alone and suggests that further study should investigate men's part in the household and how they see their own positions in it. In addition to gender, Murcott (1986) also stresses that age is another dimension that is potentially just as important. This limitation was also later identified by Beardsworth and Keil (1997). They report the lack of first hand accounts from men and children, whose perspectives are usually reported at second hand by women in the existing literature. By investigating university students, this thesis provides a complementary perspective to women's/mothers' accounts.

3.3 Students' transitions in food practices to university

There seems to be little scholarly attention in the sociology of food and eating to the university student population. Most of the works that examine university students and their food practices are dominated by three disciplines: nutrition, psychology and public health. A general objective of

these studies is to 'improve' people's diet (Anderson et al., 2003, Anding et al., 2001, Brevard and Ricketts, 1996, Cason and Wenrich, 2002, Smith et al., 2000, Soriano et al., 2000). The notion of 'improving' people's diet has been problematised by Eldrige and Murcott (2000). They argue that studies concerning young people's eating behaviour often attempt to encourage them to adopt 'better-advised' eating habits (Eldrige and Murcott, 2000:26). They suggest that researchers should be careful when they set out to solve a problem expressed by policy makers. Eldrige and Murcott argue that researchers should consider whether the problem ought to be reworked for the purpose of research in both research design as well as reporting their findings.

The manner in which policy interests identify or express a problem is not always to be taken as defining the terms in which the research is conducted: it may even be argued that thinking beyond or outside policy terms is exactly what researchers are awarded grants to do (Eldrige and Murcott, 2000:27).

In other words, the studies trying to 'improve' people's diet might need to reconsider their research questions in order to be able to provide a more meaningful interpretation of their data. In the case of research on university students, the prevalent focus on trying to 'improve' their diet has resulted in the social aspects of their food practices being continuously marginalised. The reasons why university students have come to eat as they do at this particular time in their life and the social implications that are embedded in their food practices have long been neglected in the literature. Due to the small literature that is available, the works being

reviewed in this chapter inevitably target different audiences in a wide range of disciplines.

Food consumer scientists Eves et al. (1995) examined British university first-year students' food and eating between 1986-1991. The objective of their study was to test the anecdotal beliefs that university students suffer from clinical malnutrition and binge drinking. The authors compared their data with a study conducted in 1986/1987 by Gregory and colleagues, which recorded young adults' diet between the ages of 16 and 24 years. All the students in Eves et al.'s research were studying for a degree in hotel and catering management and lived in self-catered university halls. Students were asked to complete a self-reported seven-day weighed dietary survey. The researchers found that male students were eating enough in terms of energy intake as well as macronutrients. However, they expressed their concerns about the trend observed amongst female students, particularly in later years. The female students in their study demonstrated a decline in energy intake, even though those who claimed to be on a special diet had been excluded from their study⁷. Eves et al. (1995) claim that the reason for this finding was unclear but they suspect it might be because of peer pressure amongst university female students to maintain their ideal body images with the 'normal' diet. Therefore, even though female students in their study did not consider themselves to be 'on a diet'; they might still restrict their normal energy intake. It is not clear why the authors felt it was necessary to exclude those who admitted to be on a diet in order to observe 'normal' food behaviour in a university student population. It is, after all, a part of students' eating behaviour. Eves et al. also report that, even though students seemed to feed

⁷ Eves et al. (1995) report that students in their study were advised to eat as 'normally' as possible, and the data from those on weight-reducing or other diets were not included.

themselves better than the anecdotal belief, it was unclear whether this was done by 'luck or judgement'. Furthermore, their findings were claimed to be comparable with the study conducted by Gregory et al., though the implications of this similarity were not fully explored. It is perhaps due to the nature of the objectives of their study, that some of the findings had to rely on speculation for which the researchers did not have supporting evidence. To sum up, university students in this paper were portrayed as being able to feed themselves with enough food and nutrients. The authors report that the popular belief about university students, that they are not feeding themselves with a nutritionally adequate diet, is a misconception. Only first year university students participated in this study. All were recruited from food-related disciplines and took courses in nutrition. However, the conclusions drawn from this paper implied that the findings can be generalised to all university students. The implicit assumption made here is that, regardless of their subjects of study, all students' food practices remain stable throughout their university life. It is, nonetheless, unclear whether students from other disciplines might think about food differently. Hence, it is questionable whether the features found amongst the students in their study can be generalised to the rest of the university student population.

In their paper, Eves et al. (1995) stress the uniqueness of the university student population. A non-university student population was also included in this study to provide a comparison. This is to avoid assuming that university students are just the same as other young adults. It is perhaps true that most university students are also young adults but it might be slightly over-generalising to assume they can represent the whole young adult population. After all, students share university experiences that non-student young adults do not. According to Eves et al. (1995), the student

population does not consume more alcohol than non-student groups and their eating patterns are also similar. However, this finding might need to be examined in future studies. Since only first year students participated in their study, their experiences of being university students are rather limited. It is uncertain whether students' food practices would change after their first year and this has to be explored before this conclusion can be drawn. Furthermore, Eves et al. only recruited students who lived on campus in self-catered halls. Students who live in different situations were excluded from their study. The association between students' living situations and their food practices is elaborated further later in this chapter.

In their paper, Meiselman et al. (1999) reviewed previous research on attitudes and food. They found a general conclusion that 'attitudes' play an important role in people's decisions about food. According to them, scholarly attention concentrates on the role of attitudes in food preferences and food acceptance. They report that little systematic research has been done to investigate the effects of different environments on people's food practices. Hence, they proposed a study examining the effect of changing environments in people's life. They argue that previous studies in people's food practices tend to take place on one day or at most over one or two weeks. In order to understand people's transitions in food practices, they stress that a longitudinal study can fill the gap in the literature. Therefore, they decided to study UK university students' 'attitudes' and diet for one to two years. University students who agreed to participate in their studies were doing a wider range of university courses than Eves et al.'s (1995) study. However, the selected disciplines remain limited; most of their degrees are linked to food and catering management or similar subjects. The study started as soon as students entered universities, and therefore the authors argue that it is capable of capturing the transitions throughout

students' university lives. Meiselman et al. used three different scales to measure students' eating behaviours: the Variety-Seeking Tendency Scale, the Food Neophobia Scale and the Restrained Eating subscale of the Dutch Eating Behaviour Questionnaire. This was complemented by the food frequency questionnaire to provide more detailed dietary information. Three data collections were carried out throughout the academic years. Meiselman et al. report a strong indication that university students' food attitudes remain stable throughout major changes in living environments over a reasonable period of time. According to their results, university students' thinking about, and practice in, food do not change after entering university and living in a different environment. However, the authors emphasise the need for further research on the effects of the change in living environments on food choice, acceptance and consumption. A need for further longitudinal studies was also underscored in this paper.

Meiselman et al.'s (1999) initial hypothesis was that university students' eating behaviour would change in different living environments. However, the results in their study did not confirm their hypothesis. Some observations are made on their findings.

Firstly, the authors contend that the three scales that were employed to measure university students' eating behaviours, have demonstrated long-term stability, and are therefore valuable. Nevertheless, the authors did not explain the link between the demonstrated long-term stability and the validity of their measurements. Hence, whether students' 'eating behaviours' can actually be measured by the three selected scales is questionable. Even though students' 'eating behaviours' are stable in different living environments, it is not to say students' food practices are unchanged. Therefore, the authors also underlined the importance of future

work to examine university students' 'food choice, acceptance and consumption' in different living situations (Meiselman et al., 1999:7).

Secondly, the accuracy of self-reporting can be challenged. This consideration might be more salient in this longitudinal study because of its frequent data collection. Students in their study were becoming more familiar with the questionnaires in each data collection and the extent to which this has an effect on the results is unclear. Furthermore, being in this study might also change students' 'eating behaviours' or at least make students more conscious of their diet during the time being studied.

Finally, even though Meiselman et al. (1999) tried to understand university students' changes in 'eating behaviours' by adopting a 'longitudinal' measurement, they have not examined students' 'living situations'. Detail about students' accommodations and types of catering were omitted in this paper. It appears that the authors assumed that university students' living situations are more or less similar and therefore the authors might have underestimated the effects that students' living situations can have on their food practices.

Extending their previous study (Meiselman et al., 1999), Edwards and Meiselman (2003) carried out another study investigating the changes in 'dietary habits' during students' first year at university. Unlike their previous study (Meiselman et al., 1999), the objective of this study concentrates on the changes in university students' energy and macronutrient intake during their first year. Students in their study were asked to report their changes of nutritional intake from when they left home to later in their first year. Similar to their previous study (Meiselman et al., 1999) the students in this study were also recruited from a range of

degrees associated with food and catering management. In this paper (Edwards and Meiselman, 2003), the researchers have paid extra attention to the potential effects that students' subjects of study might have on their dietary habits. According to Edwards and Meiselman (2003), the dietary patterns in the control group, which is the students from non-food business disciplines, are similar to the students in food related disciplines. Therefore, the authors believe that students' subjects of study do not play a crucial role in their dietary pattern. However, it ought to be pointed out that all students in the control group are from business related disciplines. Hence, it is questionable whether students' subjects of study would lead to differences in their food practices. Although food and business related disciplines might not have apparent connection, this thesis demonstrates in Chapter Eight that the ways in which students think and present themselves might be linked to the domain of their study.

In Edwards and Meiselman's research (2003), all the students were studying at Bournemouth University when they took part. Most of them lived in arranged catered accommodations. Edwards and Meiselman again adopted the food frequency questionnaire to record students' detailed diet. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire over two to four weeks prior to coming to university. In this research, students had to report not only their diet but also their physical measurements such as weight and height. Only students who completed three stages of data collection were selected as participants, which might compromise the integrity of their data. This potential problem is also identified by the researchers themselves, who point out that this might reduce the validity of their results. Edwards and Meiselman (2003) report no significant Body Mass Index (BMI) change in first year students, even though a decline of energy intake was reported. Their speculation is that this might be due to a decrease of energy

expenditure after students entered university. However, they do not have data about students' physical activities and therefore suggest further research. This finding, nonetheless, has contradicted a general belief in American studies in the university student population (Anderson et al., 2003, Cluskey and Grobe, 2009, Delinsky and Wilson, 2008, Pliner, 2008). Many American authors have reported that first year university students are predisposed to a moderate weight gain, though a few argue this is simply a myth (Hodge and Jackson, 1993). It is not clear whether this difference between the two countries is due to cultural differences or whether it is a result of the methods that were adopted. Students in Edwards and Meiselman's study (2003) were asked to report their physical measurements whereas most American researchers (e.g. Cluskey and Grobe, 2009, Delinsky and Wilson, 2008) actually took the measurements. The accuracy of self-reporting physical measurements is subjected to criticism. This was also pointed out by the authors in the discussion and justified by a study carried out by Strauss in 1999. According to Edwards and Meiselman (2003), Strauss' study found an overall correlation between 0.87 and 0.94 for weight and 0.82 and 0.91 for height in adolescents' self-reporting height and weight. Edwards and Meiselman did not elaborate on what these figures in Strauss' study might indicate but drew the conclusion that the self-reporting of height, weight and dietary intake should be sufficiently accurate. It appears that Edwards and Meiselman might have suggested that the adolescents' self-reporting of weight and height in Strauss' study is rather accurate. Hence, the self-reporting of physical measurements by university students was also supposed to be reliable. Nonetheless, Strauss' study examined a sample of adolescents aged from twelve to sixteen years. The population examined by Strauss was different from Edwards and Meiselman's study. It is unclear whether this difference in population might affect the accuracy of self-reporting measurements.

Hence, the finding in this study about students' weight gain and changes in BMI has to be read with cautions.

Moreover, the students in Edwards and Meiselman's (2003) study were asked to report their prior diet at home retrospectively. Since it is uncertain how much and how accurately students were able to remember their food intake during that particular period of time, the validity of their data might also be compromised. Similar to their previous study (Meiselman et al., 1999), female students considerably outnumbered male students in this study- with a total of one hundred and fifty-eight female and only seventy-nine male participants. The female-dominant research tendency is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The possibility that being research respondents might change students' eating behaviours was again overlooked in Edwards and Meiselman's paper (2003). Participating students in their study might have been more aware of their decisions about food and their weight because they know that these would be documented. This might inadvertently result in a change of their food practices, consciously or not. It has been identified that their previous study (Meiselman et al., 1999) has overlooked the importance of students' living situations at university. In this paper, the researchers have included information about students' accommodations (Edwards and Meiselman, 2003). Only students who lived in university catered accommodations were recruited. According to the authors, students lived in 'small hotels and bed and breakfast establishments' (Edwards and Meiselman, 2003:22) and therefore it is very likely that students' eating was affected by the type of food that was provided in different catered accommodations. The authors appear to have not, once again, taken students' living situations into consideration.

A recent study was carried out to examine American university students' weight gain and the related changes of food behaviour during the transition to university. Cluskey and Gorbe (2009) argue that, although students' weight gain early in their university life has been well documented in the American literature, studies examining the differences between genders on this weight gain are still insufficient. They also stress the importance of investigating university students' food behaviour because it is a period of transition for young adults to 'establish behaviours' (Cluskey and Grobe, 2009:325). The food behaviours adopted during this period, according to Cluskey and Grobe, can 'initiate life-long weight struggle and associated health problems' (Cluskey and Grobe, 2009:325). Therefore, the authors intended to find out the role that gender plays during students' transition to university in food. The study was conducted between October and December 2005. They started with weight assessments with first year students at the beginning of the term, which was in October. This was followed by four same-sex focus groups: two for each sex. In December, students' weight was measured again to see the change during this period of time. Cluskey and Grobe claim that first year university students in their study reported difficulties whilst trying to eat healthily in the transition to university. Moreover, they argue that most of their respondents recognised the environmental influences on their healthy lifestyle. Students who lived on campus found it difficult to eat healthily whereas more students who lived off campus claimed to be surprised by the time and the money required in eating healthily. In their study, Cluskey and Grobe (2009) try to understand university students' accounts about what they regarded as 'healthy lifestyle' and whether they considered themselves living in one before and after entering university. Moreover, in order to understand the process of transition, the authors also asked questions about students' lifestyle back at home when they lived with their parents. Regardless of

their attempt to investigate changes in students' food behaviours in their transition to university, their analysis of students' food practices treated university as a static period of time. It was found that the changes in students' food practices that occur after entering university are not fully explored.

In this paper, Cluskey and Grobe (2009) conclude that university students did not talk about the long-term impact of their diet in the focus groups. This observation is found to be rather curious considering the questions being asked in the focus groups concerned mainly 'healthy lifestyle' rather than their food or eating. It should not be surprising that students did not address the issue specifically in the focus groups. This, therefore, cannot be interpreted as that university students did not think eating healthily is a crucial part of a 'healthy lifestyle'. It might be simply because there are many other practices that were considered as 'healthy lifestyle' and food and eating is only one of them. When students were asked about their lifestyle back at home, they provided retrospective accounts. The authors, nonetheless, seem to have treated these retrospective accounts as the reality in their data analysis. It can be argued that it was simply students' interpretation and presentation of the 'reality' in the past.

Unlike Edwards and Meiselman (Edwards and Meiselman, 2003, Meiselman et al., 1999), Cluskey and Grobe (2009) have identified that living environments can contribute to students', borrowing their term, 'food behaviour'. However, they appear to have failed to recognise the differences between living 'environments' and living 'situations'. Their comparison between students who lived 'on' and 'off' campus only concerns students' living 'environments'. The types of catering facilities provided to students in these environments are not indicated: no information is given

about whether students lived on campus were catered for, and whether students lived off campus catered for themselves. In other words, students' 'food behaviours' might be affected not only by where they lived, but also by the types of accommodations and the types of catering facilities that were available to them. Not only this, it is not clear whether the differences expressed by students living in the two different accommodations is a result from their living environment or self-selection into different living environments. This question can only be answered by a future study investigating food transitions in various living situations with the same group of university students.

A general research trajectory can be observed in the four studies that have been reviewed. Much effort has been devoted to investigate students' diet or 'eating behaviour'. Even though Gluskey and Grobe (2009) use the term 'food behaviour' instead of 'diet' or 'eating behaviour', the major aim of their study was to examine the changes in students' eating but not other aspects of food practices. A lack of sociological attention is found in this domain of study. This can be benefited by further research exploring the social implications in students' transitions in food practices to university, investigating not only their diet, but also other food activities.

3.4 Living situations and university students' food practices

As demonstrated in the previous section, students' living situations have long been marginalised in the literature of university students and food. Some studies have looked at students living in university catered accommodation, e.g. Edwards and Meiselman (2003), and students living in university self-catered accommodation, e.g. Eves et al. (1995). Nevertheless, these studies did not explain their decisions to investigate

students in such accommodation nor did they consider it as a factor that might contribute to university students' food practices. In their paper, Cluskey and Gorbe (2009) briefly discuss the influence of students' living environments on their thinking about food but the discussion is rather limited because it is not the main focus of their study.

Brevard and Ricketts' study (1996) compared American university students' dietary intake, physical activity and serum lipid levels between those who lived on and off campus. Similar to Cluskey and Grobe's paper (2009), the authors have not explained whether students lived in different environments were catered for or not. These works seem to have been written for an American audience, made assumptions about 'common knowledge' that are not shared by readers outside America.

Brevard and Ricketts (1996) report that students who lived outside campus had significantly higher percentage energy intake from protein. According to them, this suggests that students who lived outside campus had a wider variety of food range to choose comparing to students who lived on campus. Brevard and Ricketts further suspect that students who lived outside campus might have less money to spend on food. They suggest that the limited budget would results in off campus students' consuming less fried and fast food and thus being more likely to consume leaner protein. Furthermore, they report similar serum lipid levels from both groups of students who lived on and off campus. However, students living outside campus had significantly higher triglyceride levels and higher ratio of total cholesterol to high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C), which is sometimes referred as the 'good cholesterol'. A higher level of HDL bound cholesterol is said to help prevent cardiovascular diseases, although its role and the mechanism involved are still inconclusive (Gordon et al., 1989,

Pocock et al., 1986). It appears that Brevard and Ricketts are convinced that students who lived outside campus have a 'healthier' diet and this is why a higher ratio of HDL-C was found amongst them. However, higher triglyceride levels were also found in this supposedly 'healthier' group. To explain this, Brevard and Ricketts argue that many lifestyle factors would contribute to serum triglyceride level in addition to living situations, and therefore they believe that the higher triglyceride levels found amongst students who lived off campus should not be regarded as the result of students' residential circumstances alone. Brevard and Ricketts further report a higher level of weekly energy expenditure and HDL-C level amongst women lived on campus and suspect that this might be due to easier access to exercise facilities. They conclude that women who lived on campus exercise more than those who lived outside campus.

It is rather curious that Brevard and Ricketts (1996) only tried to examine students' serum lipid level when fat is only a part of students' diet. According to Brevard and Ricketts, this is because of the well documented assumption that university students exceed the recommended allowance of fat. Although excessive fat intake is believed to be one of the factors that might increase people's risk of suffering cardiovascular diseases, it is perhaps over-simplifying the issue to assume that examining people's fat intake can provide much information about their risks of getting heart-related diseases. Furthermore, the debate about HDL-C's role in prevention of cardiovascular disease is still inconclusive, which might reduce the alleged implications of their study. Not only this, their data analysis is found to be rather inconsistent and sometimes selective. Further explanations might be required to justify the proposition that students who lived outside campus might have more variety in their diet because they had a higher percentage of energy intake from protein. Not only this,

Brevard and Ricketts (1996) might need to be more cautious when making the assumption that students who lived outside campus had less money for food, and therefore were more likely to eat leaner protein, when they do not have empirical data to support this speculation. Their finding of higher triglyceride level amongst students living outside campus appears to have contradicted their previous argument and thus they conveniently argue that this might be a result of other factors in addition to students' residential circumstances. In their analysis about students' energy expenditure, one of their conclusions considers only female students without any justification. The inconsistency of their analysis might have been a consequence of trying to explain their theory with data and inevitably failed to treat their data with neutrality.

Similar to some of the works that have been mentioned previously, the number of the participating female students in Brevard and Ricketts' study (1996) is considerably higher than male students but no reason was given. The dominance of female students in the studies on university students and food is rather pervasive. However, few studies have explained the special attention that has been given to female students. For instance, one hundred and twenty-eight female students participated in the study carried out by Mesiselman et al. (1999) whereas only seventy male students were involved. Although gender differences might not be considered relevant to their research objectives, the female dominance might affect the outcome of their findings and therefore should be addressed in their works. The experience of this thesis suggests that the female dominance in research participation may be a result of the recruiting process. In the process of recruitment, more female students responded to this study than male students. This is discussed later, in Chapter Four.

Just as in the literature of the sociology of food, gender and family, the female population appears to have been the focus of scholarly attention, explicitly or implicitly. Hence, this thesis proposes that a balanced gender account might provide a perspective that female-dominated research has overlooked.

From the studies reviewed so far, it can be seen that there are still some elements lacking in the current literature about university students' transitions in food practices. First of all, previous studies seem to have treated university students' accounts in a rather static manner. This thesis suspects that university students' food practices might be more dynamic. This might be due to fluctuations in income; their curricular and extra curricular activities throughout the terms and their parents' help in supplying food and money. The ways in which they handle food are likely to change continuously as they gain more experience. Therefore, it is very likely that their food practices at an earlier stage in university would be different from a later stage, particularly if their living situations have changed during this period. Secondly, the amount of research that looks at the transitions in university students' food practices remains limited, especially in the domain of sociology of food and eating. In short, little sociological attention has been given to the transitions in students' food practices from home to university and in different living situations at university.

3.5 Transition to marriage/cohabitation

The following sociological study investigates people's food transitions when they moved in with other people. Although the authors did not specifically examine the university period, their work provides an example of a

sociological perspective on changes in food practices through life transitions.

Kemmer et al. (1998a, 1998b) conducted an exploratory study seeking to examine the changes in food practices when people plan to get married in the near future and the changes that occur in the first three months of their marriage. This study was carried out in Scotland, with twenty-two couples who volunteered to participate. The recruited couples were living apart and planning to move in together. An interview approach and dietary assessments was adopted and carried out before and three months after marriage⁸. Their study examines the transition of the couples' food practices before and after 'marriage' using three different methods: semi-structured interview, questionnaire and physical assessments. Kemmer et al. investigated food practices of all kinds in the couples' lives. They describe early marriage/cohabitation as a period of transition. The authors suggest that cohabitation is a process of socialisation, in which individuals negotiate new attitudes, values and norms, which are acceptable for cohabiters to adopt. Food practices, according to them, are one of the major themes to be negotiated. In this study, the negotiation between the couple was examined in terms of gender-role and the concept of eating healthily. Kemmer et al. (1998b) found that the negotiation of food and eating appears to be a central issue for newly married couples. The new couples in their studies expressed their surprise at the time and efforts and considerations that have to be put into food practices. Furthermore, some couples in their study also reported their astonishment at the extent to which food practices can have such an emotional impact on their

⁸ This is the term the authors used (p.199). However, they described the couples as planning to move in together rather than getting married. It is, therefore, not clear whether the recruited couples were getting married or simply moving in together.

relationship. Changes in diet were found in these couples, largely associated with evening meals.

Kemmer et al. (1998b) also found that food practices after marriage were more likely to be planned compared to when they were still single. One of the prominent examples the researchers gave was food shopping. They found that food shopping is more likely to be made as a routine after the couple got married. Although the couples tend to go shopping together, the main responsibility for food shopping appears to be laid on women.

Kemmer et al. (1998b) also examined the strong emphasis on eating a 'proper meal' in the evening. They report that this was not simply because it is an occasion for the couples to sit down together and have meals. They argue that it was strongly emphasised because of the notion of sharing food.

Similar to other studies in the sociology of food and eating, women are reported to be the one who prepares food in Kemmer et al.'s study. In addition, women claimed to pay extra attention to the connection between food and health. This was also confirmed by men in their study, who claimed that their diets had improved after cohabitation. Kemmer et al. concluded that the transition from single to cohabitation status can be an important factor affecting one's food practices.

From Kemmer et al.'s study, it can be seen that people's food practices are not static but rather dynamic. This is even made more pronounced when there are changes in living situations and in their relationship. When a couple move in together, the changes in living situations and their relationship are likely to affect their food practices. In return, their food

practices can also contribute to their relationship. Kemmer et al. have provided a thorough sociological account on the transition in couples' food practices before and after cohabitation. This includes the negotiation of the choices in food, the adaptation of social assigned gender roles, and the emotion that is attached to food. Not only this, Kemmer et al. also introduced the notion that people's food practices are not only affected by the change of living situations and environments, but are also closely tied to the changes of relationship with cohabiters. This is to say that whilst examining people's food transitions, it is important to examine not only their change of living situations but also their change of relationship with cohabiters. Their study has provided a sociological perspective that is still lacking in the literature of students' transition in food practices to university.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided the conceptual background for this thesis. Literature in sociology of food, gender and family has been reviewed and findings presented. This is to provide the general research direction on this domain of study. It is found that in the studies about food and family, much weight is given to the topic of gender. Literature has demonstrated that it is usually women who are in charge of food preparation in families. Therefore, most studies have been carried out with women. Murcott (1982) provides an influential analysis on the social significance of a folk concept, the 'cooked dinner' in South Wales. The cooked dinner is considered essential for family health and welfare. Moreover, she reports that the cooked dinner embodies the home, the family members' relations to the home, and women's place in it.

Charles and Kerr (1988) report that food practices at home are socially constructed. The ways in which food is obtained, prepared and served are said to be done as conforming to the social norms. The social norms, in turn, are recreated by the food practices. Along these lines, DeVault (1991) argues that the act of 'feeding the family' produces family. It is through the ideal feeding work that the ideal family is embodied.

The current literature investigating students' transitions in food practices to university remains marginalised. The selection of the literature, as a result, is inevitably multidisciplinary. A general aim of the literature is to 'improve' university students' diet. This general aim has resulted in the emphasis on the transitions of students' diet or 'eating habits' to university. As a consequence, other aspects of food transitions have been neglected. Many studies that intended to demonstrate the process of transitions appear to have treated university as a static period. Hence, the changes that were examined in these studies are limited to the changes between home and university. The transitions that happen during the university period have been overlooked. The assumed static food practices over university period have led to an oversight of the effect of students' living situations. This chapter has also summarised the studies which tried to investigate university students' diet and their living environments (e.g. Cluskey and Grobe, 2009, Meiselman et al., 1999), the differences between 'living environment' and 'living situation' have been omitted. Most studies comparing university students' living environments and their eating have only divided students into those who live 'on' and 'off' campus. Their comparisons are undoubtedly valuable because students would have different access to different food and kitchen facilities in various accommodations. Nonetheless, whether these students were catered for in those accommodations was not explained.

Furthermore, it appears that scholarly interests in students' transitions in food practices have been concentrated on a nutritional perspective. A lack of sociological account in the domain was found. Therefore, a sociological work investigating food transitions in newlyweds is reviewed (Kemmer et al., 1998b, Kemmer et al., 1998a). Their study shows that people's transitions in food are not only tied to the change of living situations, but also to the change of relationship with their cohabiters.

As has been presented in Chapter Two, this thesis intends to review the three theoretical approaches towards food and eating with interview method through Goffman's lens. This chapter has identified a lack of sociological account in the research of students' transitions in food practices from home to university. Therefore, this thesis proposes a study to explore university students' discourse about their food practices. Emphases are placed upon, firstly, the ways in which students talk about the transitions over their university lives and, secondly, the ways in which the three theoretical approaches are embedded in their discourse about food practices.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCESS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how the research was designed and carried out. To begin, both practical and theoretical reasons for choosing to investigate a university student population are given here. A semi-structured interview approach was adopted and a full account of the data collection process is detailed in this chapter. This is followed by a discussion of the analytical strategy employed to interpret the data obtained. The analytical strategy is referred to as 'thematic analysis' in this thesis; however, some ideas were taken from the broad field of discourse analysis. Hence, a general introduction of discourse analysis is given as background and thematic analysis is foregrounded. When analysing the interview data, both a realist and an interpretivist perspective were adopted. Hence, a discussion of these two paradigms is also carried out in this chapter. Finally, this chapter provides an account of the limitations of the methods adopted in this thesis.

4.2 Why study university students?

University students were chosen to be investigated in this thesis for both practical and theoretical reasons. First of all, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, research on students' transitions in food practices from home to university remains limited, particularly in the UK. The research trajectory of this small literature is currently somewhat one-dimensional. Hence, this thesis proposes a study to add a sociological perspective. Secondly, this thesis is interested in people's transitions in food practices in different living situations. A student population is ideal to provide such accounts on their transitions from home to university. This thesis has assumed that

university is a rather peculiar stage in people's lives. It is a period of time when many students move away from their family, into a distinctively defined organisational setting that includes a certain range of living arrangements, as well as some element of parental care. For many, it is the first time that they have to worry about feeding themselves and managing their own finances. Money is sometimes very limited. In addition, most university students have to feed themselves, regardless of their gender. There might be, thus, a higher ratio of males who cook on a daily basis within the student population than in other demographic groups, in which females are often expected to be responsible for food preparation. Therefore, the levels of food involvement⁹ of male and female university students were expected to be quite similar. More discussions about food involvement can be found in Eertmans et al.'s paper (2005). Thirdly, before data collection began, it was assumed that it would be easier to gain access to the university student population than other populations, as I am a student working in the university environment. This assumption, however, was proved to be incorrect during the process of data collection, which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Fourthly, university students are a group of people who supposedly spend most of their time acquiring academic knowledge. This thesis was curious about whether this population is more responsive to received information and knowledge than other demographic groups in society. Finally, as discussed previously, one of the initial objectives of this research was to explore people's views on the application of new technology to food using the case study of GM food. Therefore, this study was originally designed to compare the views of students' from Natural/Biological Science, and Humanities and Social Science (HSS) disciplines. This is to see whether university students from

⁹ Food involvement is defined as 'The level of importance of food in a person's life', namely the extent to which a person worries about food' (Eertmans et al., 2005).

different disciplines would have more (and those from similar disciplines would have less) divergent views on GM food. I was intrigued by questions such as: if students' views are susceptible to the differences in their subjects of study, is this a result of the different information they received from their courses, the ways in which they are trained to think, or are there other factors that contribute to this difference?

4.3 Sampling strategies

This research was initially designed as an exploratory study, which did not set out to verify or falsify a hypothesis. This approach is similar to what is known by some as 'grounded theory'. Although not strictly following the approach described in Glaser and Strauss' (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, in essence, the methods adopted in this study are similar. However, this thesis does not intend to subscribe to the full theoretical commitments of grounded theory portrayed in Glaser and Strauss's book. Instead, it hopes to contribute to theoretical developments in the study of food and eating as well as to the understanding of university students' food practices.

The sampling strategy adopted in this thesis is often referred to as 'theoretical' or 'purposive' sampling strategy. This sampling strategy was also borrowed from grounded theory approach. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), theoretical sampling is 'the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges' (1967:45). Similarly, Mason (2002) writes that, 'theoretical or purposive sampling is a set of procedures where the researcher manipulates their data generation, analysis, theory,

and sampling activities *interactively* during the research process to a much greater extent than in statistical sampling' (2002:137). In their book, Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain that researchers who use a theoretical sampling strategy would have a general concept about their research but they would not know the relevance of these concepts to their research questions. The relation of these concepts is supposed to emerge in the process of data collection. In this study, students were recruited according to a set of criteria. Glaser and Strauss (1967) stress that it is important for the researcher to understand that he/she is an 'active sampler' of theoretical data, rather than an ethnographer who tries to document everything in the field.

Most of the sampling decisions in this thesis were made after the initial research questions about GM food were formulated, some of these have been modified during the process and others kept. Twenty-nine semi-structured interviews, six kitchen visits and four accompanied shopping trips were carried out with undergraduate students at the University of Nottingham. Due to the limited time and resources, students from other universities were excluded. All the participants were British citizens. This was to narrow down the scope of the cultural differences in their food practices. It is recognised that not all British students have similar cultural backgrounds: this criterion was simply employed as a tool to minimise the obvious cultural differences. Nevertheless, this recruitment criterion has resulted in some issues during the recruitment process, as shown in the following discussion.

Two participating students who identified themselves as British citizens were found to have spent most of their lives in other countries. There was concern that their food experiences might be different from other British

students who grew up in the UK; however, this difference was not found in their discourse. The ways in which these students talked about food were similar to those who grew up in the UK and have British parents. This might be due to the fact that both of these students have British parents and as a result, their discourse about food at home is similar to students who also come from British families and grew up in the UK. On the other hand, three students in this study identified themselves as coming from non-British families but grew up in the UK. Their food practices at home were described as combining both cultures, namely that of their ethnicity of origin and British culture. However, the ways in which they talked about their food practices at university were found to be similar to other university students who come from British families. This demonstrates that students' discourse about their food practices at home might be more affected by their family identity, including its cultural background. When students talked about food practices at university, they might stress their own identity as students studying at the same university. Therefore, their discourse about food practices after entering university appears to share more similar features. This speculation is confirmed in the shift of focus in constructing personal and institutional images, which is presented later in the data chapters.

Students' ethnic background was not one of the recruitment criteria of this study. It was initially included but later relaxed due to the difficulties encountered in the recruitment. This decision was also made due to the uncertainty about the extent to which students' food practices are affected by their ethnic background as they have spent most of their lives in the UK. First year undergraduate students were excluded from this study because one of the main objectives of this study is to investigate the transitions in students' food practices throughout their university life. First year students,

therefore, can only provide their accounts at an early stage of this transition. Furthermore, seven pilot interviews were carried out with first year undergraduate students. Most of them lived in catered halls where they did not have to worry about food. Consequently, it was found that they did not have much to say about their food practices at university. Not only this, it was also found that first year students' limited experiences with their studies might not be sufficient to provide accounts of the differences and similarities between science and HSS students. Therefore, it was decided to recruit students from their second year onwards. It appears to be the University of Nottingham's tradition that first years students live in university accommodation and then moved to private accommodation in their second year. Therefore, all the participating students were living in private accommodation at the time of interview.

The age of students was not initially included in the recruitment criteria, assuming most second and third year students would be within the age range of 18 to 25 years. Nonetheless, several mature students responded to the advertisements of this study. The recruitment criteria were then revised to add an age restriction to make sure the length of students' food experiences was more or less similar.

The comparison groups selected in this study are science/HSS students and male/female students. Similar numbers of science/HSS and male/female students were recruited to provide a balanced account of the four chosen groups. The reasons for choosing groups for comparison, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), is threefold, namely the conceptual level, the population scope and it also 'provides simultaneous maximisation or minimisation of both the differences and the similarities of data that bear on the categories being studied' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:55). On a

conceptual level, this thesis tries to look at the discourse of male and female students from both science and HSS disciplines. As seen in Chapter Three, gender is considered as one of the most fundamental issues in the literature of sociology of food and eating. Therefore, this thesis wishes to investigate the role that gender plays in university students' food practices. As for science and HSS students, this thesis tries to compare the framing they adopted to talk about food issues. Therefore, the four groups selected are believed to be appropriate on a conceptual level. Moreover, knowing that it is impossible to study the whole student population, identifying the groups for comparison provides an achievable scope for this thesis. Finally, the importance of control over similarities and differences is stressed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), who claim that it is vital for sociologists to control the theoretical relevance of their data collection. They argue that it is through minimising differences that sociologists can collect similar data from a category. The similarities in data, in turn, help to verify the existence of that particular category. Therefore, this thesis tried to minimise the differences amongst students, e.g. excluding mature students. Simultaneously, the similarities demonstrated in the four proposed student groups also confirmed the existence of these groups.

One of the features of the theoretical sampling became rather salient during the recruitment process. Although a general sampling strategy was decided beforehand, these decisions were constantly revised and modified as the recruitment continued. In theoretical sampling, the sampling processes, data generation and data analysis are considered dynamically and interactively. This is said to be a process of developing theory. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), this avoids the loss of theoretical sensitivity, which they describe as a personal quality of the researcher. Theoretical sensitivity indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning

in the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) further claim that each researcher has varying degrees of sensitivity depending on his/her previous reading and experiences within the study domain. Since there was no preconceived hypothesis to be tested in this thesis, keeping the sampling strategy process dynamic in order to collect data that are more relevant to the emerging themes was thought to be appropriate.

Although the initial research questions of this study were concerned with GM food, during the recruitment all the students were told that it was a study about food in general. This was to avoid only recruiting students who were particularly interested (or not) in GM food, as it was thought that they might have stronger views on this topic having paid more attention to it. This is, of course, a group of students who cannot be overlooked; however, I believed that other groups of students should also be included in this study. It can, of course, be argued that students who responded to the recruitment might be more interested in food. The scope of 'food' in general, however, is much broader than the topic of GM food. Moreover, as a research topic, food in general is much less controversial than GM food and therefore was considered appropriate for inclusion in the recruitment advertisement. The original aim of this study was to put GM food back into the context of food more broadly. Therefore, the interviews were designed to examine whether GM food was considered as 'food' in general by university students. As a result, a large section of the interviews investigated university students' discourse about food more generally. Subsequently, the claim that this study is about food should not be considered as a deception. Furthermore, this consideration became even less important once the direction of the study was modified to explore university students' discourse about their food transitions to university.

4.3.1 Gender distinctions in food topics

It was found in this thesis that female students were more likely to respond to the recruitment advertisements than male students. Gender differences in conversational topics since 1922 are discussed in Bischooping's paper (1993). In this paper, she roughly divides the factors that might contribute to these gender differences into two categories: 'biological' and 'non-biological'. This thesis does not intend to discuss 'biological' factors because their impact on men and women's interests in conversation topics is still an ongoing debate (Bischooping, 1993). Subsequently, attention is focused on the 'non-biological' factors that might explain the higher response rate of female university students in this thesis. It is possible that food as a research topic is more appealing to female students than male students because women are historically seen as responsible for preparing meals across various cultures as reported in Chapter Three. Moreover, females are more likely to be under social pressure to practice self-restraint and maintain a thinner body than males (e.g. Craig et al., 2007, Fallon and Rozin, 1985, Mori et al., 1987). Subsequently, food might be thought of as more relevant to females than males in most cultures, including the UK. A study investigating food practices may seem more appealing to female students. This might also be one of the reasons that the current literature about food and eating across various disciplines put undue weight on women's accounts and experiences, as identified in Chapter Three. There are many other potential factors that might also contribute to this gender difference. This study cannot identify all of them but would like to propose what can be investigated in future research. These include questions such as whether females are more likely to respond to research of all subjects. Whether female students pay more attention to research advertisements on campus and to research recruitment emails. After reviewing some of the qualitative methods

literature (e.g. Bornat, 2004), it was found that most discussions about gender are devoted to the gender differences in people's performance and engagement in interviews. Little attention has been drawn to the differences in willingness to participate in research between genders. This study argues that the higher response rate of female students is a result of various factors, one of which is that female students might be more interested in the topic of food.

4.3.2 Difficulties in sample recruitment

It proved difficult to recruit students for interviews. I began by asking other postgraduates who taught undergraduates to circulate invitations in their classes. However, this produced no responses, so I decided to approach students directly. Eleven students were approached in various venues on the university campus: four postgraduates, two first year undergraduates and five second and fourth year undergraduates. Students who matched my requirements were reluctant to participate due to the potential length of the interview. Some asked whether there was any incentive. When they learned there was not, all refused to take part. Advertisements were also posted at various locations on campus and emails circulated with the help of administrative staff in different departments. Neither strategy produced any responses. In the absence of an incentive, students seemed reluctant to devote such a long time to talk about food to a stranger. This led me to reflect on why people participate in research at all.

Singer (2002) suggests that people take part in research for three main reasons: first, for 'altruistic' reasons - to fulfil a social obligation; second, out of interest - participants might find the research questions interesting

or want to learn more about the subject; finally, from a personal obligation towards the researcher. The study's topic did not appear to trigger any sense of social responsibility. Students did not consider food and eating to be interesting topics. One described the theme as a bit 'random'. Some students saw the study as my personal asset- that its objective was more to gain a PhD than to contribute to knowledge. If they agreed to participate, it would just be a favour to me. Since I was a complete stranger, their reluctance was not surprising. Because the students themselves so frequently raised the issue of incentives, I decided that these would have to be offered.

4.3.3 To pay or not to pay

Offering an incentive could benefit recruitment in several respects. First, it would encourage participation by students from more varied backgrounds and increase the chances of finding participants who matched the sampling criteria. Second, I discovered, in posting advertisements, that many other studies offered incentives for participation. As Singer (2002) notes, the growing use of incentives in survey research seems to be leading potential participants to expect an incentive. Although this is not a survey, the consequences are similar: the student population now seems to regard the provision of incentives as normal practice and do not seem willing to participate in studies without them. Finally, participants were asked to encourage their friends to consider participating. It seems that they would be readier to do this if an incentive were being offered. Otherwise, participants would be asking their friends for a personal favour, which they would be unlikely to do for a researcher they have known for such a short time. However, the disadvantages of incentives must also be acknowledged.

First, incentives could affect the data. Singer and Kulka (2002) suggest that incentives can influence participants' mood and thus change their responses to at least some survey questions. However, this was not considered to be a problem for this particular study, as it seemed unlikely that students would talk about their food practices differently if given an incentive. It might also be argued that students would be encouraged to tell the researcher what they think she wants to hear, if an incentive is offered. Again, this is unlikely to be a problem for this particular study, because the main research focus emerged through the analysis of students' discourse so it is unlikely that they would have known what I was looking for. Moreover, students were asked to give specific examples of their food practices in the interview as an internal check on its validity.

Finally, the ethics of payment for research participation should be considered (e.g. Chambers, 2001, Grady, 2001, Singer, 2002, Singer and Kulka, 2002). The major concern is whether an offer of payment would make disadvantaged students more likely to participate in the research. For example, McKeganey (2001) argues that people might agree to participate in research that offers incentives, even though their preference may be to decline. However, very few students consented to take part before being given a general idea of the research topic, suggesting that they were not agreeing to participate purely because of the incentive. Nevertheless, its provision is definitely a considerable motivation for students.

The incentive has to be chosen carefully because some people might be more responsive to certain types of incentive than others, affecting the composition of the participating group. Most importantly, the incentive would have to be sufficiently appealing to students. Cash seems to be the most effective incentive for most people (Singer, 2002). It was, though,

considered to be inappropriate for this study because the incentive might place too much pressure on impoverished students, who would be less able to make a free choice about participation. A monetary incentive might also be used for ethically undesirable purposes such as buying drugs or alcohol. After careful consideration, it was decided that book or gift vouchers would be most appropriate, since students could use them to buy things they actually needed. A range of suppliers was offered, to limit any impact on the composition of the sample. Vouchers also provided a solution to the use of incentives for undesirable purposes: students could only spend them in major UK retailers or book shops.

4.3.4 An incentive does not mean access

With the introduction of an incentive, it was assumed that recruitment would be easier. However, the problem of disseminating information was still not resolved. Administrative staff in various departments were approached again and asked to re-circulate the information about this study via email, with the additional detail of the incentives. This effort proved more effective. Some students responded and agreed to take part: however, they said that the email had not reached all the students on their courses. This may explain why the response was still less than expected. The amount offered was increased due to concerns that it was not sufficiently enticing, although it seemed reasonable in comparison to medical research incentives (McKeganey, 2001). This was confirmed by participants, all of whom agreed that its value was reasonable for their effort. According to some students, the problem lay more with the efficient circulation of the information rather than the incentive itself. Therefore, all the participating students were asked to pass on invitations to their friends.

The university timetable may also have hindered recruitment. The process started in April 2007, which is shortly before undergraduate exams begin. Therefore, students might not have had much time spare to participate. More responses were received after the exam weeks, but many students were then leaving for their summer holidays. While the timing may have been an obstacle to recruitment, similar issues are likely to recur throughout the academic year: university students are occupied by multiple curricular and extra-curricular tasks during term time. Data collection was finally concluded in December 2007. Although this period was extended by the difficulties in recruitment, it provided an opportunity to talk to students over an extended period of time in the context of their food practices at different phases of the academic year.

4.4 Data collection

This section documents the ways in which this study was carried out and explains why it was carried out like this.

4.4.1 The choice of methods

A semi-structured interview approach was adopted in this study. Interviewing is an approach that has been well established over the years. In this study, it was adopted because the initial research questions were concerned with whether university students talk about GM food in the same way that they talk about food in general. An interview approach was believed to be able to provide good data for this research question. After the research questions were changed, the interview was still believed to be the most appropriate research method to investigate university students' discourse about their food transitions to university for the following reasons. Mason (2002) suggests that the choice of an interview approach

should involve both ontological and epistemological considerations. She proposes that in terms of ontological consideration, an interview approach is chosen because 'your ontological position suggests that people's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality which your research questions are designed to explore' (Mason, 2002:63). She further suggests that if an interview approach is chosen, the researcher should 'have an epistemological position which allows a legitimate or meaningful way to generate data on these ontological properties' (Mason, 2002:64). She argues that before the researcher chooses to adopt the interview approach, they should consider whether they have the access to talk interactively with their interviewees, whether they have access to their accounts or to analyse their use of language and construction of discourse. Interviewing has been criticised for the likelihood that the interviewee is concerned what he or she says in the interview might influence the interviewer's perception of his or her competence as a member of whatever community is invoked by the topic (e.g. Dingwall, 1997). The data obtained from that interview are likely to be social constructs, created by the self-presentation of the interviewee and the cues given by the interviewer perceived by the interviewees. Hence, one common critique is that interview data cannot be treated as the literal descriptions of the respondents' reality (Dingwall, 1997). However, some authors argue that the interviewees' selection of detail and the choice of facts can help to indicate respondent's reality. The information we receive in real life contains a mixture of the reality and the representation. According to Moore, there is no reason why the information we receive in the interview as researchers should be any different from the real life scenario (Moore, 1974 in Dingwall, 1997). Furthermore, Silverman has identified two versions of interview data, deriving from positivism and interactionism,

respectively. The positivist approach considers interview data as giving access to 'facts' about the world. The interactionist approach, on the other hand, regards interview data as 'authentic experiences' (Silverman, 1993:90-91). This thesis is interested in students' views, knowledge, understanding, interpretations, experiences and interactions, which is what Silverman (1993) refers as the interactionist version of interview data. Therefore, what has been argued as the constraint of face-to-face interaction can actually provide the data that are appropriate for this thesis.

This thesis emphasises students' construction of discourse about their food transitions. Talking to students is believed to be the most direct method to learn their accounts. Furthermore, interviews in this study are regarded as social encounters which provide opportunities for university students to construct their images. Therefore, an interview approach is believed to be appropriate on the epistemological level. However, this is not to say that this thesis cannot provide 'facts' about university students' food practices. This thesis intends to interpret students' discourse within both positivist and interactionist paradigms. Further discussion is carried out later in this chapter.

To understand students' food practices from the three theoretical approaches in the study of food and eating, their food practices are examined from the functionalist, the structuralist and the materialist perspectives. The current literature about university students' transitions in food is found to be, not only limited, but also to overlook the social implications of these transitions. An interview approach is able to provide depth and roundedness of understanding about people's discourse (Mason, 2002). It is able to contribute to the existing literature about students' food

transitions to university, which mainly concerns a broad understanding of students' food patterns, as identified in Chapter Three.

Murphy and Dingwall (2003) propose that the degree of control which the researcher seeks in qualitative interviews should be regarded as a continuum. At one extreme is structured interviewing, where the researcher has a set of questions following the same order and sticks with the same wording as decided in advance. At the other, is unstructured interviewing, which the researcher simply introduces a broad topic and the interviewees are asked to contribute without much constraint.

Structured interviews aim to elicit objective facts from respondents whilst ensuring that the responses are not contaminated by the whole procedure (Silverman, 1993). As a result, the interviewer has to avoid any variation in self-presentation or behaviour that might bias the interviewee's responses. This approach is adopted by positivists, borrowing Silverman's term, who intend to treat the interview data as facts. The logic is that if all the interviews are conducted in an identical manner, then one can say the differences between them are 'real' differences. The problem of this logic is that structured interviewer behaviour and predetermined questions do not guarantee standardisation of responses. Murphy and Dingwall (2003) argue that: by answering questions, interviewees are always involved in a process of interpretation and therefore identically worded questions do not necessarily guarantee that interviewees understand and interpret the questions in an identical way. Furthermore, Silverman (1993) observes that no matter how hard the interviewers try, there is no way that they can standardise their interaction with different interviewees.

The unstructured interview technique, that requires no specific set of questions or set order, is said to be able to find out what respondents think since it avoids the artificiality of structured interviewing that might inhibit respondents' expression (Murphy and Dingwall, 2003). However, Mason (2002) challenges the idea of a structure-free interview. She argues that the agendas and the assumptions of both interviewer and interviewee will impose a framework for meaningful interaction.

Murphy and Dingwall (2003) propose that the decision about where a study should situate itself on the continuum of structure can be guided by the research questions. They suggest that if a research topic has been widely explored and the existing knowledge is abundant, a more structured approach is appropriate. If little existing knowledge is available, a more open approach might benefit the research. Semi-structured interviewing is considered as appropriate for this thesis. First of all, as suggested previously, the research questions of this thesis remain under-explored. This thesis positions itself as an exploratory study and thus perhaps is situated closer to the unstructured interview approach on the continuum which Murphy and Dingwall proposed. However, I was worried that a structure-free approach might result in a loss of focus in the interview. According to Flick (2002), a semi-structured interview approach combines a structured agenda with the flexibility to ask subsequent follow-up questions. Flick further argues that semi-structured interview approach is useful to explore interviewee's viewpoints; as it enables the interviewees to express their opinions in a relatively more open design than structured interviewing or a questionnaire. Furthermore, this thesis seeks to provide an interactionist approach to the data. A more interactive method is required. Therefore, a semi-structured interview approach was believed to be appropriate for this thesis.

Two ethnographic approaches, kitchen visiting and accompanied shopping, were initially proposed to explore whether students are conscious of GM food and other 'special' foods such as organic food or functional food in everyday settings. As the research questions were revised, these two approaches were also re-considered. I believe that they are able to provide an ethnographic account of students' daily food practices, which complement the interview data. Furthermore, according to Dingwall (1997), observation provides an opportunity to understand people's construction of everyday life in a much wider range of environment. Nevertheless, the change in the research questions resulted in the marginalisation of the data obtained from these two approaches during the data analysis, in which attention was largely focussed on students' discourse during the interviews. Consequently, the details of the fieldwork in regard to these two approaches are omitted from this thesis.

4.4.2 Conduct of fieldwork

The interviews took place in a vacant room in the Institute for Science and Society (ISS) at the University of Nottingham. It was a room that I could easily book for private use and is reasonably quiet. When a potential respondent replied to the advertisement, he or she would be asked some demographic questions to make sure that they matched all the recruitment criteria. A time for the interviews would then be arranged with selected students. The length of the interviews was generally between sixty and ninety minutes. The shortest one was forty-nine minutes and the longest was three hours and nine minutes. Twenty-nine semi-structured interviews were carried out. A topic guide¹⁰ was used during the interview, which served as a reminder of the major themes that needed to be covered. The

¹⁰ A version of the topic guide is given in Appendix Three.

topic guide was continuously modified in light of each interview; however, the major themes remained constant. A brief introduction to the study was given at the beginning of each interview. The respondents were informed about the purpose of this study and their right to stop the interview should they wish. They were also told that they would remain anonymous and that all they say is treated as confidential. Their consent to be recorded was also obtained. Finally, the respondents were told that because of the differences in my cultural background and language as an international student, they might need to explain things in more detail. This turned out to be an advantage because students did not seem to be intimidated by my probing questions, to which many gave detailed answers. Perhaps by acknowledging the better understanding of language and culture of the undergraduate interviewees, the power relation implicit in being interviewed by a more senior postgraduate student was balanced.

All the interviews were recorded using two audio digital recorders. This was so that my full attention could be given to the interview and to make sure that there would be a backup if something went wrong with one recorder. Handwritten notes were taken occasionally during the interviews. These included: questions I might want to ask later in the interview, any language being used that I found intriguing, and any tone of voice a student adopted that I found worth noting.

All the recordings and transcripts were backed up and kept in safe places. The names of the respondents were coded and the codes were only used in data analysis. Due to the comparison this study wished to make between gender and students' academic disciplines, students were coded into four categories: Male Science (MS), Male Humanities and Social Science (MH), Female Science (FS) and Female Humanities and Social Science (FH).

Access to data was restricted to the researcher only. Information that could reveal students' identities was removed during data analysis. The details of the participating students can be found in the Appendix One. The following table provides a summary of the participating students' gender, disciplines and their first year accommodation:

Disciplines	Science Students		HSS Students	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
First year in self-catered halls	1	7	3	3
First year in catered halls	5	2	2	4
First year in private accommodation	1	0	1	0
Subtotal	7	9	6	7

Figure 2 Interview Participants' Demographic Summary

4.4.3 A loss may turn out to be a gain

Due to the difficulties encountered in recruiting participants, the recruitment process was longer than intended. As a result, some preliminary data analysis started before the data collection was completed. In so doing, some unexpected themes emerged and could be added to the topic guide for the following interviews. Some of the themes that were added at a later stage turned out to be the main arguments in this study. For instance, the ways in which students talked about their food practices at an early stage of university accommodation was found to be different from the later stage. Therefore, more emphasis was given to this distinction after the first few interviews. Furthermore, in the process of transcribing, the researcher's interviewing technique was evaluated and refined. It was found the questions were put into conversations more

smoothly in the later interviews in comparison to the first few ones. Follow-up questions were also found to be phrased better after some practice. Instead of being asked in the form of separate questions, they were put into informal conversation, which also showed the students that what they had said was interesting and given my full attention. Some questions in the original topic guide that did not work well were removed or replaced with better phrased questions. For example, students were asked about their willingness to try new food. Some of the students interpreted this question as their willingness to try making new dishes and others interpreted it as their willingness to try new food ingredients. Hence, this question was modified to specify their willingness to eat new food ingredients that they have never tried before. Although the obstacles in the recruiting process had extended the length of data collection, it was found to be useful for a junior researcher like me to begin transcription and data analysis whilst data collection was still ongoing. Thanks to the extended recruiting process, various sampling strategies were attempted and the topic guide was continuously modified according to the feedback from each interview. The prolonged length of data collection endowed me with more time between each interview; therefore, much thought was given to refining my interviewing skills for the following interviews.

4.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis belongs to a family of qualitative methods that social scientists use to study interview data. Other members of the family include grounded theory, content analysis, and discourse analysis. Although thematic analysis is my main analytical approach, I also borrow some elements from discourse analysis. This section begins by describing my understanding of discourse analysis, then examines how they have been

linked to thematic analysis and concludes with some general comments on my methodological framework.

4.5.1 Discourse analysis

The term, 'discourse analysis', was first used by Zellig Harris (1986), a structural linguist, in 1952. He was particularly interested in examining language beyond the level of the sentence, and the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. Discourse analysis can provide information about the structure of a text and the role that each element plays in this structure. Harris's programme found little support at the time. In the 1970s, however, a number of humanities and social sciences disciplines became interested in the use of language and adopted the term to describe their work (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). 'Discourse analysis' became a generic term for research concerned with language in its social and cognitive context, focussing on linguistic units beyond the level of the sentence (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:6). The term now spans a considerable range of activities (Hammersley, 2002, Hepburn and Potter, 2004, Jaworski and Coupland, 1999, Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and is understood differently by different people in different academic disciplines. Some researchers use it to cover all forms of talking and writing, while others limit it to the study of talk (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). In contrast, the French thinker, Michael Foucault, used the term with much broader reference to the ways in which language organises fields of knowledge (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

In describing this thesis as influenced by discourse analysis, then, it is important to be specific about exactly what ideas are being used. Hammersley (2002) has distinguished two foci of discourse analysis: one

being analysis which draws findings from discourse itself, e.g. discourse analysis based on systemic linguistics, and the other placing analysis in the context of social or societal processes or structures, e.g. discourse analysis carried out as part of social psychology and sociology. This thesis falls into the second category, studying interview talk as evidence of social processes and social structures. This thesis is influenced particularly by three contributions: Potter and Wetherell's discussion of interpretive repertoires; Fairclough's version of critical discourse analysis and its incorporation of politics and ideology; and Foucault's ideas of discourse as a system of overarching meaning related to power and knowledge. I shall discuss these three versions of discourse analysis in turn.

The interpretative repertoire is a theoretical and analytical concept used in certain forms of discourse analysis. The term was developed by social psychologists, including Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell. They define the interpretative repertoire as 'a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events.' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:138). Their perspective on discourse analysis recognises that language allows people to create different versions of an event. It is the ways in which people construct their versions of the event that they are interested in. Potter and Wetherell's version of discourse analysis is particularly useful to understand the ways in which people converse and interact in different contexts with different people about the same event. Potter and Wetherell believe that the concept of interpretative repertoires has an advantage over the theory of social representation because it does not regard entities as intrinsically linked to social groups. They argue that the relationship between groups and repertoires can be decontextualised from the notion of the group membership using this version of discourse analysis. More importantly, Potter and Wetherell report

that the study of interpretative repertoires does not attempt to find consensus in the use of repertoires. They do not believe that some people always use certain repertoires. Potter and Wetherell argue that people go through life facing continuously changing situations; they are most likely to draw upon different repertoires to suit their immediate needs. Therefore, they argue that people are likely to draw on different repertoires under different situations they encounter in life. In this thesis, their version of discourse analysis draws attention to the repertoires that university students' use in continuously changing situations.

Critical discourse analysis was first developed by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough, 1985). His version of critical discourse analysis suggests that since language is such an irreducible part of social life, it cannot be overlooked whilst conducting social analysis and research (Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough argues that many forms of discourse analysis in social sciences have been heavily influenced by the work of Foucault, so much so that little close attention was given to the linguistic feature of the texts. Therefore, his approach towards discourse analysis is to transcend the divide between work inspired by social theories, which tends not to analyse text, and work that examines texts in a linguistic manner but fail to engage with social theoretical issues (Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough is particularly interested in the ways in which social practices are discursively shaped and vice versa. He believes that 'a statement cannot be made without reference to the distribution and exercise of power in the institution, and, ultimately, in the social formation' (Fairclough, 1985:758). Fairclough's version of critical discourse analysis suggests that local Interpretive repertoires effect, and are effected, by a wider social context. Therefore, by putting students into different categories, such as the academic disciplines in which they

belong, their gender, their discourse about themselves might be helpful when investigating them in the context of a wider social structure.

Another version of discourse analysis to be introduced here is heavily influenced by Foucault. Discourse analysis is often associated with Foucault's interest in the ways in which discourses construct the facts that they claim to describe (Tonkiss, 1998). In *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972) argues that the 'statement' (the English translation of 'énoncé') is the basic unit of discourse. He claims that statements are understood according to the field of discourse in which they exist. Foucault sees discourse as referring not merely to language or speech, but also to the ways in which the language organises the fields of knowledge. Hence, this version of discourse analysis argues that local actions, like interview talk, are embedded in much wider structures of cultural and cognitive organisation.

In *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972:182) defines knowledge as '[This] group of elements, formed in a regular manner by a discursive practice, and which are indispensable to the constitution of a science, although they are not necessarily destined to give rise to one, can be called knowledge.' He further elaborates that knowledge can be represented in discursive practice. The domain of knowledge is specified by the elements that will or will not acquire a scientific status. Not only this, knowledge is also the space that one may take up a position when speaking of the objects with which he deals in his discourse. Knowledge is the series of statements within which concepts are embodied, defined, applied and transformed. Finally, Foucault defines knowledge as 'the possibilities of use and appropriation offered by discourse' (P. 183). Drawing from the various definitions of 'knowledge', he argues that there are certain bodies of

knowledge that are independent of science but none of them can escape from a particular discursive practice. Hence, he argues that any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge which it shapes. One of the main interests of this thesis is to understand university students' thinking about science and technology applied to food. According to Foucault, discursive practices can be defined by the knowledge which they shape (Foucault, 1972). Hence, this thesis hopes to glimpse the relationship between students' discourse and the shaping of their knowledge and perhaps their views through examining their discourse. While these ideas are taken from the broad field of discourse analysis, their application in this thesis is, however, embedded in an approach known as thematic analysis, which I shall now introduce.

4.5.2 Thematic analysis

Holstein and Gubrium (1997) believe that thematic analysis may be the most common analytical approach used in social sciences, while Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that it should be seen as a foundation of qualitative analysis. Boyatzis (1998:4) defines thematic analysis as 'a process for encoding qualitative information'. Braun and Clarke (2006:79) describe thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.' They propose that it should be the first method of qualitative analysis learned by all researchers, as it provides essential skills for other forms of qualitative analysis. However, there is no clear agreement on what thematic analysis is and how it should be done (Boyatzis, 1998, Braun and Clarke, 2006). It does not seem to have a 'name' in the same way as that other methods like conversation analysis or narrative analysis do. Boyatzis (1998:4) reports that thematic analysis is often used without being described. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2006)

claim that thematic analysis is often not specified as a method of analysis. While a lot of analysis is essentially thematic, it is often referred to as something else or not described at all: themes just seem to 'emerge' from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006:80).

In order to provide a general guide for researchers who decide to use thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) have summarised the main decisions that are involved in this approach. These decisions are employed to reflect upon the analysis in this thesis. The first issue is 'what counts as a theme'. They suggest that the prevalence of a particular theme in the data is not necessarily indicative of its importance. The 'keyness' of a theme has to be evaluated by the researcher according to whether this particular theme captures something important and relevant to the research questions. After researchers decide what can be considered as themes for their research, they have to decide whether they need to present a detailed description of the data set, which should accurately reflect this, but with some inevitable loss in depth and complexity, or whether they want to present a detailed account of one particular aspect, which might be relevant to a specific interest but might not reflect the whole set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Both Boyatzis (1998) and Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that themes can initially be produced either inductively, from the raw data, or deductively from theory and prior research. Inductive analysis involves coding the data without a pre-existing frame, so that this form of thematic analysis is data-driven. Deductive thematic analysis is driven by the researcher's theoretical preconceptions. They suggest that the deductive form of thematic analysis is more likely to emphasise a particular aspect of the data set at the expense of a rich report on the whole.

Another decision that needs to be considered is whether the researchers wish to examine the data at a semantic or at an interpretative level (Boyatzis, 1998, Braun and Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis usually focuses primarily on one level. At a semantic level, the themes are identified with the 'explicit meanings' of the data, which is similar to the realist paradigm. At an interpretative level, the themes are examined within a constructionist paradigm. Hence, Braun and Clarke conclude that thematic analysis can be conducted within both realist and constructionist paradigms. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a 'step-by-step guide' for thematic analysis through six phases: 1. familiarizing yourself with your data; 2. generating initial codes; 3. searching for themes; 4 reviewing themes; 5. defining and naming themes; 6. producing the report. Similarities can be found between thematic analysis and the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Some authors even claim that thematic analysis depends on constant comparative analysis to develop their understanding of human experience (Thorne, 2000). Therefore, a brief introduction of the constant comparative analysis is given in the following.

In developing grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss proposed a new approach to qualitative analysis. They suggest that there are two typical approaches to the analysis of qualitative data: either to test a hypothesis (similar to 'deductive analysis') or to generate theoretical ideas (similar to 'inductive analysis'). They propose a third approach to qualitative analysis which involves taking the explicit coding procedure from deductive analysis and the style of theory development from inductive analysis. They describe this approach as 'the constant comparative method'. They argue that this allows the researcher to generate theories more systematically whilst not being hindered by a pre-existing theory to be tested. Glaser and Strauss

(1967:105-113) describe the constant comparative method in four phases: 1. comparing incidents applicable to each category; 2. integrating categories and their properties; 3. delimiting the theory; 4. writing the theory.

As stressed in the beginning of this chapter, this thesis does not seek to produce a theory. The third and the fourth phases of the constant comparative analysis were therefore less important. The first two phases of the constant comparative analysis can be found similar to the 'step-by-step guide' for thematic analysis. Hence, my data can, then, be seen as being analysed following Glaser and Strauss' constant comparative method, but the process can also be described as thematic analysis on both semantic and interpretive levels.

In beginning analysis, I tried to familiarise myself with the interview transcripts by reading and re-reading. Because I transcribed all the interview data myself, much time was devoted to listening to the audio recordings of the interviews before the analysis. As a result, I became very familiar with the data before I started to think about analytical strategies. The next step was to decide what should be considered as a theme. Since I did not have a preconception about university students' discourse about food practices, an inductive analysis was carried out. By doing this, the thesis attempts to generate an overall account of university students' food practices and their thinking about science and technology applied to food. However, this thesis also gives attention to specific cases if they contribute to a particular argument. For instance, in Chapter Five, student MS1 has provided an example of the contradiction between family and personal images. Therefore, more attention was given to this particular case.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparative analysis is concerned with producing many categories about general problems. Therefore, I decided to identify as many interesting features as possible from the data as initial categories or codes. Themes were then identified according to their relevance to my research questions. This was done systematically across the entire data set. The relevant data were then collated to each code. For instance, it was found that students had the tendency to describe their food practices according to the three different living situations, i.e. at home, in university accommodation and private accommodation. Therefore, their answers about particular living situations were collated under the same code. From these codes, I noticed that the ways in which they talked about their food practices in these three living situations appeared to be framed as a learning process, both in food practices as well as in being independent. Therefore, the theme of 'transition' stood out at this stage of data analysis. This observation can be tied to Potter and Wetherell's perspective of discourse analysis. As briefly summarised earlier in this chapter, they do not believe that some people always use certain repertoires. They argue that people are likely to draw on different repertoires according to their needs at hand. Therefore, people's discourse might vary throughout their life according to the ever-changing situations they encounter. In order to explore more on the notion of 'transition', university students' discourse about their food practices was examined at three stages in order to conceptualise their food practices as constantly changing activities. Furthermore, comparisons were made throughout the data analysis in the hope that this would identify similarities and differences in other properties of the students. This does not only cover the obvious comparisons of gender and school education but also includes some other subtle differences such as the comparison between students from similar family backgrounds, e.g. their ethnicity, or the ways

in which some beliefs about food were constructed in their talks, e.g. certain types of vegetarianism. This is to escape from a common criticism which critical discourse analysis receives- assuming the relationship between the institutions and the repertoires rather than discovering this relationship. Although the recruitment of this study was carried out according to a set of criteria, similarities/differences in their discourse was not assumed. This thesis was hoping to explore the existence of similarities/differences amongst university students.

The theme of transition was found to be not only prevalent on a semantic level but also on a 'latent or interpretative level' (Boyatzis, 1998). Therefore, the data in this thesis were sometimes analysed, borrowing Silverman's (1993) terms, from a positivist perspective and sometimes from an interactionist perspective. However, as this thesis aims to examine university students' discourse through Goffman's lens, more emphasis was drawn to the interactionist perspective. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a typical thematic analysis would only focus on one level. However, I would argue that focusing on only one perspective or another might limit the production of a comprehensive account of the data, since the conversation that is carried out in our everyday life constitutes both paradigms. Further discussion of these two paradigms can be found in the following section.

According to Boyatzis (1998:6), one of the most important features of thematic analysis is that it allows researchers to use qualitative methods to communicate their findings and interpretations to others who use different methods. Boyatzis emphasises that increased communication 'allows more understanding of the phenomenon' He further argues that thematic analysis may even provide crucial insights into 'what is known'. He believes

that different methods provide different insights into the understanding a phenomenon. By adopting thematic analysis, I hope this thesis can provide different insights to what is already known about students' food practices.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is different from other analytic methods which only seek to describe the patterns found in the data. Instead, it is about 'understanding people's everyday experience of reality, in great detail, in order to gain an understanding of the phenomenon in question' (P.80). Since this thesis hopes to investigate university students' food practices from a sociological perspective, it is a study about 'people's everyday life experience of reality'. Therefore, thematic analysis is considered to be an appropriate analytical strategy for this thesis.

4.5.3 Realist versus interpretivist thematic analysis

As stated previously, I decided to analyse the interview data within both a positivist and an interactionist paradigm, borrowing Silverman's (1993) terms. However, these two terms are rarely adopted by other authors. In order to facilitate the following discussion, I decided to adopt the terms 'realist' and 'interpretivist' instead of 'positivist' and 'interactionist'. This is because these two terms are more commonly seen in the literature. However, the choice of these terms should be regarded as mere shorthand; the philosophical implications behind the nuances of these terms are not explored here. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), examining the data on both semantic and interpretive level is not considered 'typical thematic analysis' but this thesis argues that there are benefits from examining both levels.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, most common criticism of the interview approach is that the data produced by this method are social constructs (Dingwall, 1997), as a result of the inevitable face-to-face interaction between interviewer and interviewee. However, this does not mean that interviews cannot be made to provide some insight on the respondents' reality. Dingwall (1997) suggests that researchers can use their own judgement to interpret some aspects of the interviewee's reality such as the selection of details, or the choice of facts presented in the interviews. He argues that 'My point is merely that interview data are fraught with problems because of the activity of the interviewer in producing them. At the same time, data are never merely accounts or versions, such that any reading is as good as any other' (Dingwall, 1997:60). Therefore, the data produced from the interview approach in this thesis, were treated as the respondents' accounts as well as their 'reality'. Although the data obtained from the two ethnographic methods, i.e. kitchen visiting and accompanied shopping, are not discussed in this thesis, they enabled me to construct a broad picture of my respondents' 'reality' through observing the ways in which they actually cook at home and shop for food. Therefore, this thesis argues that some aspects of the respondents' 'reality' can be grasped from the data produced in their interviews. Moreover, bearing in mind the criticism of the interview approach, I also examined the data from an interpretivist perspective. I think that it is as crucial to be reflexive and consider the interpretation of the data as jointly produced by interviewer and respondents (Briggs, 1986:3). It seems to me somewhat naive if this perspective in data analysis was ignored.

4.6 Limitations of the methods adopted

In the recruitment process, students were told that this is a study about food. Therefore, students who responded might be, to a certain extent, more interested in food than others. It is unclear whether the ways in which they talked about food were affected by this consideration. However, it is clear that some students have more to say about their food practices and others have less. It can also be observed that their enthusiasm for food is not uniform. Therefore, I suspect that not all the students who participated in this study are particularly interested in food. Moreover, only students from the University of Nottingham were recruited, which is purely a practical consideration. This study did not have the resources to conduct research with students in other universities. Hence, it needs to be stressed that the conclusions derived from this thesis cannot be generalised to students at other universities, and doing so is not attempted.

In using the theoretical sampling strategy, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that the researchers have to continuously judge how many groups should be sampled for each theoretical point as they emerge. Ideally, sampling should be stopped when 'theoretical saturation' is reached (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:229), meaning further data collection is unable to provide additional information. Due to the constraints of time and resources, the scale of this study was pre-planned and it would have been difficult to carry out further fieldwork. Therefore, this study cannot claim to have reached its theoretical saturation with confidence; this is also why it has been continuously stressing that the scope of its findings is limited.

In order to minimise the 'cultural differences' in students' food practices, this study has only recruited students who identify themselves as British citizens. This criterion is proven to be problematic. It appears that

students' discourse about their food practices at home is largely affected by their family identities, regardless of their country of residence. Their discourse about food after university, nonetheless, is found to be similar. Hence, further research that investigates students' food practices at home might have to consider the ways in which the ethnic background of their family affect their family identity.

One final note to be discussed here is the ways in which the data are presented in this thesis. I have decided to present the data including my questions. I consider it as a way to improve the transparency of the data analysis and interpretation. By providing my questions alongside the responses they triggered, it is my belief that readers can more easily evaluate my interpretation of the data. However, sometimes it might appear that the questions being asked varied and thus this thesis might be subjected to criticism for generating bias. I would argue that this thesis did not adopt a structured interview approach and therefore it does not claim to have asked pre-determined questions in a structured manner. The variations in the questions being asked amongst each individual should not be considered as a major issue for the semi-structured interview approach. However, I also agree that the readers should bear these variations in mind when reading my interpretations of the data.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCOURSE ABOUT FOOD PRACTICES AT HOME

5.1 Introduction

In order to examine university students' discourse about transitions in food practices, this thesis presents three stages of transition in their life. This chapter examines university students' discourse about food practices at home and the ways in which students' discourse was affected by their self-positioning at the time of the interviews.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the ways in which, first, food practices at home were gendered in students' discourse and, second, their own roles in the family setting were articulated. It was also found that students' discourse about food practices at home was dominated by the image¹¹ created to represent their family. Little individual input from their younger selves was described. Two types of images were found in university students' discourse: 'institutional images'¹² and 'personal images'. These two types of images are used to portray the ways in which students presented different living institutions and themselves in their discourse about food practices. Students' discourse is examined to understand the relationship between their personal food decisions and the presentation of their family food practices. Finally, this chapter investigates students' discourse about their acquisition of autonomy in food practices at home and the roles their parents adopt in this process.

¹¹ An image is a working conception, an impression, or a model of reality (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990:35).

¹² The term 'team image' is borrowed from Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor.

5.2 Gendered food activities in the family

Cooking has long been reported as a 'gendered activity' (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988, Murcott, 1983a, DeVault, 1991); which can be considered at two levels. First, women are often the ones who are believed to be responsible for feeding the family on a daily basis. Second, gender¹³ also determines which parts of the domestic food activity in which men and women are more likely to be involved with. Hence, it has been argued that men do participate in domestic food activities but in a different manner from women (Murcott, 1983b). Along these lines, university students in this study were found to have adopted a gendered framing to talk about the food practices at home. For instance:

YL: So when you're at home, who does the cooking?

FH5: Mainly my mum (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

Even though students' mothers might not be the only person who is in charge of the food activities in their family settings, they are the first to be mentioned when students were asked about food activities back home.

The majority of the students in this study came from nuclear families¹⁴. The ways in which students from nuclear families described their parents' roles in domestic food practices are rather distinctive. On the one hand, their mothers were described as being in charge of daily domestic food preparation. The ways in which this was portrayed in students' discourse implies that students took it for granted that it is their mothers who cook,

¹³ Whilst concerning food practices in domestic settings, it is the socially constructed roles that are examined in this study and thus the term 'gender' is believed to be more appropriate than the term 'sex' in this thesis.

¹⁴ The term 'nuclear family' is used in this thesis only to refer to families consisting of heterosexual parents and children. Other possibilities are not considered in this thesis.

as suggested in the literature. On the other hand, some students claimed that their fathers are involved in domestic food preparation and some claimed otherwise, that their fathers do not cook at home at all. As we will see, even though some of their fathers were said to cook at home, the ways in which students described their fathers' participation in food practices seem to be distinct from those involving their mothers, as reported by Murcott (1982, 1983b). In MS2's family, it was his mother who did most of the daily cooking.

YL: When you were at home, who did the cooking?

MS2: My mum does most of the cooking 'cause she's very good. My dad does some cooking but not as much (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

MS2 claimed that his mother did most of the cooking at home because she is 'very good' at it. His father would do some cooking but not as much as his mother. MS2 appears to have suggested that his mother is being held liable for food preparation at home because she is more capable of this task. It was also implied that his father is less capable of cooking and therefore is only in charge of food preparation occasionally. This comment is found to be similar to women's/wives' account in Murcott's study (1983b). Murcott reports that women in her study claim that men are either less or more capable of domestic cooking. Either way, according to Murcott, gender is said to be tied to the question of who is to cook. Regardless of whether MS2's mother was described as more capable of cooking because of her gender, the decision regarding who is to cook was framed as made by reference to whoever is more competent to the task. In MS2's response, gender was not portrayed as a determining factor for the duty of cooking. To put it differently, although MS2 presented his family

food practices as conforming to the conventional stereotype of domestic food preparation, it was portrayed as a matter of competence rather than gender roles. MS2 might have been aware of the demand for men to take an equal share of the household chores and the debate to abandon the over-simplified categorisation of the male being the breadwinner and the female being the home manager since mid-19th century (Bowlby et al., 1997). As a result, he might have tried - consciously or otherwise - to describe his family as not conforming to this over-simplified categorisation.

Such attempts were not uncommon within the students' talk. In the following quote, we can see how MH3 adopted a more gender neutral term to talk about food preparation at home. He claimed that it was his parents who did the cooking at home. But actually, he meant it was his mother who did the cooking. Even though MH3's father was not involved in domestic food preparation, MH3 chose the term 'parents' rather than 'mother' whilst describing food preparation in his family.

YL: Did you cook at home?

MH3: No, not at home, my parents would have done that.

YL: So both of your parents?

MH3: Largely my mum.

YL: Does your dad cook?

MH3: No, not really (male third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

Perhaps aware of larger cultural debates about the role of women in the home, MH3 seems to have deliberately avoided referring to his mother as the one who prepares the family's daily meals in the interview. Instead, he presented both of his parents as sharing the food preparation at home.

MS2 and MH3's comments about food preparation at home demonstrate that, even though their mothers play a conventional women's role in the family, students might have attempted to construct different images about their families in their interviews. Hence, it seems likely that, students used interview discourse about the food practices at home to construct 'ideal' family images. This is, however, found to be a rather complicated process. In this process of constructing the 'ideal' images of their families, it is found that some elements might clash with others. In these cases, a balance point would have to be negotiated.

MS2 has provided a rich example of finding a balance in constructing his ideal family image. Therefore, his case is discussed in more detail in this chapter. In university students' discourse, it was found that certain food activities appear to be considered as more 'masculine' and therefore described as more likely to be practised by their fathers. When MS2 was talking about his father's cooking, it was portrayed as distinct from his mothers' daily food preparation. It was Sunday English breakfast that his father used to make when he was living at home.

MS2: [...] when I was younger because it's kind of like my dad always cooks English breakfast, very stereotype [...] maybe once every 3 weeks; my mum didn't want us to have [it] too often so maybe come back from church on Sunday or watch football on. And I would try to help in the kitchen with my dad 'cause it's very kind of- in England it's a very stereotype of thing, it's a very men thing to cook full breakfast. It's a dish often cooked by men in a way, because it's very fatty, it's associated with big football kind

of, I don't really- very strange culture (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

MS2 explained to the researcher, who came from a different cultural background, the reason that it was his father who used to make Sunday breakfast, was because it is a stereotypical thing for men to cook an English breakfast on Sunday. In essence, MS2 was drawing boundaries between cooking Sunday breakfast and daily food preparation, which is supposed to be women's work.

This distinction between men and women's cooking has also been identified in the previous research. Murcott (1983b) argues that men cook 'in the strict sense of taking charge of the transformation of food stuffs to some version of a meal' (Murcott, 1983b:82), which she reports as not considered as a proper cooked dinner. Whilst attempting to explain the reasons why Sunday breakfast is often prepared by men, MS2 drew upon its link with things that he considers to be associated with masculinity, such as fatty food and football. MS2 has not only adopted a gendered food discourse, he also tried to rationalise that, even though food preparation is supposed to be women's work, men get involved on certain occasions with certain cooking that is 'masculine'. MS2's discourse about the gendered food activities at home conforms to the culturally ingrained gender roles in domestic food practices. The gendered food practices in his family were framed as a 'stereotype of thing'. This might suggest that MS2 believes that this is a result of social construction and it should be found in other families in the same culture. In his second quote, MS2 presented his family as typical in this culture using the food practices in the domestic setting. Similar discourse is also found amongst several other students in this study. However, as was shown in his first quote, this arrangement was firstly

portrayed as a decision made based on his parents' competence in the kitchen rather than their gender roles. It can be seen that the ways in which MS2 presented his family are somewhat contradictory. It seems that MS2 tried to construct an ideal family image, which does not completely conform to the stereotypical gender roles but, at the same time, wants to evidence a masculine father and feminine mother. Furthermore, in his second quote, MS2 claimed that he used to help his father make Sunday breakfast. This can be regarded as a claim of his own masculinity: the reason he helped out in the kitchen was because he was a boy who wanted to help with men's cooking. DeVault (1991) argues that the gender feature of feeding activity has become one of the primary ways that women 'do' gender. She argues that since feeding is believed to be women's work, women often feel that they are obliged to take the responsibility. By feeding the family, women are 'doing' the gender of female; expressing their femininity through doing what the females are supposed to do in their culture. By the same token, MS2 was also 'doing gender' when talking about his younger self helping his father prepare a typical English Sunday breakfast on Sunday – argued to be men's work. DeVault contends that doing gender is not an individual performance but an interaction process. It is a conduct of collective production and recognition of being 'adequate' in one's gender role. By claiming his participation in 'men's cooking', MS2 declared his younger self's 'adequacy' in his gender role. Thus, the socially constructed conventional gender roles in his family adopted were passed down from his parents to him, who might have learnt about the gendered food activities by watching his own parents taking up distinctive food practices as a young children and then eventually starting to participate the food activities that he saw as appropriate in the society according to his own gender. This is in line with Bernarde's (1987) conclusion in his paper, in which he writes:

In engaging in parenthood, adults transform and crystallise their own sense(s) of reality and present these to their children as models of social order, as models of behaviour (Bernardes, 1987:694).

However, whilst MS2 described his participation in food practices at home, he claimed that he was involved not only in preparing the Sunday breakfast, i.e. men's cooking, but also in helping his mother with the daily food preparation, i.e. women's cooking.

YL: How did you learn to cook?

MS2: I helped at home a little bit with my mum, maybe as a kid but not very much. Typical boy I just played lots of football out about I didn't really stay at home and learn to cook.

After claiming he has helped his mother cook, MS2 stressed that he did not spend much time doing so. Moreover, he further consolidated his masculinity by saying that he used to 'play lots of football out about' as a 'typical boy'. It can be seen that, whilst constructing his ideal family image, MS2 tried to find a balance point amongst the elements that might clash with one another. On the one hand, he wanted to present his family as embracing modern version of gender egalitarian domestic life. On the other hand, he wanted to present his father and himself as masculine and his mother as feminine.

Some of the previous studies suggest that gender is an important factor in determining whether parents encourage their children to participate in food preparation. For instance, in her study, DeVault (1991) demonstrates how

women talk about the ways in which they learned domestic food preparation from their mothers. Women's discourse about their learning/participating/helping food preparation at a younger age reveals the taken-for-granted character of the division of labour by gender. DeVault reports that it is via these involvements throughout childhood that women in her study were ingrained with the idea that cooking is women's work. By the same token, Charles and Kerr (1988) report that women's attitudes towards their children's help in the kitchen is very much gendered, even though they try to move away from this stereotype. Charles and Kerr further argue that it appears that the young children themselves seem to be enthusiastic about helping out in the kitchen regardless of their genders. The differences between boys and girls only become more prominent as they learn which tasks are appropriate to their gender.

In this study, MS2 was the only student who related gender roles to his younger self. Even though gendered food discourse was found to be pervasive amongst other students, they seemed to consider it as applicable only to their parents. Most students described their contribution to food preparation at home as being in the role of assistant; very few of them¹⁵ had the experience of cooking the whole meal for the family, regardless of their gender. MH6 claimed that it was mostly his mother who did the cooking at home but his father would also cook occasionally. The children did not seem to be much involved in the food preparation in MH6's family.

YL: When you were at home, who does the cooking mostly?

MH6: Back at home, mostly my mum, but sometimes my dad. Us kids we very rarely cooked for ourselves, unless

¹⁵ Only students from nuclear families are considered here; students from single-parent families are discussed later.

obviously they're both going out doing some sort of working or whatever. Yeah, it's mostly mum (male second year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

MH6 adopted a gender neutral term, 'us kids', in this quote to refer to their roles as children in their domestic food setting. Although MH6 has siblings of both genders, he did not talk about their different roles in domestic food preparation. Moreover, in this quote he suggested that it was mostly his mother who cooked at home. The children would not cook for themselves unless both of their parents were unavailable. If his mother was unavailable, it would be his father who cooked. This arrangement of responsibility was commonly found in students' discourse.

By the same token, some male students claimed that they used to participate in domestic food preparation whereas some female students claimed to have no such experience. This again confirms that the stereotypical gender roles in family food practices are not adopted in students' discourse whilst talking about their younger selves. Male student MS5 claimed to have learnt cooking when he helped his mother at home.

YL: So where did you learn to make it?

MS5: At home, my mum.

YL: Did she teach you actually-

MS5: Um, I just used help her cooking it really. So I sort of learnt by watching (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year).

Female student FS4, on the other hand, claimed she had never cooked when she lived at home.

YL: When did you learn cooking?

FS4: When I was in my first year, before that I'd never cooked anything.

YL: So you'd never cooked at home?

FS4: No, not really (female second year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

In summary, it can be suggested that from students' viewpoint, food preparation at home is only gendered when their parents are the subject of the conversation. It is not clear in this study whether gender is a major factor in determining the ways in which students' parents encourage them to participate in the domestic food practices. However, it can be found in students' discourse that they do not regard it as important. This might be due to the fact that their mothers were trying to move away from this gender stereotype, as reported by Charles and Kerr (1988), and therefore the children did not consider their own roles in the family food practices as gendered. However, it has to be stressed, as suggested at the beginning of this chapter, that their discourse about food practices at home is still very much gendered when talking about their parents' roles.

In general, children were not said to play a crucial role in domestic food preparation, regardless of their gender. As a result, student' discourse about their involvement in the food practices at home does not seem to be tied into the conventional gender roles. This was also found true in their discourse about self-catering after moving out from home. Thus, the framing of gender-neutral food practices in families is speculated to be extended to their discourse about food practices at university, which is presented in Chapter Six and Seven.

5.3 Discourse as the construct of family images

As has been discussed, students in this study used their discourse about food practices at home to construct 'ideal' images of their families. In this study, a 'typical family' image was often constructed by presenting their parents, particularly their mothers, as in charge of family food preparation at home. Whilst students from conventional two-parent nuclear families constructed their families as 'typical' as shown in the previous section, others constructed their families as loosely 'atypical'. The construction of 'atypical' families is exemplified in the discourse of students who came from single-parent families. The food practices in single-parent families were framed differently from those in two-parent nuclear families. For instance, FH7 claimed that when she lived at home, she had to cook for herself if her mother was not available because there were only two people in her family.

YL: Who cooks most of the time?

FH7: It depends. 'Cause I only live with my mum, my parents are divorced. My mum is a mid-wife therefore she has to go in shifts so sometimes she's out at dinner time so I just cook for myself (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

In contrast to students from nuclear families with both parents, students from single-parent families described the food preparation at home as a part of their responsibility. This is similar to the roles fathers adopted in the two-parent families. According to them, not only do they play the role of assistant, but they were also held liable to prepare meals if their parent was unavailable. Their discourse about domestic food preparation also suggests that they are more experienced in food preparation than students

from families with both parents. The construction of the single-parent family image is not only reflected in students' discourse about food preparation but in relation to all food practices. In the following quote, student MH5 constructed a single-parent family image whilst talking about his diet change.

YL: Did your mum say anything?

MH5: My mum was very supportive. My mum actually decided to go vegetarian with me, which was quite good. My mum is now vegan at home, she was vegan while I was still living at home, not the university. She was vegan while I was there. And partially just because it was easier 'cause my mum and dad live separately. It was easier for my mum to just cook for both of us whereas I was cooking a meal; it was easier for me to cook for my mum as well instead of two meals (male second year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

MH5 interpreted his mother's diet change as being supportive of his conversion to veganism. He then said that this was partially because there were only two people in his family at the time and it was easier to prepare food if both of the family members are vegan. This comment has again, presented a single-parent family image through their diet change: because his parents live separately, MH5's mother chose to adopt his diet change so that she would not have to prepare a separate meal just for herself. This finding echoes Eldridge and Murcott's (2000) work, where they problematise the ubiquitous assumption of parental 'influence' on children's food preference and attitudes. They suggest the interaction processes assumed in the existing literature are poorly characterised. They argue that

the negotiation between parents and their children over family food practices should not be reduced to the over-simplified term 'influence' (Eldrige and Murcott, 2000). In the case of MH5, it is clear that his change of diet was not 'influenced' by his mother. The negotiation between his mother and himself has led to the result of them both converting to veganism. The negotiation in his family took place after he decided to change his diet, and his mother decided to make compromises in her own diet in the end. However, she resumed eating meat after MH5 started university and left home. Hence, the negotiation ended when the child moved away and his mother is no longer 'influenced' by him.

Similar to FH7, MH5 also talked about how he used to be held responsible for food preparation at home because there were only two members in his family. This was also documented in the work of Eldrige and Murcott (2000), in which they discuss how the division of household labour is developed in food practices. They report the role in which food plays in the economic and emotional organisation of the household and the ways in which it constructs a sharing of resources and of labour, which features the relationship of family members. Both FH7 and MH5 in this study demonstrated the ways in which the division of labour developed in the single-parent families. Furthermore, the mother-son, mother-daughter relationship of MH5 and FH7's family was also featured in their discourse about food preparation work.

FH7 and MH5 used their discourse about domestic food practices as a means to construct their 'atypical' family images. In their discourse, each family member was regarded as an entity, whose 'doing' constructing the family images that were presented to the researcher. As a member in their families, both FH7 and MH5 presented themselves as having to take up the

responsibility of domestic food preparation once the other member is not available. In both cases the family members, including themselves, were presented as working together to maintain the family as a whole. Students' discourse about the family members' food practices can be regarded as a constructed family image of 'doing family' together (Bowlby et al., 1997, DeVault, 1991). FH7 and MH5 talked about their family food practices treating the members of their families as independent entities in the family, within which the members cooperate to make sure the family functions smoothly. Their family images presented here were shown as the results of the family members' doing. The discourse of 'doing family' is commonly seen amongst students in this study, single-parent families is only one of the prominent examples. Students from nuclear families presented the family food practice to be their parents' responsibility, which was framed in the ingrained family gender roles as presented previously.

Family members' act of 'doing family' was presented in a different manner in other students' discourse. MS1 claimed his mother's cooking was healthy and suggested that it is what he used to eat at home.

MS1: I think compare to most of the students I eat very healthy but I used to eat healthier at home. Mum used to- yeah my mum is a very good cook so she used to- I mean she never used to use fat or sugar or anything like that. She would just use healthy ingredients, so- yeah perhaps why I like eating healthily (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

Even though MS1 claimed that he was not eating as healthily as he used to after moving away from home, he maintained that he still ate more

healthily than most other students. Similarly, MS3 presented his diet as being determined by the religion of his family. Growing up in a Muslim family, MS3 claimed to have never knowingly eaten pork.

MS3: [...] It's a weird thing, I don't eat pork either.

YL: Why not?

MS3: Well like my parents are Muslims, we never eat pork so ever since I was a child, like I've never been given it so I don't-like I haven't started eating.

YL: So you've never had pork in your life?

MS3: Well, maybe accidentally once or twice but never on, like- (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year)

Both MS1 and MS3's discourse about their own diet was constructed by the family images they presented. Different from FH7 and MH5's approach of constructing their family images, MS1 and MS3 presented their families as independent entities¹⁶, which have their own core values, being healthy eaters and Muslim family respectively.

Whilst MS1 was talking about his own diet after moved away from home, he conformed to the family image he constructed by claiming that he remained a healthy eater. Similarly, coming from a Muslim family, MS3 claimed to have remained not knowingly eating pork even after he moved away. The family as an entity in its own right has affected its member discourse about their own food and how they presented themselves. Both MS1 and MS3 described their personal food practices at home as

¹⁶ More discussion about family as an entity can be found in Gubrium and Holstein's book: *What Is Family?* (1990:38)

conforming to their family images and this again reinforces the idea of the prior discussion about 'doing family'. Yet the conduct of 'doing family' was presented differently from FH7 and MH5's discourse. Whilst FH7 and MH5's family images were described as a result of the conduct of its family members, MS1 and MS3 portrayed the conduct of family members' to be a result of their family images. In short, the family images were constructed by the 'doing' of their family members. These images, in turn, shape what is believed to be the 'ideal family images' and were adopted in students' discourse.

The family images students chose to present in the interviews might vary depending on, the individuals, the context of the conversation, and the questions they were asked. However, the social norms of how a family should be can have an impact on the family images presented by students. Hence, although students chose to construct different family images in different contexts of the conversation, all of them adopted a normative framing whilst describing their family food practices. The normative framing of the family was portrayed as where parents provide the place to live, domestic service, economic and emotional support. In return, the children would show their appreciation, their respect and affection to their parents. This monolithic family image was challenged by Gubrium and Holstein (1990), who argue that researchers increasingly find it difficult empirically to verify the family's existence as a distinct social form, which 'retains its stature as an ethical or normative prescription' (1990:133). They believe that this monolithic idea of 'The Family' is often treated as a 'prescriptive or normative referent', which 'underscores a set of constraints on, as well as enablement of, social interaction' (1990:133). Students in this study appeared to have been ingrained with the idea of 'normative' or 'prescriptive' family and thus tried to present their families as one of them.

The message that is embedded in their discourse is that their families function 'normally' and therefore should be accepted by the society.

As shown earlier, some students constructed their family image as an entity. Similarly, Gubrium and Holstein (1990) argue that "family had some form of consciousness, separate and distinct from the consciousness of individual members" (P.38). In light of this statement, this thesis has discovered that when family members agree with the core values of the family, 'doing family' should be rather straightforward; the family members would cooperate and act according to their family values. On the other hand, when the family members' personal beliefs clash with the core value of their families, some strategies were employed to maintain the family images as normative.

For instance, MS1 presented his family to be Jewish. As a kosher family, no pork or prawns were allowed in his family.

MS1: Also my family is Jewish so they're all kosher. And I was never allowed to eat anything like pork or prawns- (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

MS1's family as an entity was illustrated as a kosher family that actively practises Jewish Law by not eating pork and prawns. Nevertheless, it was later discovered that the family image MS1 constructed was what his father believes to be appropriate. The rest of his family, according to MS1, do not seem to mind eating some pork or prawns. MS1 said that his mother used to take them out to have prawns or pork, which is supposed to be forbidden in his family. It appears to be only his father who insists that

they cannot have pork or prawns. MS1 described his father as 'weird' for imposing these ideas on the rest of his family.

YL: Are your parents against that you eat-

MS1: Well my mum's not very against it. She like used to take us all out for like- have like prawns or pork. She's when I have a meal with my mum, she always like gives us these things so she doesn't really care, she likes them herself. My dad a bit of, he's a bit of a weird person, he's just a- not a weird person in a bad way he's just he's got these things in his head that eating- if we eat prawns or- not we do anything Jewishy but with prawn stuff like- he insists that we're all going to hell if we had prawns and stuff like that but seems a bit irrational to me to not do anything else [...] but anyway so we are not allowed to bring it into the house and my mum [...] if he knew- she took us out to eat prawns he'd divorce her, which I think is rubbish as well (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

It is clear that MS1 does not agree with his father and the rest of the family appears to feel the same. They did not seem to mind having pork or prawns in the absence of their father. However, the family image MS1 constructed in food practices at home is found to conform to his father's ideal family image: a family that keeps kosher. Moreover, MS1 presented the members in his family as trying to behave in a way that is appropriate in order to create the kosher family image, even though they do not necessarily feel so strongly about it. MS1 even claimed that if his father had known his mother took the children out to eat prawns he would have

divorced her. In effect, in order to be in his family, the rest of the family members have to behave in ways he considers appropriate otherwise he or she could have been denied as a member of this family. Male dominance in domestic food practice is also reported in DeVault's (1997) work, in which she argues:

Women's comments about feeding reveal powerful, mostly unspoken beliefs about relations of dominance and subordination between men and women, and especially between husbands and wives. They show that women learn to think of service as a proper form of relation to men, and learn a discipline that defines 'appropriate' service for men. (DeVault, 1997:183-184)

DeVault (1997) suggests that women have learnt to think of feeding work as service to men in domestic settings and thus strive to provide appropriate food to men. This was also described in MS1's discourse where he suggested that the family members would obey his father's ideal family image and avoid eating pork and prawns at home. However, MS1 also claimed that the family members who do not agree with the family value imposed by his father might behave in a way that contravenes family values secretly without his father's knowledge. MS1 has demonstrated that secret knowledge not only exists in the inter- but also the intra- familial settings. In Gubrium and Holstein's book *What Is Family* (1990), they discuss the difficulties and the benefits of conducting family research as outsiders. They argue that the family members are likely to have 'secret knowledge', to which it is very hard for researchers to gain access. In discussing secret knowledge, Gubrium and Holstein adopt Goffman's (1959) term, the 'back region' or 'backstage' and argue that family members are

more likely to possess negative knowledge about their family. Negative knowledge is kept away from outsiders often because 'it is the conceptual opposite of what it is believed families should be' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990:53). In his comment, MS1 has illustrated the secret knowledge that is shared by all the family members but not his father. This is because this secret knowledge was believed to be able to damage their family. Therefore, hiding the fact that they actually eat the forbidden food outside the family can also be regarded as 'doing family'. The family members might not wish to raise conflicts in the family and thus decided to keep it as a secret.

On the other hand, MS1 did not seem to regard this knowledge as a 'secret' to me. There are many probable reasons for his sharing the family 'secret' with me as a researcher. First of all, I am a graduate student who was talking to him in the name of research. I have also promised to keep what is said in the interview confidential. Secondly, I am an outsider to his family. I do not know any member of his family and it is unlikely that I would know them in the future. Therefore, MS1 did not have to worry that I would reveal this secret to his father, who the secret is supposed to be kept from. To put it into a wider sociodemographic context, I am an international student who does not share a common cultural background with him. Hence, MS1 might have felt that he would not offend me by telling me that he had broken Jewish Law, which might offend others who also come from Jewish families. Regardless, this shows that MS1 personally did not agree with the kosher family image and thus did not mind revealing the secret that might damage this particular family image. This might imply that MS1 did not see this image as necessarily how his family should be. Furthermore, he claimed that when they broke the family core value, it was done outside the family setting. This implies that MS1 might feel less

obliged to the family image outside the family setting, which could be confirmed by MS1's discourse about his eating after moving away from home:

MS1: [...] so like I came to university and just 'cause I don't really believe any of this [...] At the first few weeks was like prawn prawn prawn 'cause I could eat it, and obviously things like salami and sausages I wasn't allowed to eat but I am now-

Physically moving out from home appears to have unleashed the constraints imposed on MS1's food practices at home. He had demonstrated that he did not believe in this family image and celebrated his full autonomy in food by regularly eating food he was not allowed back at his parents' home. This, nonetheless, is not to say after moving away students are free from their duty of 'doing family'. Even though he had moved away from home, MS1 presented himself as still having to behave as appropriate whilst he goes back home:

YL: He wouldn't say anything if you eat pork?

MS1: No, he wouldn't like- he would be angry but I think he knows, I do. So, we just don't speak about it.

In this quote, family image was presented as only needed to be obeyed when he is in the setting. MS1 suspected his father knows about him eating pork but they had not talked about it. It was implied that both MS1 and his father were trying to maintain the kosher family image. This is in line with MS1's earlier quote: the rest of the family hid the fact that they actually eat pork and prawns in his fathers' absence because they believed his

father would deny their membership of the family if they broke Jewish Law. Similarly, MS1 would not tell his father he had broken Jewish Law after he came to university for the same reason. On the other hand, even though MS1 suspected that his father knew he might have broken Jewish Law; his father might have also avoided confronting his son. So that he would not have to deny his son's membership in this family. In MS1's discourse it can be suspected that he believed both his father and himself were 'doing family' by not talking about the change of his diet at university. This is because the change in his diet contradicts his family image as kosher. This can be seen as a form of denial that is said to become increasingly persuasive in contemporary society. Both MS1 and MS1's father are in denial of the reality that MS1 has broken Jewish Law and thus they pitted one version of the reality against another (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990) in order to maintain their family as a whole and its core value.

The ways in which students constructed their family images in their discourse has been demonstrated in this section. Students are predisposed to present their family conforming to what is considered as 'appropriate' in the society. Students constructed two types of images to talk about their food practices at home, namely institutional images, i.e. their family images, and personal images. Their family images are stressed in their discourse, even though they might not personally agree with this image. This is when various strategies were said to be employed in order to maintain the family images as a whole. The ways in which students negotiate their autonomy in food is demonstrated in the following section.

5.4 Diet changes at home

Some students in this study claimed to have experienced major diet changes whilst living at home. The reasons for their diet changes vary from suffering from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) to ethical and environmental considerations. Some students framed their diet changes as inevitable and compulsory. Others presented their diet changes as voluntary. They described their decision to make dietary changes as a conclusion they drew after thorough consideration. Regardless of how their diet changes were framed, students' decisions to change their diet regimes when they lived at home can be regarded as their early attempt to acquiring autonomy in food¹⁷.

FS1 claimed to have suffered from IBS and gave up on wheat at the age of thirteen. Being unsure of the cause of the syndrome, she decided to give up wheat, which allegedly had helped with her IBS.

YL: When did it start? When you were a child?

FS1: Probably when I was about 13 but I didn't know it was wheat then, I just had it quite often but I didn't know that until 2 years ago. And then I just thought I just give up wheat and see what happens and it almost went away, so- (female second year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

According to FS1, the decision of giving up wheat was actually a suggestion from her mother, who was said to suffer from various food intolerances.

¹⁷ The expression 'autonomy in food' is used loosely throughout this thesis to refer to students' freedom to make their personal decisions about food.

Since then, FS1 had been avoiding wheat and other food, which she suspected might be associated with her food intolerance.

YL: So how did you find out?

FS1: Because my mum has loads and loads of food intolerance so she doesn't have wheat, dairy and sugar, not even fruits. And then she sort of said why don't you try and give up on wheat?

FS1's diet change was described as having no other option. In her account, since stopping eating wheat, her IBS has improved noticeably. Hence, she claimed that she has to stop eating wheat. FS1 appeared to be convinced that her IBS is a result of intolerance of wheat.

YL: What happens when you have wheat?

FS1: I'll get diarrhoea.

Though it was simply her, and perhaps her mother's, speculation that it might be wheat that caused IBS, FS1 seemed to be convinced it was the case. Her diet change was presented as necessary. Henson et al. (1998) report that a diet change recommended by professionals, e.g. for medical purposes, is often regarded as more 'legitimate' than personal choices such as vegetarianism. Even though FS1 has never been advised by professionals, her diet change was framed as being related to a 'legitimate' medical condition. Put differently, FS1 presented herself as a competent actor, not subject to whimsical or impulsive diet changes by framing her decision not to eat wheat within a quasi-medical framework: wheat was omitted from her diet so as to better manage her IBS.

Several other students in this study discussed diet changes. Although FS1 was the only student to frame diet change in terms of medical benefits, legitimating devices – such as linking diet change to moral or ethical imperatives – were common. Nowhere was this more apparent than when students discussed vegetarianism:

YL: How long have you been vegetarian?

FH1: About 7 years.

YL: Why?

FH1: Very complicated. I'm not against eating meat but I'm against the way and consumerism that surrounds it (female second year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

FH1 claimed to have become vegetarian because she is against the consumerism surrounds the meat industry. Unlike FS1, FH1's diet change was not portrayed as compulsory. She did not experience medical complications if she eats meat; rather she elected not to eat it because she chose not to eat it. Her decision was presented as voluntary and she has good reasons for it. FH1's acquisition in the autonomy in food was framed as a spontaneous action, which Henson et al. (1998) suggest could be seen as less legitimate. However, FH1 presented herself as having very clear reasons for her diet change in the interview.

YL: What do you mean?

FH1: Well, eating meat is sort of necessary for survival usually but in the modern world, in most places, they don't use all the animals. They'll just use certain parts of it and then everything else gets thrown away, which is just wasteful.

Therefore, it was implied that her decision to become a vegetarian is not on impulse and it should be regarded as legitimate as other forms of diet change.

Both FS1 and FH1 have demonstrated their attempts to acquire autonomy in food back at home. Although distinctive framings were adopted, their attempts were presented as being embedded in legitimate reasons. The legitimacy of their dietary changes was stressed in most of their discourse. This finding might be able to complement women's accounts in DeVault's study (1991), where she argues that women have to evaluate which of their family requests on food are 'legitimate' when they decide whether and to what extent to put the request into practice. Hence, the legitimacy of students' dietary changes whilst living at home can potentially determine the success of their diet changes. Before the form of the diet change is recognised as 'legitimate' by their mothers, it might be unlikely that they could change their diet in their family setting. This is because their mothers would try to make them understand that they cannot always have what they want (DeVault, 1991). Students in this study might have wished to present their diet changes as successful and this might also be the reason that they volunteered the information about their diet changes. Students who did not succeed in their diet changes are suspected to be less likely to provide this information voluntarily.

On a different note, students who claimed to avoid eating meat voluntarily might also suggest that not only are they thoughtful about what they eat; they have also sacrificed the pleasure of eating meat voluntarily. People choose to be vegetarians/vegans for various reasons but according to Twigg, there is also coherence behind this diversity (Twigg, 1983). Claiming oneself to be a vegetarian or vegan has a lot of other

connotations in addition to simply one's food avoidance. Twigg claims that there have been four major foci to the vegetarian arguments – health, animal welfare, the economic/ecological and spiritual concerns. Presenting oneself as vegetarian/vegan might imply that one is concerned about these other issues in addition to food per se. Consistent with Twigg's paper, most of the vegetarians/vegans in this study presented themselves as more concerned about eating healthily, the environmental issues or animal welfare. Interestingly, none of them mentioned the role of spiritual or religious factors. The lack of spiritual factors in students' discourse might be due to that they did not think it is a 'legitimate' reason. However, this thesis does not have sufficient data to make further speculation.

Some vegetarian/vegan students presented themselves as distinct from meat-eating students, or the 'meat eaters'¹⁸. A message was embedded in this self-presentation: they might have wanted to be regarded as different from the meat-eating students. By claiming to be vegetarian/vegan, they presented themselves as those who care more about certain issues and might even imply that they took a higher moral ground.

YL: When you said that people who eat meat usually can't give you a good reason to eat meat, what if they said I just like meat? Isn't that a good enough reason to eat meat if people enjoy it?

MH5: Yeah, that's what I get quite often. The problem with that reason is obviously that that's a factual immoral. So if you're a completely an immoral or amoral person you know either you're not a very nice person or a very good person in terms of ethics or you don't consider ethics as we were

¹⁸ This is a term used by vegetarian and vegan students in this study.

talking about like the market system, then yeah, you're right. But you know some people are killing other people; it doesn't make it right, does it? (male second year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

MH5 claimed that meat eating is 'a factual immoral' and further proposed that people who eat meat simply for the pleasure of its taste are immoral. This comment implies that his being vegan is moral conduct. The implication of morality that is embedded in vegetarianism/veganism, is often found in vegetarian/vegan students' discourse.

Students' diet changes whilst living at home can be regarded as their attempt in gaining food autonomy in the family setting. An inevitable negotiation of power with their parents was found in students' discourse. This appears to be particularly prominent with their mothers, who were said to be responsible for their daily food preparation (Henson et al., 1998). Mothers' role in students' discourse was framed as the major family member who can determine the success of their attempt in gaining autonomy in food. Because FH6's mother was the person who was in charge of food preparation in her family, she was said to have stopped FH6 being vegetarian before the age of ten.

YL: You said you used to be a vegetarian and now you're a vegan? How long have you been a vegetarian?

FH6: I always wanted to be vegetarian, but my parents- because obviously my mum would be doing all the cooking and she only let me be vegetarian when I was ten years old (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

In this quote, FH6's mother was presented as the person who was able to stop her from making decisions about her own food and also the one who could allow her converting to vegetarian after the age of ten. By the same token, MH5 claimed that his mother used to make a lot of effort in order to encourage him to eat vegetables, which he used to dislike when he was a child.

YL: When you were a child, did they make you eat something?

MH5: Yeah, I think when I was very young; I did eat some fruits and vege. I'm not quite sure when it stopped or why but I wouldn't say they made me but my mum particularly made a lot of efforts try and find something I liked so she would make me fruits smoothies or something 'cause I've just always said that I didn't like the texture of fruit and vegetable. So she always tried to get around that, make things (male second year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

Both FH6 and MH5 portrayed their mothers as the main person in the family who was most concerned about their diet. Due to the fact that it is often their mothers who does the cooking, mothers were presented as having a major influence on their children's autonomy in food to different extents. It has been identified in the literature that women's role in food choice-making for the whole family is complicated (Charles and Kerr, 1988, DeVault, 1991, Henson et al., 1998, Mennell et al., 1992, Murcott, 1983b). On the one hand, women have the obligation to provide food that satisfies their husbands' and children's taste. On the other hand, women need to monitor the family members' health, whilst using little treats to please

their young children from time to time (Charles and Kerr, 1988). Whilst women in DeVault's (1991) study talked about their choice of food for their children, they seemed to be more conscious of making sure their children eat 'right'. This might be what DeVault refers to as the awareness of feeding, which partly comes from the physiological experience of pregnancy. DeVault argues that pregnancy is identified as a period of time when women can feel their children being nurtured directly by their diet and this might contribute to their food consciousness about serving the 'appropriate' food to their children. Nevertheless, children's decisions in food do not always agree with their mothers'. When disagreement occurs, the process of power negotiation will begin. In this study FH6's mother rejected young FH6's attempted diet change and thus FH6 was unable to put her idea into practice. Her mother was presented as the dominating part in this power relation. MH5's mother, on the other hand, was said to have adopted a less dominating approach whilst trying to make younger MH5 eat fruits and vegetables. FH5's mother even went through all the effort of trying to change his eating, which was also against his own will. This power negotiation over food in family settings, as demonstrated by these two students, is a continuous process. Even though FH6's mother was said to have rejected her attempt to make decisions about her own food in the first place, she was said to become supportive of this decision when FH6 reached the age of ten. FH6 explained that it was because at the age of six, her mother did not think she meant it when she first brought it up. FH6 further speculated that her mother thought she came up with the idea to be like her grandfather who is vegetarian and it was simply 'a childish thing' and 'silly'. As a result, her mother did not take her idea seriously.

YL: Do you know why your mum wouldn't let you go vegetarian before ten?

FH6: Well my grandfather is vegetarian so I think they thought I did it just like a childish thing, I wanted to be like my grandfather [...] So yeah I remember when I was six I said I wanted to be vegetarian my mum put me on the phone with my grandfather and he laughed at me. And I was so offended because it was something I really felt but he thought I was just doing it because I admire him. So he just laughed at me and told me I was silly and not to bother so I forgot about it for a few years and then when I was really sure and my mum knew that I was sincere about it she was like wow and she was very supportive.

FH6 claimed that at the age of ten her mother realised that she really wanted to be a vegetarian. Her mother was slightly surprised¹⁹ but became supportive of her decision. The power relation over this disagreement on FH6's decisions in food has shifted as she grew up. It was suggested in FH6's response that when she reached the age of ten, her idea of becoming a vegetarian was 'taken seriously' and her mother understood she was 'sincere about it'. Similarly, despite the efforts MH5's mother devoted in order to make him eat fruits and vegetables, she had stopped trying when he turned sixteen.

MH5: [...] that I think by the time I was sixteen she probably felt that I could look after myself and that she got enough of forcing me to eat something I didn't want to eat. It was my responsibility I think. Yeah she did try very hard

¹⁹ This was implied in her response by saying 'she was like wow'.

to sort of change it (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

MH5 claimed that his mother decided that he should be responsible for his own food decisions and was also tired of forcing him to eat anything when he turned sixteen years old. Age was cited in both FH6 and MH5's discourse about their mothers' change of mind in their food decisions. Before a certain age, their mothers were said to have tried to tell them what they should or should not eat. After they had passed that age, their mothers were said to be more likely to let them make their own mind about their food and take them seriously. It can be observed that students have the tendency to relate the process of 'growing up' to their acquisition of autonomy in food. In other words, students appear to think that they are entitled to more autonomy in food as they age. As a result, it might be suggested that the power relation in children's personal food decisions should shift from domination by the mothers to the children as they grow up. In addition to that, having moved away from home, students had taken full responsibility for their food when they were interviewed. The link between food autonomy and growing up might also be used to declare that they are now grown-ups since they had been preparing food for themselves after they entered university.

University students' tendency to claim autonomy in food as they grow up is very likely to be a result of a process of socialisation. They might feel they are not only 'entitled to' but also 'supposed to' be responsible for their own diet as they age. In Barker's study (1972) she concluded that enormous value is placed upon having a home of one's own and being married. Students might feel it is important to be independent from their parents at their age and take their own responsibility in food as suggested in MH5's

quote. Age appears to be considered directly linked to this entitlement/responsibility. Hence, in order to present themselves as responsible adults, food was used to declare their autonomy. This tendency is observed in students' discourse throughout their university period.

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented several themes that emerged in university students' discourse about their food practices at home. Students' discourse is found to conform to the stereotypical gender roles in family food practices. However, they have only applied this gender stereotype to their parents' roles in their families. They did not seem to consider it as applicable to themselves, namely the children in their families. When students talked about their own roles in the family food settings, gender was not framed as a dominant factor. This is suspected to be due to their roles in family food practices as assistants. That is to say, students of both genders did not consider themselves as being responsible for food practices at home. However, the differences between genders are more salient in their discourse about eating, which is discussed in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven.

This chapter has also illustrated the ways in which university students used their food discourse to construct the family images they wished to present to the researcher. Some students portrayed their family members as independent entities. The family images presented were illustrated as a result of individual family members' collaboration. Others chose to portray their families as entities in their own right. Their personal images were said to be constrained by these family images. When their personal beliefs clash

with their family images, students might employ different strategies to fulfil their personal beliefs whilst maintaining the family images as a whole.

Finally, this chapter has discussed the ways in which students talked about their diet changes when living at home. Students' changes of diet were portrayed as either compulsory or voluntary, both of which were justified for their legitimacy. The legitimacy of their diet changes is believed to be able to determine the success of the said changes. Students' decisions to change their diet can be considered as their attempts to acquire food autonomy at home. In students' discourse, it was found that they have related their autonomy in food to the process of growing up. They seemed to think that they are entitled to more autonomy in their food practices as they grow up. Hence, they expected a power shift between their mothers and themselves over their autonomy in food. This expectation is believed to be a product of socialisation. Students expressed their belief that they are not only 'entitled to' but also 'supposed to' acquire food autonomy in order to show the independence that is expected at their age.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCOURSE ABOUT FOOD PRACTICES IN UNIVERSITY ACCOMMODATION

6.1 Introduction

Following the previous chapter looking at students' discourse about their food practices at home, this chapter examines students' food discourse about moving out from home into university accommodation. It aims to investigate the first stage in their food practices as university students: hall life. The main focus of this chapter is to discuss students' transitions in their food practices after moving away from home and starting to have some autonomy in their food practices at university. This chapter starts by examining students' discourse about their hall selection. This is then followed by students' accounts of their experience in university accommodation, both catered and self-catered halls. Finally, this chapter proposes that students' discourse about their food practices at a particular time is likely to be embedded in a relative framing. Both their prior and later experience in food would contribute to this discourse. Students' food practices, therefore, should be regarded as continuously changing.

6.2 Catered or self-catered halls

When students first came to the University of Nottingham, the majority²⁰ of them in this study claimed to have stayed at university halls of residence in their first year and moved into private rented accommodation in their second year. There are two types of university halls of residence at the University of Nottingham, namely catered and self-catered halls. In catered

²⁰ Only two students in this study had not stayed in student halls in their first year. The two cases are not discussed in this chapter but their discourse is examined in other data chapters.

halls, meals are provided by the communal kitchen three times a day at a range of times. In self-catered halls, several students share a kitchen in the accommodation and all the food has to be prepared by themselves. Roughly half of the respondents in this study chose to stay in catered halls and the other half stayed in self-catered halls. Because all the students in this study were in their second year or above at the time of interviews, the assumption was that all of them would have had some self-catering experience.

In students' discourse, it was found that, in comparison to students who stayed in catered halls, those who chose self-catered halls were more articulate in justifying their decision as to which kind of hall they choose. It seems to be assumed as a norm for first year students at the University of Nottingham to stay in catered halls and thus students perhaps only felt it was necessary to justify their decisions if they chose otherwise. The main reasons given by students for choosing to stay in self-catered accommodation were largely associated with autonomy in food. Students claimed that they wanted to have more independence in their food practices after moving out from home. FS8 claimed that the reason she chose self-catered halls was because she wanted to be more independent about her food and she was also convinced that hall food is 'dodgy and fatty'.

YL: What do you mean [the hall food is] not very nice?

FS8: It's just dodgy and fatty and I'd rather cook my own food and rather cook it at the time I want to eat it rather than feel like I have to be back for a certain time. That's what I want: more independence (female third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

In this comment, FS8 considered hall food as low quality and therefore she would rather cater for herself. Furthermore, it was not only the quality of the food per se that she did not like. She also claimed to try to avoid the restricted dining time in catered halls. In her discourse, it was implied that staying in catered halls and being provided with food might be considered as dependent and therefore she presented her decision in staying in self-catered halls to be the acquisition of independence.

By the same token, FS4 claimed that she chose to live in self-catered halls in her first year because she wanted to decide what and when to eat.

FS4: I didn't want to be told when I have to eat. 'Cause if you stay in catered hall you have to have breakfast starts at certain time and lunch at certain time and then like evening meals at certain time. I'll find that difficult. And also 'cause you're told what to eat, well I would like to choose what I want to eat (female second year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

In line with FS8's comment, FS4 also talked about her decision to stay in self-catered halls as acquiring independence. In this comment, she stressed that her decision for self-catered halls was to escape from the restricted food activities.

Although some of the other students said that they did not personally make the decision to stay in self-catered halls as they were allocated accommodation by the University, they claimed that they would have chosen to stay in self-catered halls if given the choice.

FS3: [I stayed at] self catered hall.

YL: Did you choose there?

FS3: No, I came in through clearing so you have no choice you just get booked. I could have appealed to go into catered halls but I already knew I didn't want; I wanted to cook for myself. I would have chosen to cook for myself even if I had been given a choice (female third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year)..

FS3 claimed that she had the choice to appeal for catered halls but she did not because she knew she wanted to cook for herself. Similar to the previous two students, she also linked self-catered halls with being independent and autonomous. Although she was allocated to self-catered halls by the university, it was largely presented as her own choice.

As identified in the previous chapter, the acquisition of food autonomy might be a result of socialisation. Students who chose to stay in self-catered halls might have felt they were not only 'entitled to' but also 'supposed to' take full responsibility for their own food at the time when they were interviewed. Hence, they presented their choice of halls as being determined by their desire for food autonomy. By presenting their choice of self-catered halls, they might have tried to declare that they were capable of handling their own food right after they moved away from home and they were doing what they were supposed to – being independent individuals. Compared to students who stayed in catered halls in their first year, students who chose self-catered halls were more likely to adopt a discourse that constructed their personal images as independent individuals. In the quotes demonstrated above, students declared their

desire to acquire independence when talking about their decision in selecting university accommodation.

Students who stayed in catered halls in their first year, on the other hand, did not explicitly address the reasons as to why they chose catered halls. As briefly mentioned earlier, students have taken it as a norm and therefore did not feel the need to justify their decision. MS3's comment might be able to shed some light on why students chose catered halls in their first year. MS3 was the only student who decided to move back to catered halls after having stayed in a rented house and catered for himself in his second year. He made it clear that he did not like cooking and the cleaning after it. As a result, he claimed that it would be more convenient for both him and his parents if he went back to catered halls in his third year.

MS3: [...] and then I like to go back in halls 'cause it's a lot easier.

YL: What do you mean it's a lot easier?

MS3: Just cooking, cleaning, and the bills and-[...] Like I was really bad at cooking and my mum made loads of food to put in the freezer. To them, it's a lot easier [for me] just to live in halls (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year).

Because of his dislike of cooking, MS3 claimed that his mother had to make him a lot of food and put it in the freezer when he lived in private rented accommodation. Therefore, he believed that moving back to catered halls would be not only easier for himself but also for his parents. The convenience of catered halls was said to be a major attraction to him.

A previous study (Edwards and Meiselman, 2003) reports that parents, mothers in particular, prefer their children to live on campus during their first year at university. Edwards and Meiselman claim that this preference was shared by their children for social reasons. The authors did not elaborate on what they meant by 'social reasons' in their paper. This thesis suspects that Edwards and Meiselman (2003) might have suggested that children in their first year at university would prefer to stay 'on campus' in order to meet other students. In line with Edwards and Meiselman's observation, MS3 believed that his parents might want him to move back to catered halls because of its convenience. However, many other students in this study claimed that their parents did not really worry about their competence in feeding themselves. For instance, MH6 did not think his mother was concerned when he decided to stay in self-catered halls in his first year.

YL: Do you think she was concerned when you first have to start to cook for yourself?

MH6: I don't think she was. She was very encouraging and sort of- because I think she recognised that I would have to start cooking for myself eventually. I don't think that she was very concerned that it would be a year in advance rather than that (male second year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

MH6 described his mother as supportive of his choice in staying at self-catered halls in his first year. According to him, this was because she knew that he will have to start cooking for himself eventually. MH6 believed that it should not matter to his mother whether he would have to do it a year in advance or not.

Both MS3 and MH6's decisions in choosing halls were said to be supported by their parents. Once again, students constructed their family images conforming to the social norms, which often consist of supportive and loving parents. In addition, their roles as children were portrayed as being considerate of their parents. MS3 framed his decision to move back to catered halls as having joint benefits for both his parents and himself. This implies that his decision was made not only for his own interest but also his parents', which is supposed to legitimate this 'deviant' decision. It also implies that he has not 'failed' to establish himself as an independent adult that is being considerate of the extra work placed on his mother. Another student, MH6, presented his decision in choosing self-catered halls as not resulting in his mother's concern. Their decisions were described as being made, not only on the basis of their personal preferences, but also as having taken their parents' feelings into consideration.

Chapter Five has demonstrated how students used their discourse about food practices at home to construct the family images they wanted to present. Hence, their discourse about food practices can be regarded as a means of communication in their self-presentation. Along these lines, students' discourse about their hall food experience after moving away from home was also found to construct how they wanted to be seen in that context. Students' discourse about their food practices in university accommodation has adopted a different focus from their discourse at home.

Students are likely to face a dilemma when they were making hall decisions before coming to university. Whilst moving out means more autonomy in their food practices and dietary decisions, it often comes with more responsibility. Some students might be slightly unsure about taking up the full responsibility right after moving out from home. Hence, they

might use their first year as an intermediate stage and choose to stay in catered halls, where they are allowed to make some decisions about food but do not have to take full responsibility for food practices. As for students who chose to stay in self-catered halls, they presented themselves as more eager to acquire independence than those who stayed in catered halls. In their discourse, it was suggested that they were willing to take full responsibility in their food practices in exchange for more autonomy. The ways in which students talked about their food practices in catered and self-catered halls are discussed in the following two sections. The attention is firstly given to students' discourse about catered halls.

6.3 Discourse about food practices in catered halls

Hall food was generally described as 'unhealthy', 'fatty' and 'disgusting' by university students who stayed in self-catered halls. The negative image of hall food was said to be a 'widely held belief', which was claimed to contribute to their decision to stay in self-catered halls. Student FS8 chose to stay in self-catered halls because the food served in catered halls is known to be 'not very nice'. Furthermore, she seemed to suggest that since 'everyone always complains about it' there must be something wrong with hall food.

YL: Have you been in the [self-catered] hall before?

FS8: Not- well for two days when I went to a conference (female third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: Then why would you think the food is fatty and unhealthy?

FS8: I guess it's just like widely held belief. Everyone always complains about it.

Many other students in this study have shared this 'widely held belief' about hall food being unhealthy and disgusting, even though they might never have stayed in catered halls. Hence, this thesis is curious about the ways in which this belief was established.

FH1 who had stayed in catered halls for one year did not consider food in halls as negatively as FS8, who had only little experience in catered halls.

YL: Where did you live in your first year?

FH1: I was in halls on campus (female second year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: Is it a catered hall?

FH1: Yes.

YL: Do you like the food there?

FH1: Most of the time I do, sometimes it wasn't brilliant but it seems okay. I don't know why everyone is complaining about its food.

It appears that students who chose to stay in catered halls, such as FH1, were aware of the prevalence of the 'widely held belief' about hall food and that 'everybody is complaining about it'. Having stayed in catered halls for a year, FH1 claimed to not agree with these complaints. In line with FH1's response, the taste of the hall food per se appears to be generally thought of as acceptable to students who had actually stayed in catered halls.

FH4: [...] but the taste was ok. Some things were nice and some things were not so great (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

Although most catered hall students claimed that the taste of hall food is acceptable, it did not seem to have much impact on students' discourse about hall food. The negative framing they adopted to talk about it is, first, likely to be tied into its unhealthiness and poor quality. Students who have the experience in living in catered halls might have created and continuously reinforced this negative discourse about hall food, based on their dissatisfaction with its healthiness and quality. Second, this negative response to hall food might be normatively required. Admitting to liking hall food might be linked to not showing their desire for food autonomy, which might be seen as not being an independent adult. Subsequently, this negative framing is adopted by all students, including those who have never stayed in catered halls. Students like FS8, as cited above, might choose to live in self-catered halls because of this pervasive negative framing of hall food.

Several female students who stayed in catered halls talked about their weight change, which was said to be a result of the unhealthy food served in catered halls.

FH7: [...] But after a while I began to feel very bloated from the food, it was very unhealthy [...] And I put on quite a lot of weight. Yeah, so at first it seemed really good but actually it's really bad for you (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: How about your friends? Did they enjoy the meals?

FH7: Probably the same like at first it seemed really good 'cause you'd have like pizza everyday but then after a while we, obviously we're all like being young girls, we were like worrying about our figures [...].

In this study, the weight change was often said to have made students realise that their diet was not ideal in catered halls. In this comment, FH7 claimed that she actually enjoyed hall food until she realised that she put on a lot of weight. After the awareness was raised, she said that she decided to do more exercise and tried to eat what she believed to be healthier, i.e. to adopt a healthier life style.

YL: What did you do back then? When you realised that oh it's probably not healthy enough, did you do anything about it?

FH7: Well I try to do running. We just like tried to be more careful about what we ate and although obviously it's tempting to have sort of like chips and pizza and stuff. We just have to like try and have salad and things like that but like you know more healthy.

This can be conceptualised as constructing her personal image as health conscious, which is also found in several other students' discourse, particularly amongst female students. Students' awareness of healthy eating, amongst catered hall students, was usually said to have been established a while after they moved into catered halls. The ways in which male students constructed their personal images as being conscious of eating healthily are discussed as follows.

In comparison to female students, male students in this study were less likely to talk about weight changes when asked about their food experience in catered halls. The differences between male and female discourse about weight might be explained by FH7's quote cited above. She adopted the discourse of a stereotypical gender role of female, a category that has long been associated with consciousness of their body weight, food and eating (e.g. Mori et al., 1987). Conforming to this gender role, FH7 described her friends and herself as concerned about their figure because of their role as young girls. The concern for weight was framed as generally belonging to the young female population. This framing is likely to be prevalent amongst university students, in both genders. Consequently, fewer male students in this study talked about their weight change, which is alleged to be a women's concern. However, it is not to suggest that male students are not interested in their weight changes. It may be due to this stereotypical gender role on the topic of weight that male students were less likely to mention the topic in the interviews. They might have tried to avoid presenting themselves as worrying about a 'women's problem'. In order to learn how male students feel about their weight changes in catered halls, some probing questions were posed in the interview. Only two male students said that they had noticeable weight changes in catered halls and both of them lost weight. MS7 claimed to have lost a lot of weight in his first year in catered halls.

YL: Did you put on weight in your first year?

MS7: No, I lost a lot of weight (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: Why did you lose weight?

MS7: I don't know, I was probably eating healthier 'cause I was eating more vegetables and things like that. And I

guess maybe I was walking around, I really don't know. I didn't deliberately try to, it just happened.

YL: Were you worried?

MS7: No, not really. I was pleased I suppose.

Although MS7 was pleased about his weight loss, he emphasised that he did not try to lose weight deliberately. His comment, again, appears to have adopted the gender stereotypical framing, in which men are not supposed to worry about weight. Furthermore, this quote also shows that some male students do have concerns about their weight to a certain extent. If MS7 did not have concerns about his weight at all, he would probably have felt apathetic about his weight loss. Nonetheless, this finding has to be read with caution since only two male students in this study claimed to have noticed weight changes.

In his previous quote, MS7 speculated that his weight loss was a result of his eating healthier in catered halls. Nonetheless, in the following quote, he claimed that it was more likely to be associated with consuming less rather than eating healthier.

MS7: In my first year I just didn't do anything 'cause I didn't tend to keep that much food in my room because we didn't have fridge in my room and everything. My thought was that I'd already paid for the food in the accommodation price so I didn't really want to spend money on food.

MS7 speculated that he might have lost weight in catered halls because he did not want to pay extra for food as food is already served in halls. However, he chose to present his weight loss as a result of 'eating

healthier' in his previous comment. This seems to be a common framing where male students illustrated their lives in catered halls as healthy. In contrast to female students, as discussed earlier, male students' discourse about attempting to live a healthy life is often framed as effortless. Although both FH7 and MS7 tried to construct their lives in catered halls as healthy, the ways in which this 'healthy life style' was put into practice were framed distinctively. This finding might shed some light on Cluskey and Grobe's paper (2009), in which they report that male university students in their study do not tend to make efforts to be healthy whereas female students tend to foster healthy behaviour. This thesis would propose a different viewpoint to consider this distinction between male and female students. Similar to students' discourse about their weight, male students might have felt that making efforts to eat healthily is not typically considered as masculine. Therefore, male students might not stress the effort they put into healthy eating, as it is supposed to be a 'women's concern'. However, it ought to be noted that this is simply an observation that emerged during the data analysis. This thesis does not have sufficient evidence to support a gender discrepancy in representations of healthy eating and future research is required.

In students' discourse about their catered hall food experience, on the one hand, MS7 claimed to have an improved diet in catered halls compared to his eating at home. On the other hand, FH7's discourse adopted the pervasive catered hall image, i.e. unhealthy, low quality. She presented herself as having adapted her food practices to that catered hall image when she first moved in and then learned to eat healthier. Her experience in catered halls was portrayed as a learning process. FH7 and MS7's experience in catered halls appear to be rather different at a first glance. Nevertheless, reading between the lines, it can be found that both FH7 and

MS7 actually presented their diet as becoming progressively healthier. Furthermore, even though MS7 presented his diet as healthier, he did not challenge the pre-existing negative hall food image.

University students' tendency to present their diet as increasingly becoming healthier can be linked to the alleged bad reputation of their diet. It seems to be a popular belief that students' diet is high in calories, fat, cholesterol, sodium and lack of fruits and vegetables. As has been discussed in Chapter Three, this popular belief has attracted scholarly interests from various disciplines (e.g. Cason and Wenrich, 2002, Devine et al., 2006, Edwards and Meiselman, 2003), attempting to 'improve' university students' diet.

It is possible that students in this study tried to avoid presenting themselves as typical students who 'live on baked beans and beer' and therefore emphasised that they did pay attention to the quality of their food as well as to its healthiness. This is further confirmed by the claims that were made by most of the students in this study, describing their own diet at the time of being interviewed as healthy. Students in this study might have wanted to be regarded as eating healthily and to demonstrate that poor student diet is a stereotypical prejudice. Students' discourse about healthy eating is discussed in further detail in Chapter Seven.

Students' discourse about takeaway food relates to students' diet change in catered halls. Takeaway was usually described as a supplementary meal in addition to the meals that are provided in halls. In general, students claimed to have more chances to order takeaways in catered halls, compared to other living situations. MS1 said that when he stayed in

catered halls, he used to get takeaways about four times a week, sometimes even every night.

YL: How often [did you used to get takeaway]?

MS1: Last year when I was staying in halls, I used to order takeaway about four times a week, probably sometimes, sometimes, every night I have it. It wasn't very healthy like drinking, getting drunk pretty much every night. And more drink, takeaway pizza or takeaway kebab, stuff like that (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

University students adopted an unhealthy framing to describe takeaway food. Whilst talking about getting takeaway in catered halls, many students extended this unhealthy framing to talk about their lifestyle back then. Many students who lived in catered halls talked about their unhealthy life style in their first year: getting takeaway, getting drunk and staying up late were all frequently mentioned. This discourse is found particularly prominent amongst students in catered halls but less so in those in self-catered halls.

The main reason for ordering takeaway in catered halls was said to be lack of cooking facilities in catered halls. Thus when students got hungry, it was the only option available. The fixed dinner time in catered halls, according to students, is usually between six and seven in the evening. Many students claimed that because of their unhealthy life style, including staying up late, when it got to midnight they would find themselves starving with no food available. Getting takeaway was described as the only way to get food after the dinner time in catered halls.

YL: Why [did you get takeaway in halls]?

FH2: Um, hungry, there's no food around cause we are in [catered] halls (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

In their discourse about getting takeaway in catered halls, many students described themselves as having made bad dietary decisions, e.g. getting takeaway, when they first moved in catered halls. After realising their diet was not ideal, students claimed to have tried to eat what is supposed to be healthier. This pattern is very similar to what has been described earlier in FH7's quote, where she portrayed her diet as progressively improving in catered halls. In the following quote, MS1 claimed that he had stopped drinking, smoking weed and getting takeaways altogether a while after his stay in catered halls. He stressed that this unhealthy living style is in the past and now he has changed.

MS1: Um, yeah, I used to like taking that a lot. I used to order loads and loads of like kebabs, but then I stopped, this year I stopped drinking and smoking weed and I've ordered two takeaways, since the start of the year. So, I don't really have takeaways anymore, used to (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

Students' discourse about their catered hall experience is found to be framed as a learning process; not only in terms of how to eat healthily, but also in terms of how to live a healthy life in general. All the students who used to live in catered halls described their living styles as progressively improving. In other words, they portrayed themselves as learning from the previous experience and trying to live a healthier life. After examining

students' discourse about catered halls, the attention now turns to students' discourse about food practices in self-catered halls.

6.4 Discourse about food practices in self-catered halls

Students who stayed in self-catered halls presented themselves as more independent than catered hall students in their first year. Similar to their decision in choosing halls, they seemed to have placed more emphasis on their individuality in their discourse about food practices in self-catered halls.

Unlike catered hall students, self-catered hall students did not describe their food practices as progressively improving in their first year. FS1 claimed that she did not cook before university but after moving into self-catered halls she started to cook.

YL: You didn't stay in hall in your first year?

FS1: No, I stayed in a flat, so it was self-catering. It was university accommodation, it was for self-catering. It's called [name of the hall] (female second year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: Do you usually cook for yourself or do you cook for your flatmates?

FS1: Yeah, it depends. 'Cause they eat different food to me. So when I started in the first, we started everyone cooking for everyone.

In this quote FS1 described cooking as something she learned effortlessly after moving in self-catered halls. This framing was found to be rather

common amongst students who stayed in self-catered halls. In general, they portrayed themselves as conscious of, and capable of, eating healthily right after they moved away from home. The learning process described in catered hall students' discourse was not found amongst self-catered halls students. As mentioned previously, students' diet has long been considered as unhealthy. Students from self-catered halls might have tried to avoid being seen as 'typical students'. This might have been stressed by self-catered hall students because they had chosen to cater for themselves in the first year, indicating they might have wanted to be regarded as more independent than catered hall students. Moreover, choosing self-catered halls was illustrated as a decision that did not conform to 'the norm' of the University of Nottingham. Presenting that they were eating a healthy diet in self-catered halls might be an attempt to reinforce the idea that their decision was correct and that they had done well looking after themselves.

Students' attempts to change their reputation of poor diet are not unique to this study. A news article (Tobin, 2006) in *The Independent* reported that students in Oxford claimed that they have a healthy diet and they are not the only ones amongst their friends who give consideration to their food. The author of Foodie Student Cookbooks Fiona Beckett was interviewed in this news article, who claimed that:

'Students' approach to eating has changed [...] Most are far more interested in what they eat, and very health-conscious, particularly girls. Messages like eating five fruit and vegetable portions a week have been taken on board by students [...] and more freshers are arriving at university with good eating habits established by home lives.'

According to this news article, students' eating has changed nowadays and the reputation of student food is no longer applicable. Moreover, students' diet at home was also suggested to have a positive effect on students' eating habits. It is, therefore, suspected that UK university students nowadays are more conscious of the challenge of eating healthily. Whether they put it into practice or not, the ways in which they presented themselves were conforming to this healthy eating notion.

Unlike students who stayed in catered halls, takeaway was framed as simply one of many options by self-catered hall students. Once students were hungry, they said they were able to choose between ordering takeaway and cooking food themselves. Most students in self-catered halls claimed that they would often just cook something when they felt hungry, which was not an option for students in catered halls. FS8 claimed that she only had takeaway once in her first year in self-catered halls and claimed that if she was to eat at home she would just cook.

FS8: If I'm gonna eat at home then I usually just cook. And if I don't want to cook, I usually go out (female third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

This is not because she does not enjoy takeaway food. Although she claimed that she likes takeaway, she said that it is too expensive and fatty.

YL: Do you enjoy the food from take-out?

FS8: I like it.

YL: Why don't you get it more often?

FS8: 'Cause they are expensive and really fatty.

FS8's comment has reinforced the pervasive image, which self-catered hall students in this study similarly constructed. She described her first year in self-catered halls as being health- and financial- conscious of her food. Therefore, instead of getting takeaway, she would rather cook, which is supposedly cheaper and healthier. The ways in which FS8 presented herself in her first year are commonly seen amongst other self-catered hall students. Generally speaking, the ways in which self-catered hall students portrayed their first year's diet are found to be more health-conscious than catered hall students.

Although most self-catered hall students claimed to only get takeaway very rarely, they claimed to enjoy its taste. At the same time, they described takeaway food as unhealthy. Many of them expressed their belief that they should not eat too much takeaway food. Therefore, takeaway food was often portrayed as a temptation that they tried to resist. For example, MH1 claimed to enjoy takeaway food but would only get it if his friend does the same so that he would 'feel better'.

YL: Do you enjoy take out food?

MH1: Yeah, I like chips, yeah [...] But we feel better about getting chips if the other person does, that's how we justify ourselves (male third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: Why would you feel bad in the first place?

MH1: Well the chip shop near where we live is very greasy so it's not particularly good for you.

MH1 claimed that he felt the need to justify himself for getting takeaway was because it is supposed to be 'not good for you'. Compared to self-

catered hall students, students who stayed in catered halls presented their reasons for getting takeaway as more legitimate. Takeaway was said to be the only option left for them in catered halls. This legitimacy might have endowed students in catered halls with some justification whilst claiming they used to get it frequently. Students from self-catered halls, on the other hand, might have felt it less legitimate to get takeaway food because they were given other options. Therefore, they were less likely to present themselves as getting takeaway. This is not to say that students' self-presentation in the interview is untrue. This thesis does not have the data to examine university students' food practices in their first year. Therefore, it is only their self-presentation that is being discussed here. However, it can be argued that self-presentation can also reflect students' 'reality'. At the same time, their 'reality' cannot be seen as free from self-presentation. In students' self-presentation, not only their personal images were constructed, the construction of hall images was also found, which is discussed below.

6.5 Discourse as the construction of hall images

Students' discourse about takeaway food provides an example of students' construction of university halls. Similar to their construction of family images, university halls were framed as entities in their own right in students' discourse. The categorisation of catering and self-catering was found to be most prominent. Catered halls appeared to be associated with an unhealthy life style to a certain extent. Self-catered halls were portrayed as having more autonomy and independence, and sometimes even as being healthier. Catered halls students described their initial food practices as conforming to the unhealthy image attached to catered halls.

Similarly, self-catered hall students also presented themselves according to the healthy, autonomous image that is associated with self-catered halls.

Unlike the construct of their family images, students' personal images were not described as working together in order to create 'ideal' images of the university accommodation. In their discourse, university halls seem to have their own pre-existing images established by previous residents. Hence, their food practices during this period were described as conforming to what is supposed to be the norm in the accommodation in which they lived. At the same time, students also stressed their individuality about their food practices in halls. Even though students from catered halls were said to have initially conformed to the 'unhealthy' hall image, many of them claimed to have adapted a 'healthier' eating pattern after they learned that a catered hall life style is not necessarily good for them.

In the discourse about their food practices at home as shown in Chapter Five, when the family images clash with their personal images, many of them claimed to have developed various strategies to maintain their family images. This effort was not found in their discourse about university accommodation. This can be considered from two aspects.

First, it can be a result of the change of living situations: the change of their social relations with their cohabiters and the institutional images. Students' relationship with their family is likely to be closer than with their cohabiters in university accommodation. Similarly, their attachment to their family images is likely to be stronger than to hall images. Therefore, students might try to maintain their family images as a whole while not necessarily feel the same about hall images.

Second, students' personal images were portrayed as gradually becoming more important than the hall images. This was found to be particularly salient amongst catered hall students. For self-catered hall students, it might be more difficult for them to talk about their hall life. This may be due to the fact that students in self-catered halls did not have a clear transition in food practices after they entered university. Unlike students who stayed in catered halls, students from self-catered halls did not have a period of time when their food practices were clearly different from they were in private accommodation, i.e. at the time of being interviewed. As a result, their account about their self-catered hall life might have been mixed with their later food experience in private accommodation. Therefore, they might have felt they have skipped the learning process and were able to make the 'right decisions' from their first year. By contrast, students who stayed in catered halls were more likely to be able to describe their food practices in their first year because it was a separate food experience from that in their private accommodation. Hence, catered hall students might find talking about their first year food practices easier. In students' discourse, catered halls and self-catered halls were framed as two different entities with certain features. The focus of their discourse, nonetheless, was found to be gradually shifting from hall images to personal images.

6.6 Continuously changing food practices

In their discourse about home and university accommodation, students described themselves as having adopted different food practices in different living situations. This finding contradicts the longitudinal study conducted by Meiselman et al. (1999), which has been discussed in Chapter Three. They found that students' 'eating behaviours' remain the

same before and during the change of their living situations, i.e. as entering university. Meiselman et al. further predict that the eating behaviour would be even more stable in an older population because they tend to have more established food patterns than young people. However, this thesis has identified the ways in which Meiselman et al. overlooked the differences between living environments and living situations in Chapter Three. Furthermore, it has also been pointed out that they have treated students' food practices at university as static.

This thesis found that students' discourse about their food practices does vary when they experience different stages of life changes. Students' discourse about their experience in halls has shown that they have the tendency to talk about their food practices in halls in relation to their other food experience.

Students' food practices at home were found to have an impact on the ways in which they talked about their food practices in university accommodation. Similar to many other catered hall students, the reasons that FH2 dislikes hall food were said to be associated with the limited food choices and the high fat content of the hall food.

FH2: I didn't really like the food, I thought it's really fatty and you don't have that much choice. We had to eat what they told you. Because it was fatty and limited choice (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

FH2 claimed that one of the reasons she dislikes hall food was the limited choice. By contrast, FH7 said that she actually enjoyed hall food due to the wide range of choices when compared to home cooking.

YL: When you stayed in halls, can you talk about the food?

Did you enjoy it?

FH7: I'd say I enjoyed it but I suppose like it's sort of- the choice is so big like you know different to school and everything and different to home like, you can have like lots of different choices (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

The difference in their answers does not necessarily mean that the range of food in FH2's and FH7's halls varied. FH7's comment about catered hall food choice was made in relation to school meals and home cooking. FH2 might have talked about the limited choice of hall food in relation to food that is available in private accommodation. Catered hall food seems to be framed as a stage in between moving out from home and catering for oneself. Similarly, the degree of autonomy in food at this stage was also described as more than at home but less than in self-catering. Therefore, even though both FH2 and FH7 were talking about catered hall food, the ways in which the food selection was portrayed in their discourse has to be considered in the context of students' food experience as a whole.

By the same token, the following example demonstrates the ways in which students' discourse about halls was framed in comparison with their later experience in private accommodation. Only students at their second year or above were included this study. Hence, all the students had some experience in self-catering at the time of being interviewed. Their

discourse about hall food experience was also found to be tied to their later experience in private accommodation.

In general, most students in this study claimed to enjoy cooking for themselves. It was found that once they have a relatively successful food experience in private accommodation, a more negative framing would be adopted to talk about hall food and vice versa. This is often found to be embedded in students' discourse implicitly. FH7 who claimed to have enjoyed the wide variety of hall food also adopted a negative framing to talk about it. Although not said explicitly, she presented herself as preferring to cook her own food in private accommodation.

FH7: oh [catered hall serves] like refined starchy food, like white pasta, like white rice, like loads of chips, potato wedges, everything, onion rings, like disgusting fried things (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

On the contrary, once students' attempt to cook for themselves did not turn out to be what they had hoped, their feeling about hall food might be relatively more positive. MS3 claimed to dislike cooking after self catering for one year. As a result, his discourse about hall food was relatively more positive than other students.

MS3: I tried to cook, but I didn't really like the food that I cook. It was more just, there was this café next to us so we used to go there to eat a lot, [name of the café]. And my mum used to give me a lot of frozen food and [from name of a supermarket] and- cause cooking seems like a lot of

hassle as well, like a lot of time and a lot of cleaning (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year).

As briefly mentioned earlier, MS3 was the only student who intended to move back to catered halls after living in the private accommodation for a year. He claimed to dislike cooking and considered himself as a bad cook. He described cooking as an everyday chore and expressed his dislike for handling food as well as the cleaning afterwards. During his time in private accommodation, he claimed to have not cooked much and to have eaten out rather frequently. His mother was also said to have had to make food to put in his freezer. In comparison with the year he stayed in the private accommodation, he claimed that catered hall life was more suitable for him and his parents. For MS3, the experience in private accommodation appears to be less successful than his previous experience in catered halls. From his comment, it can also be observed that students' discourse about food in halls is not necessarily framed as only tied to hall food per se but other implications that hall food might be associated with.

In addition, MS3 portrayed himself as less interested in acquiring autonomy in his food practices. It can be seen in his previous quote that a large part of his food decisions were still made by his mother after he moved into private accommodation, by providing frozen cooked meals for him. It is speculated that even if he did want autonomy in his food practices, the full responsibility and the extra efforts he would have had to make in exchange for the autonomy might have been a discouragement. Hence, MS3's discourse about his catered hall experience was much more positive than that of other students. As a result, moving back to catered halls was presented as a sensible decision.

By the same token, self-catered hall students also talked about their experience in self-catered halls in relation to their later food experience in private accommodation. The major change in self-catered hall students' food practices was said to have happened when they first moved away from home. As suggested earlier, self-catered hall students presented themselves as having no problem looking after themselves over this period. Therefore most of them claimed to be happy about self-catered halls.

In his following comment, MH1 adopted the general framing to illustrate self-catered halls. He claimed that he enjoyed staying in self-catered halls because he was uncertain about the idea of having to eat at set times and the quality of hall food. Furthermore, he claimed to have enjoyed the location of the self-catered hall in which he used to stay.

MH1: Firstly because I didn't like the idea of having to eat at set times. And secondly because I was concerned about the quality of the food I would get in hall. Also [name of the self-catered hall] is quite nicely located, it's off campus, and you're midway between uni and town centre. So all your taxi fares are halved in your first year. It just separates you from the university so I really enjoy [name of the self-catered hall] (male third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

Similar to other students' discourse, MH1's self-catered hall experience was linked to autonomy in food. Being able to make all the decisions about his food in self-catered hall, the experience was largely described as positive. On the other hand, FH3 who also chose to stay in self-catered halls, claimed to have enjoyed her life there but she believed that she

would probably have met more people in catered halls, where all the students eat together.

YL: Did you enjoy it at [name of the self-catered hall]?

FH3: I did like it but think you would have met more people if you have been on main campus in the catered accommodation. 'Cause everyone eats together and it's quite like communal and friendly whereas we all cooked basically kind of whenever we wanted to eat, usually I'd eat by myself (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

In this comment, the restriction of dining time in catered halls was framed as a desirable feature by FH3. It was portrayed as a time when all the students gather in the dining hall and eat together. This was said to be a good way to meet people if they were new students. According to this comment, FH3 might have felt she had missed out from the catered hall food experience. However, the restriction of dining time was generally described as an undesirable feature of catered halls, as demonstrated in several previous quotes. In her case, FH3 claimed to usually eat by herself in self-catered halls. Hence, it might be that FH3 did not have a successful experience in self-catered halls. As a result, she might have considered catered hall as a potentially better option. As for other self-catered hall students who claimed to prefer self-catered halls, they might have had a more successful experience there. In comparison, FH3's discourse about self-catered halls might be less positive than other students, particularly those who had a more successful experience in self-catered halls.

Students' discourse about their food practices over a certain period of time was found to be framed in relative terms. Their discourse is often based on other food experiences they had in their life experience and embedded in a relative discourse. This can be linked to James' and several other interactionists' views about one's own reality, which is very much constructed by their life experience. James (1890) believes that the social self is the self of daily awareness that is constructed in reflection upon itself. This self is realised through one's everyday experience and thus it changes in the course of social interaction. Within the experience, James (1996) contends that 'the continuities and the discontinuities are absolutely co-ordinate matters of immediate feeling' (P.95). According to James, students' discourse about food practices should be regarded as constructed by their life experience. It is, therefore, supposed to be constantly changing.

In short, this chapter reports that students adopted different discourse to talk about their food practices at home and in university accommodation. Hence, this thesis suggests that students' discourse about their food practices is linked to their living situations. Furthermore, it is also framed in relative terms. Their discourse about university accommodation might reflect their feelings about it at a particular time point, i.e. the time students were interviewed for this study. Moreover, their feeling at that particular time is likely to be shaped by their life experiences. Hence, their discourse about their food practices is likely to be dynamic and continuously changing.

6.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has illustrated the themes that have emerged in university students' discourse about university accommodation. It has examined the ways in which university students talked about their decisions whether to stay in catered or self-catered halls before coming to university. Choosing catered halls was portrayed as a norm in university students' discourse whereas autonomy was closely linked to students' choice of self-catered halls. Catered hall food was generally portrayed as unhealthy and of low quality in students' discourse, which was referred to as a 'widely held belief'. This negative image was suspected to be constructed by catered hall students and being adopted by all students, some of whom chose to stay in self-catered halls because of this negative image of hall food.

Students' discourse about catered and self-catered hall culture has also been examined in this chapter. Students had the tendency to describe their food practices as conforming to the pre-existing hall images in the beginning of their hall life. Many described their life in catered halls as conforming to the unhealthy life style that was constructed to illustrate catered halls. Catered hall students portrayed themselves as generally starting with unhealthy food in halls, along with other unhealthy living styles such as over drinking or staying up late. After a period of time in catered halls, they claimed to have realised that the life style in catered halls was not healthy and many of them claimed to have adopted what is supposed to be a 'healthier' living style. Their first year in catered halls was described as a learning process, which helped them to develop a healthy life style.

In the accounts of self-catered hall students, the hall image was presented as having more autonomy and independence. Many described themselves

as being able to have a healthy diet right from the beginning of their first year at university, when they started to cater for themselves. The learning process found in catered hall students' discourse was missing in self-catered hall students' discourse. This appears to be a common self-catered hall image that students tried to construct, which might be able to reinforce their decision in choosing self-catered halls as correct. Similar to students from catered halls, those from self-catered halls also described their hall experience as conforming to the prevalent hall image. Regardless of the differences between the images that were illustrated, all students described their own food practices as progressively improving.

Unlike their construct of family images, students' personal images did not seem to contribute to the pre-existing hall images. The hall images were portrayed as being determined by previous residents. When their personal images clash with hall images, students did not attempt to reconcile the two images. Instead, their personal images were stressed in their discourse. The focus of their discourse was found to be gradually shifting from institutional images to personal images.

Finally, this chapter discusses the ways in which students' food practices were framed in relative terms. Students from catered halls were likely to frame hall food more negatively if their later experience in food preparation was more successful. In contrast to that, if they had a less successful experience in food preparation, they might frame hall food more positively. Similar to this, students' experience in self-catered halls was also framed in relation to their later food experience in private accommodation. Hence, this thesis suggests that students' food practices are dynamic and continuously changing.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCOURSE ABOUT FOOD PRACTICES IN PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION

7.1 Introduction

This is the last of the three chapters that examine university students' discourse about their food practices in different living situations. Students' discourse about their food practices in private accommodation is presented here. All the students in this thesis claimed to have to cater for themselves in this living situation.

The attention then turns to students' self-presentation in private accommodation. Students' discourse at this stage of life is found to be mainly constructing their personal images but not institutional images. Three major themes have emerged in their discourse, namely students' feeling about food preparation, breakfast skipping and juggling multiple tasks in life. Finally, this chapter examines the gender roles students adopted to describe food preparation and their diet.

7.2 Discourse about self-catering

When students were asked about their food practices in private accommodation, food preparation was framed as one of the major challenges they had to face. Catered hall students appear to see this task as more challenging than self-catered hall students. This is because, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, most students from self-catered halls would have faced this challenge in the previous year in university accommodation. To overcome this challenge, many of the catered hall students claimed to have tried and learnt some cooking skills in the

summer before they moved into private accommodation. MS7 claimed to have made the effort to learn cooking at the end of his first year because he knew that he would be put in the position of making meals for himself after moving out from catered halls.

YL: When you went home that you decided that you want to practice-

MS7: Yeah, I did it the end of the first year, I thought I wanted to start learning to cook and I think I got my mum and dad helped me looking for books and things like that (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

Having little previous experience with food, many students claimed to have sought for help from home with their cooking. Cooking skills were presented as passed onto students from their parents, revealing that this attempt towards independence-seeking was supported and helped by their family.

In the *University Student Food Attitudes and Behaviour Survey*, Devine et al. (2006) report that 86% of respondents learned their cooking at home, 27% learned at school and 7% taught themselves to cook, e.g. using cookbooks. The university students in this study also claimed to have learnt cooking through these said means.

FH6 claimed to have learnt cooking through trial and error, watching her mother cook, adapting her mother's recipes and inventing things of her own.

YL: So how did you learn to cook then?

FH6: Trial and error? At first I was terrible. Also watching my mum a little bit, I used to cook with her. And once I'm here she's sent me recipes, vegetarian recipes online so when I'm feeling very, like I had a lot of time because her recipes are a bit more complicated then I take those and read about it. Yeah, mostly my mum, try and replicate things that my mum does or just like invent stuff from myself and see what happens, yes (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year)..

In this quote, FH6 described her cooking skills as learned from her mother, but other approaches were also suggested. The ways in which students learned to cook appear to be less straightforward than Devine et al. (2006) have reported. The categories Devine and colleagues proposed in their survey, which were used to organise the responses about learning to cook, were found to be rather ambiguous. The categories proposed were: at home, at school, self/recipe books, friends/other people, TV/media/internet, work, or when came to university/college respectively. This categorisation raises a problem in studies that try to investigate people's cooking 'information sources'. This thesis found that students often have difficulty in identifying when and where exactly they received a piece of information. In the previous quote from FH6, she has shown some degree of uncertainty when answering my question. Her first response was that she learned cooking through trial and error using a questioning intonation, demonstrating that she was unsure where exactly she learned cooking but trial and error was the first answer what came to her mind. However, she realised other information sources have also contributed to her cooking-learning process and therefore elaborated on her answer.

Unpredictability was often mentioned when students were talking about the beginning of their learning process. FS2 claimed that cooking is like 'doing chemistry' because it is simply following the instructions.

YL: Where did you learn to cook?

FS2: I guess I've always, you know watched mum in the kitchen or helped mum. But if you give me a recipe, it's kind of like doing the chemistry. You just follow the instructions and usually it works out fine (female second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

It was implied that there is the possibility of failing in her cooking but as long as she follows the instructions, 'usually it works out fine'. As new cooks, students seemed to have the tendency to follow cookbooks or recipes. What was implied is the unpredictability of cooking without cookbooks or recipes.

In students' discourse, cooking was often said to be learnt by 'trial and error' or 'experiments'. The experiment analogy was used by several students whilst talking about the beginning of their learning process. Describing cooking as an experiment shows that students consider cooking and doing experiments as having certain similar characteristics, one of which might be both practices involve 'explicit knowledge' and 'tacit knowledge'.

In students' discourse, it was found that gathering cooking knowledge and acquiring cooking skills are not equated. FS4 claimed that her mother had told her how to cook since she entered university. Although she might

know how to cook in theory, she claimed to have found it difficult to put it into practice.

FS4: Well at first I used to try to cook like my mum, like things like she cooks I would try to cook but it doesn't always turn out great.

YL: Have you asked her to give you the recipes?

FS4: Well since I've been in the university, she told me how to cook but since I got here and then I thought I can't cook and yeah (female second year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

From this quote, it can be suggested that having knowledge about cooking does not necessarily endow students with equivalent cooking skills. Their experience in replicating what they saw when other people cook, or what they read in cookbooks was said to not always end in success. Their cooking skills seem to get better with 'hands-on' experience. Acquiring cooking skills in students' discourse was portrayed as a rather personal experience. Even with the help of cookbooks, recipes, and their mothers, students' cooking skills were described as something that has to be gained from personal participation and experience. Their personal 'hands-on' experience was described as being able to transform their cooking knowledge into cooking skills. This can be linked to some of the discussion in STS about 'tacit knowledge'. Tacit knowledge was first described by Michael Polanyi (1958), as knowledge that cannot be achieved by explicit inference but can be only tacitly known. In one of his papers (Polanyi, 1966) he argues that,

It appears then that scientific discovery cannot be achieved by explicit inference, nor can its true claims be explicitly stated. Discovery must be arrived at by the tacit powers of the mind and its content, so far as it is indeterminate, can be only tacitly known (Polanyi, 1966:1).

Deriving from Polanyi's work, some scholars have criticised his work as weak and needing of support from Wittgenstein's philosophy (Gourlay, 2004). Scholarly attention from various disciplines has been drawn to tacit knowledge research. These include philosophy, cognitive sciences, neurosciences, social sciences, economics and so on (Pozzali, 2008). With the wide interest in tacit knowledge research, different schools have adopted different definitions and interpretations of the term. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) identify tacit knowledge as 'a non-numerical non-linguistic form of knowledge that is highly personal and context-specific and deeply rooted in individual experiences, ideas, values and emotions' (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995:8,9,59-60). Baumard (1999) distinguishes two types of organisational knowledge that cannot be articulated or stabilised: implicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. He identifies that implicit knowledge is something we know but do not necessarily want to express whereas tacit knowledge is something we know but cannot express. Collins (2002) defines tacit knowledge as 'knowledge or abilities that can be passed between scientists by personal contact but cannot be, or have not been, set out or passed on in formulae, diagrams, or verbal descriptions and instructions for action' (Collins, 2002:72). This thesis does not attempt to resolve the long debate surrounding tacit knowledge, but only intends to discuss tacit knowledge on the most general grounds on which is agreed by most of the schools of thought, that tacit knowledge is personal and private. It is generally difficult to make explicit. The term explicit knowledge

referred to here also adopts the most general framing: knowledge that can be explicitly stated.

In students' discourse about learning to cook, both forms of knowledge were mentioned. Explicit knowledge was said to be acquired through observing others' cooking or the use of cookbooks and recipes. Tacit knowledge was portrayed as that which can only be learnt from 'trial and error', i.e. through personal experience. At the beginning of the learning process, students claimed to replicate what they observed when others cook or following the instructions in the cookbooks, all of which can be seen as a form of explicit knowledge. It was said to be general practice to learn cooking using explicit knowledge as a starting point, from which students develop tacit knowledge through 'hands-on' experience. Students' discourse about the ways in which they learned to cook was found to be similar to the example Polanyi (1966) uses to make the argument, that all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in it. He illustrates an example of learning to drive from the motorcar manual.

The text of the manual is shifted to the back of the driver's mind and is replaced almost entirely into the tacit operations of a skill (Polanyi, 1966:7).

To sum up, the process of learning to cook was described as acquiring explicit knowledge from various means as the starting point. The explicit knowledge was then interpreted and then transformed into tacit knowledge through personal experience. Since explicit knowledge is only one of the forms in which knowledge is disseminated, it is inherently partial. However, compared to tacit knowledge, it is perhaps a form that is more easily and efficiently disseminated and thus is received more quickly than tacit

knowledge. This might be the reason why it was described as the starting point of learning by students in this study. Most of the literature emphasises the importance of tacit knowledge and has perhaps sometimes overlooked the importance of explicit knowledge.

Drawing from university students' discourse about learning to cook, this thesis would suggest that the best way to learn knowledge should involve both forms of knowledge. Explicit knowledge should be made easily accessible as a starting point. The acquisition of explicit knowledge would facilitate the development of tacit knowledge. This might be able to serve as a model for knowledge acquisition in general.

Moreover, students' discourse has also portrayed the transitions in their cooking skills. Most students described themselves as following recipes and cookbooks more closely at the beginning of the learning process. For instance, MH1 claimed that he started out from replicating his parents' cooking at the beginning of catering for himself.

YL: How did you learn that (cooking)?

MH1: Good question. I suppose at first I just try to do things that my parents cook. And once I sort of, well once I knew how to cook enough to live and I just, tried whatever took my fancy (male third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

Once MH1 had some experience in cooking, he was said to be more flexible in his cooking. This pattern of developing cooking skills is found to be rather prevalent in students' discourse. Flexibility is often said to be developed only after they were more familiar with the process of food preparation. This finding is similar to the study carried out by Henson and

colleagues (1998), in which they investigate people's food choice and diet change in family setting. They discover that the diet changers and the feeders in families are often anxious about obeying the rules of a new diet at the beginning of the diet change. Over time, the degree of this strictness may decline and more flexibility would be introduced in their new diet regime. Students' acquisition of cooking skills can be seen as similar to adopting a new diet regime.

Some students said that their cooking skills have been developed through certain dishes only. MH6 portrayed the beginning of his learning to cook as easy, during which he experimented and once he found what he liked he claimed to have stuck with it.

MH6: [...] I quite quickly built myself up to a rather enjoyable state of affairs as well but I sort of experimented a bit, found what I like and then stuck with it, so yeah that's good (male second year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

MH6's comment suggests that he had established a set of dishes or meals at the beginning of his learning process. He then claimed that that he 'sticks with what he likes', which is the set of dishes he developed from the beginning of his learning process. Although several other students made similar comments and some of them even gave examples of their 'set menus', this thesis speculates that the ways in which these set dishes are prepared are likely to evolve as students gain more experience. More flexibility is likely to be introduced.

Although the experiment analogy was more prevalent in students' discourse in reference to the beginning of their learning process, these experiments were described as continued throughout their learning process, as can be seen in the following quote.

YL: Do you mind trying new ingredients, like something you've never tried?

MH6: Yeah, I do like trying something new every once in a while and again that's exceptional rather than the norm (male second year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

Despite his earlier comment claiming that he would stick with the food he likes, MH6's food practices were not said to have stopped evolving. This reinforces one of the main arguments of this thesis: students' food practices, including food preparation, are constantly changing.

A large part of students' discourse about the process of learning to cook involves the transitions of perspectives in relation to food, particularly before and after self-catering. FS6's previous experience with red meat, when it was served to her, was said to be enjoyable. However, red meat was described as 'sickening' when she was required to cook it herself.

YL: You like red meat but you don't like the smell of it?

FS6: Yeah, I used to be fine with it but now when you put a piece of red meat on the frying pan, it smells like you know obviously burning haemoglobin or whatever. It's just sickening for me, I don't know what it is but yeah, that's one of the reasons why I actually don't eat, I don't eat at all

red meat when I'm here. But I eat red meat when I go back home. When it's cooked, I love it (female third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

After starting to cater for herself, FS6 claimed to have discovered her dislike of the smell of cooking red meat. This experience was framed as adding to her previous experience with red meat but not necessarily in a contradictory sense. Although FS6 claimed to dislike the smell of cooking red meat, which resulted in her not doing it, she still reported enjoying eating it and would eat it at home where she does not have to undertake the unpleasant cooking process. Hence, the transition of perspective is not presented as a permanent change. It was described as introducing a new perspective into the existing ones rather than replacing them. When talking about cooking, the perspective of the food provider was naturally adopted in students' discourse. Likewise, when eating was the subject of the conversation, students would adopt the perspective of the eater. This change of perspective is perhaps not unique in university students' discourse but is likely to be pronounced because of the perspective as the food provider is only acquired after they started to cater for themselves, which was not long before the interviews.

As has been reported in Chapter Five, most university students' roles in domestic food practices were simply as assistants. It was said to be their mothers who were held responsible for the food activities at home. Although students may have been familiar with food before they started self-catering, the ways in which they looked at food are likely to change after they started to cater for themselves. What they used to know about certain foods was learnt from a different role and therefore the information gathered might be different from the information they required in order to

cook for themselves. For instance, they might need to learn about how to do food shopping, what food they like and what they dislike, what they know how to cook and what they do not, what is good for them and what is not. Students' discourse about their cooking at the beginning of the learning process portrayed them as unfamiliar with food activities since their past food experience was likely to be established in the role of being catered for. Therefore, self-catering might mean that they have to learn about food all over again from the perspective of being the cook.

This change of perspective is not only seen in students' discourse about food preparation but also in other food activities. After MS5 moved away from home, he claimed to have 'learnt a lesson' in eating. It is unlikely that MS5 was unfamiliar with the conduct of eating, which he should have been practicing successfully before he moved away from home. Nonetheless, he might have been provided with food at certain times and in certain amounts, such that he had not paid much attention to these details at home. Therefore, he claimed to be unfamiliar with when or how much to eat when first moved away from home.

MS5: I had a tendency to miss meals and I did lose a fair bit of weight and it was a bit of lesson actually not- in making sure I ate properly. Because if, especially if I missed breakfast actually I'd feel quite bad for the rest of the day. So I went through a path where I was a little bit tired, not for the- a little bit underweight because I wasn't getting all my meals properly. And I did learn a lesson there of making sure I did eat, make sure I had enough to eat during the day. So it's very rare I'll skip a meal now (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year)..

MS5 suggested that it took him a while to realise it was a problem until he was tired and underweight. He also claimed that this experience has taught him not to skip his breakfast and to have enough to eat during the day. At the time of being interviewed, he presented himself as equipped with knowledge about eating thanks to his past experience. The contrasts students created between their food practices before and after they started to cater for themselves are commonly found in their discourse. When talking about cooking skills, students often described their previous selves as having less confidence in cooking. This is found to be in contrast to their portrait of their present selves as having earned confidence through experience. Students presented themselves as having learnt cooking at the time being interviewed by illustrating the difference between their present and previous selves. This self-presentation is likely to be what they believed they should have accomplished after they moved into private accommodation. Their competence in their food practices might be used as an indication of their independence.

As has been reported in the previous chapters, in their discourse students have the tendency to directly associate their food practices with their independence in their discourse. Hence, students' discourse about their learning process in relation to food practices might also be seen as the process of learning independence. Therefore, what they said about their food practices might be used to reflect upon how they see their independence. After moving into private accommodation, students presented themselves as unfamiliar with their newly-gained independence because they had to make all their choices for themselves. Their food practices in private accommodation were presented as a rather personal experience and thus were mainly used to construct their personal images. After obtaining more autonomy in food, students presented themselves as

learning cooking by trial and error, which might also be how they learned to practice their newly-gained independence. Moving into private accommodation might mean full independence and thus they might have to make all the decisions on their own.

7.3 Self-presentation in private accommodation

It was found that the focus of students' discourse about their food practices in private accommodation was mainly placed upon constructing their personal images rather than the images of their private accommodation, i.e. the institutional images. FH3 was the only student who briefly talked about the image of her private accommodation.

FH3: [...] I think because everyone is a bit- all the people in this house are a bit more concerned of being healthy (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

FH3 constructed a health-conscious image of her private accommodation in this comment but her personal image of eating healthily was not said to be influenced by this institutional image. Instead, she stressed that she learned to eat healthily from her brother, which can be regarded as a part of her family image. Whilst creating the institutional image of her private accommodation as healthy, FH3 still adopted a rather personal framing to talk about her own food practices there.

YL: So you didn't really cook for each other?

FH3: No, not at all. I know a lot of my friends at other house they cooked for each other but we never did (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

In her comment, the personal images of her housemates and herself were emphasised and their institutional image of eating healthily was framed as being determined by its members' personal images. This is found to be different from the institutional images constructed about their family and university halls, which were illustrated as shaping, and sometimes being shaped by, their personal images. Their institutional images in private accommodation, at least in FH3's comment, was not framed as an entity in its own right that might contribute to its residents' personal images. Other students in this study simply did not construct an institutional image of their private accommodation. The absence of institutional images in students' discourse might imply that most students wanted to be seen as independent individuals after moving into private accommodation and therefore their food practices were framed as independent.

By the time students were interviewed, all of them were living in private accommodation. In other words, the construct of their personal images is likely to be their present personal image at that time. Students might have felt that they were expected to be independent at this stage of their lives and thus tried to portray themselves as such. Moreover, it was also found in students' discourse that they constructed different images before and after they started self-catering. Students might believe that they were expected to have learnt to look after themselves after starting self-catering. Thus, they emphasised that they had fulfilled the expectation by stressing the differences before and after self-catering. All of these were to construct their personal images to have accomplished what was expected of them,

presenting themselves as having taken the full responsibility of looking after themselves. Furthermore, their personal images were also constructed through their discourse about their feeling about self-catering.

The attention is firstly turned to students' discourse about their preference in food preparation in private accommodation.

7.3.1 Feeling about food preparation

The majority of the students in this study claimed to enjoy cooking as long as they are not being too busy. Similar to this finding, Devine et al. (2006) reported 70% of their university students either liked or really liked cooking.

MS2: I do cook yeah when I have time I love cooking, I do enjoy it (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

The reasons that students claimed to enjoy cooking varied in this study. Some students said they do not necessarily enjoy the act of cooking but they enjoy the prospect of eating.

YL: Do you enjoy cooking?

FH4: Ah, I enjoy eating so I enjoy the prospect of eating while I'm cooking (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

The act of cooking was said to be enjoyable by several students in this study because it can be 'therapeutic'. Student MS6 said that cooking is not

too demanding on the brain, and thus when he had been doing work in class, cooking is a good way to relax. Another student MH6 claimed that he finds it satisfying to see the food come together from the raw ingredients in to a meal.

YL: What do you enjoy about it?

MH6: I don't know, it's [in a] weird way. It's quite therapeutic; gives you time sort of stop and think while you're chopping stuff up and throwing stuff in pots and pans and so forth. But at the same time I suppose it's sort of bizarre simple pleasure to be gotten out of- having a little bit separate stuff to begin with; watching it all come together as you throw all together. Sort of satisfying to do that, it's a lot more satisfying. And I suppose the food tastes a lot better if you cook it, weird as it sounds (male second year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: What do you mean by that?

MH6: I don't know, I just- it's very difficult to explain if it's set in front of you at some point, you've put time into and that you have sort of seeing food from the beginning to the end if you like. First of all you've got more control over what you are putting in, the meal is more likely to turn out being more suited your individual taste, than if somebody is cooking for you and all of other people. But at the same time, it's just sort of very satisfying, and I don't know, I guess it's just something that I love about.

Whilst examining the reasons for which students claimed to enjoy cooking, it can be found that many of them only enjoy certain aspects of cooking

but not necessarily everything about it. Still, the majority of them chose to present themselves as finding cooking enjoyable. Presenting themselves as enjoying self-catering might imply that they wanted to be regarded as enjoying the independence of private accommodation. Students might have felt they were expected to enjoy the independence after moving into private accommodation and thus presented themselves as such. More evidence to support this speculation is demonstrated in MH6's previous quote, in which he claimed what he enjoys about food preparation is not only the act per se but also the autonomy of being able to control what to put in a dish and the taste of the food.

Only two students expressed their dislike for cooking in this study, both of whom happened to be male. Whether gender has contributed to this dislike for cooking is not obvious in this study because many other male students claimed to enjoy cooking. Furthermore, it is documented that some women feel resentful that they have to be the ones who prepare meals on a daily basis (Charles and Kerr, 1988). Although none of the female students in this study claimed to dislike cooking, some claimed to not particularly enjoy it. Therefore, more data would be necessary to explore the relationship between students' feeling about cooking and their gender.

Similar to those who claimed to enjoy cooking, when dislike for cooking was expressed, it appears only to be directed at certain aspects of cooking activity. The two students did not claim to dislike everything about cooking but only certain inevitable aspects of cooking. MS3 said that he dislikes his own food and the cleaning up after cooking.

YL: You said that you are very bad at cooking?

MS3: Yes (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: Do you cook?

MS3: Not really.

YL: Even when you were staying-

MS3: I tried to cook, but I didn't really like the food that I cook. [...] cooking seems like a lot of hassle as well, like a lot of time and a lot of cleaning.

Whilst MS3 claimed to dislike cooking, he also said he enjoys baking cakes and bread but does not do it because 'there is no point'. He thought it is messy and he does not have the time to do it.

MS3: I enjoy baking, like making cakes and things.

YL: Why? What's the difference?

MS3: I don't know, it's more fun, I don't know. I don't do it just because there's no point to that.

YL: Why do you not do it if you enjoy it?

MS3: Just 'cause it's messy and I don't really have time.

Although MS3 presented himself as disliking cooking, he claimed to enjoy baking. He was unable to explain the reason why he dislikes cooking but enjoys baking and suggested that it might be because baking is more fun. Baking, according to Charles and Kerr (1988), is a form of cooking in which children are most likely to participate in because it is often regarded as play. MS3 appears to have adopted this framing to talk about baking activity and therefore described it as more fun than cooking. Charles and Kerr also suggest that baking is seen as appropriate for both boys and girls by the women in their study. Therefore, it is possible that male student

MS3 might have regarded baking as a more gender neutral form of cooking and thus claimed to like it better than cooking, which is supposed to be a 'women's work' as discussed in Chapter Five. Notwithstanding his claimed preference for baking, MS3 stressed that he does not do it because he does not like the cleaning up. For him, baking is more fun but the effort that he has to put in was perhaps considered not worthwhile. This demonstrates that students' feeling for 'cooking' may be derived from their perception of necessity, cooking techniques, the volume and type of cleaning up it might involve, and the amount of time that is required. What students like or dislike about cooking might only be part of these considerations. Portraying themselves as liking or disliking cooking is due to their beliefs that they are supposed to like or dislike cooking. The majority of the students in this study believed they are supposed to like cooking whereas the others might have felt that it is appropriate to present themselves as disliking cooking. It has been discussed earlier that MS3 is the only student in this study who decided to move back to catered halls after self-catering for a year. Although he did not describe himself as disliking independence, it was framed as relatively unimportant in his discourse about food as shown in the previous chapter. He claimed that catered hall life is more suitable for him and appears to be content with partial autonomy in food as long as he does not have to cook. In his interview, little attempt was detected that he was trying to present himself as an independent individual in private accommodation. Further research will be required to understand why the two students chose to present themselves as disliking cooking. This thesis can report that the majority of the university students believed that they are expected to enjoy the independence in private accommodation and thus constructed their personal images as such via their discourse about food practices. Students' acquisition of independence is not only found in

their discourse about their preference in cooking. It is also embedded in their discourse about their breakfast skipping,

7.3.2 Breakfast skipping

Skipping breakfast was found to be common amongst university students but it is not a practice unique to this population. Breakfast skipping is reported to be relatively common amongst adolescents and adults in Western countries, yet the factors associated with breakfast skipping in an adult population are still not clear in the literature (Keski-Rahkonen et al., 2003). A limited amount of research has identified that breakfast skipping is associated with socioeconomic status, (Keski-Rahkonen et al., 2003), age (Siega-Riz et al., 1998), and gender (Rampersaud et al., 2005, Siega-Riz et al., 1998). A lack of time and not feeling hungry in the morning were said to be the major reasons that adolescents skip breakfast in the US (Reddan et al., 2002) and Australia (Shaw, 1998). In Shaw's study, she reports that skipping breakfast is related to gender, with females skipping more than three times as often as males. However, in her follow-up telephone survey, the breakfast skippers claimed almost exclusively that they skip breakfast due to a lack of time and not being hungry in the morning. Drawing from the data, Shaw describes breakfast skipping as 'a matter of individual choice' (Shaw, 1998:851). Similarly, the reasons given by students in this thesis for skipping morning meals was that they had no time for it if they have lectures in the morning. If they do not have lectures in the morning, students claimed to have the tendency to sleep late, in which case they would have an early lunch in the late morning.

YL: Are you a three-meal person?

MS2: No, not really. I generally miss breakfast because I'm quite sleepy. I'd stay in bed a long time and then I don't eat breakfast very often. By the time I get up it's often getting on towards lunch so I'll just have lunch anyway (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: Don't you have lectures in the morning?

MS2: Not very many. What I do if they're early I generally get out of my bed and then just get on my bike just to get to the lectures in time. So I don't have breakfasts no.

Student MS2 portrayed his breakfast skipping as his personal choice. He claimed that he would choose to stay in bed instead of getting up early to eat breakfast. This personal choice of his was described as made base upon the restriction of time. Breakfast-skipping was also portrayed as a personal choice in FH2's discourse, in which a different framing was adopted.

FH2: [...] but if I have to skip any meal, it definitely would be breakfast (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: Why?

FH2: Um, I don't really like it that much. It just [hasn't] got interesting food.

FH2's comment reinforces that breakfast is regarded relatively less important and thus is sometimes described as omissible. However, this was expressed in a tone that she would skip breakfast only if she 'has to skip any meal'. This implies that she does not always skip meals but breakfast is more likely to be skipped than others. It has been documented in the literature that morning and afternoon meals are generally described as

lighter. More efforts were said to go into the evening meals, which would often be a hot meal. Murcott (1982) reports that the term 'proper meal' was never used by women to refer to the morning or the afternoon meals. It is more likely to be used to talk about the cooked dinner, which is also the main meal of the day. This is suspected as a convention in the UK that the main meal of the day is usually a cooked evening meal. This convention, therefore, was adopted by university students in this study. By the same token, Dickinson et al. (2001) have demonstrated the 'breakfast time'²¹ in the UK households is often described as hurried, pressurised and even frantic. This might also be a reason that contributes to the convention of having small meals in the morning. Moreover, FH2 claimed that she is more likely to skip breakfast because 'it has not got interesting food'. Unlike MS2, FH2's decision to skip breakfast was not associated with shortage of time. Instead, the decision was portrayed as linked to the selection of food. Although different framings were adopted by the two students discussed, it can be found that they have presented breakfast-skipping as personal choice.

Students' emphasis on personal choice in their discourse about breakfast-skipping might be due to the fact that when students were at home, schools they used to attend are likely to have fixed timetables which they were asked to follow. They were obliged to be at school at a certain time and do certain things everyday. It is possible that their parents might also have tried to make them follow the school timetables at home. The university timetable is, on the other hand, supposed to be more flexible. Therefore, university students are more likely to be able to sleep in if they do not have lectures in the morning, which they might not be able to do outside university life. At this stage, university students might have the

²¹ Only the weekdays or working days are referred here.

most flexible timetable in their life experience. There is unlikely to be anyone telling them when to get up or what to eat in the morning. Therefore, they can decide when to get up, whether they want to be late for lectures and whether to have breakfast. Students' constructed their personal images as having autonomy to make their own choice in their life and they try to make the most of it by doing what they want to do. In their discourse relating to 'skipping breakfast', students positioned themselves as autonomous individuals after entering university.

7.3.3 'Juggling' multiple tasks in life

In their discourse about food practices in private accommodation, students also appear to have tried to present themselves as appropriate beings in the society. One of the major personal images that was constructed by all the students in this study was that they were still learning to 'juggle' all the tasks they encounter in life. This could be because they believed that they were not expected to handle their food practices perfectly as they had only moved away from home for a rather short period of time. Furthermore, it might be a strategy they employed to avoid the constructed personal images being challenged by the researcher. According to Goffman,

When the performer is known to be a beginner, and more subject than otherwise to embarrassing mistakes, the audience frequently shows extra consideration, refraining from causing the difficulties it might otherwise create (Goffman, 1959:225).

Students might have assumed that the researcher would be a more sympathetic audience if they presented themselves as 'beginners' in their

food practices. In which case, the researcher might have been expected to avoid challenging the personal images that were being constructed.

Time and money were referred as the two major limited resources in university students' lives, both of which have been previously identified as constraints on students' cooking. Time was identified as the primary reason for university students not being able to eat healthily in various countries (e.g. Biloukha and Utermohlen, 2007, Cason and Wenrich, 2002, Makrides et al., 1998). Students' financial condition was also said to have an effect on their decisions about food (Edwards and Meiselman, 2003). Having limited time and money appears to be a stereotypical university students' image when their food practices are being investigated.

Students in this study talked about their food practices in relation to time in two respects: one being their time availability and the other being their university term schedule, both of which were found to be closely linked to students' food practices. Although the following discussion examines the two aspects of time separately, it ought to be stressed that students' time availability and their term schedule are often interrelated. Hence, it is not proposed here that one should regard the two separately. Considering that much previous research has only examined the relationship between time availability and students' food practices, this study intentionally presents the time availability and term schedule separately to demonstrate that when students talk about 'time', they can be referring to their time availability, their university term schedule or both of the above.

Time availability was presented as a determining factor in students' food activities. MH3 said that time is the major reason that he was not eating particularly well.

YL: What about now?

MH3: To be honest I'm being a bit lazy at the moment. I try to eat healthily. I tend to have meat and vegetables together. And try to eat not too much junk food but that doesn't go particularly well. The big thing that holds me back really is time really, time to make food, and getting it as well (male third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

Along the same line, it was found in Devine et al.'s survey (2006) that the main reason for university students not to cook 'from fresh ingredients' was because of their lack of time. This thesis reiterates that time availability is crucial in students' discourse about food practices. In fact, time availability was not only emphasised when students were talking about food preparation, but in all food activities, such as their food shopping and eating patterns, which is demonstrated later in this chapter.

Whilst students claimed to be too busy to cook, too busy to go to the shops, and even too busy to eat, they might have been saying that they were trying to fit food activities into their busy life and sometimes the time spent on food practices is compressed due to other tasks in their life. A process of 'trading-off' can be found in students' discourse and they also demonstrated that they have worked out the best ways that suit themselves. In his previous quote, MH3's 'trade-off' was between healthy eating and time. He described the main barrier for him to eat healthily was the lack of time. However, he also admitted that a further reason he did not eat particularly well was because he was 'being lazy', implying that the lack of time is not the only factor. Time, however, was framed as the major

reason for not eating well because 'being lazy' might not be seen as a legitimate reason.

In addition to students' food preparation, the availability of time is also associated with their food shopping activities. FS6 claimed that she normally does weekly shopping but might go shopping fortnightly if she is busy.

YL: How often do you shop?

FS6: I shop weekly, occasionally if I'm really busy I'll shop once in 2 weeks but that means - I live literally around the corner from [name of a supermarket that is generally considered more expensive by the respondents] so I'll be going to [name of a supermarket that is generally considered more expensive by the respondents] for probably milk and some chicken pies or something (female third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

Student FS6 said she had decided to do a small shopping instead of a big shopping if she is busy. In her case, money was being traded off for time:

FS6: I've been mostly shopping in [name of the supermarket that is generally considered more expensive by the respondents] and I just didn't have time to go and shop properly. So I'll just buy snacks all the time so I've probably spent quite a bit.

This study demonstrates that time availability might be used to account for what are perceived to be 'undesired' features in students' food practices. It

was presented as a legitimate reason for not preparing food, not doing food shopping or for not eating properly. MS2 claimed that he would not 'cook properly' if he was too busy and struggling with time. As a result, he would not eat very well.

MS2: [...] Just depends on how much I've got on, when I'm busy I struggle to have time to cook properly so I don't eat very well (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

His tone implies that he was aware of the fact that he did not eat particularly well when he is busy. However, MS2 did not seem to think there was anything he could have done differently. His not eating well was portrayed as being legitimated by his lack of time.

The three students discussed above claimed to have practiced supposedly undesirable food activities, e.g. not eating healthily, over spending on food, and not cooking properly. All of them justified what they did with a 'trade-off' for time, expecting lacking of time to be considered as a legitimate reason to rationalise their 'inappropriate' behaviour.

In addition to time availability, students' food practices were portrayed as revolving around their university academic term schedule, based on which they seemed to have worked out a particular pattern. They claimed to be less likely to cook at the end of the terms. This was said to be because they wished to meet up with their friends before the long holiday break. Hence, going out is said to be more frequent during this period of time.

YL: How often do you [cook]-

FH2: How often do I cook? Umm, every night, well not as much lately (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: Why?

FH2: Um, end of term just be with friends, just [go] out a bit more. But usually, during the year I try to have dinner at home.

In order to spend more time with her friends before long breaks, FH2 claimed that she would arrange her food activities with them. Therefore, she claimed to go out for food more frequently. In this quote, FH2 stressed that she tries to have dinner at home at other time of the year. This comment might imply that she considered eating out is something she should not do too often. As a result, she felt the need to justify it with reference to the arrangement of the term schedule. Portraying the end of the term as a special period of time, as opposed to 'during the year', legitimises the fact that she eats out more often.

Similarly, MH6 claimed that he only bought takeaway food when he did not want to go food shopping before long holiday breaks.

YL: Have you tried takeaway?

MH6: Yes I mean a couple of times, particularly in sort of the last week when I was at [name of the hall] the last couple of days because I was running out of food. I didn't really want to go and sort of buy new food to cook because if it was something like meat or something that you need to keep refrigerated, I couldn't take it back home with me. So once all sort of got used up I started looking around for

places to go (male second year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

MH6 claimed that he generally does not get takeaways and only did so because it was the end of the term. It can be seen that he might have thought that he should not get takeaway but considered it acceptable because of the term schedule. Furthermore, his comment has nicely illustrated the complicated considerations that are given to evaluate and organise the right amount of food and the time left at university. This is perhaps a rather unique feature to the student population because they have to organise their university term schedule three or four times throughout their university life. Many of them would have to go back to their home towns during breaks, and therefore they would have to know how to decide how much food they should buy before going away and how long it would last so that the food would not go to waste.

In addition to going away, students' food practices were also said to be affected by their academic tasks, particularly during the examination period. Many students claimed to eat differently during this period. According to some, the stress from their academic lives can sometimes lead to 'comfort eating'. It was mentioned in several interviews, i.e. consuming more 'comfort food' than usual as a means of de-stressing, commonly mentioned comfort foods are chocolates, crisps or so called 'junk food'.

FS5: But sometimes I do comfort eat (female second year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: What do you mean by that?

FS5: Comfort eat means when I'm stressed I'll just pick out anything. It's just like- I eat chocolate and crisps sometimes when I'm really stressed.

YL: Why?

FS5: Because that's my comfort.

YL: Do you find that [comfort eat] kind of help your stress?

FS5: Yeah. I'm going from you know eating something and the next time maybe worried, I won't eat anything at all. So it's really weird. Like if I'm stressed about something, then I'll eat sometimes but if I'm really worried about something, then I tend to forget about food [...] I'm just always focused on what I worry about because you know my work so I end up forgetting it or don't make me feel like eating.

FS5 claimed that the stress might result in either comfort eating or losing appetite, both of which were said to have happened to her. Similarly, FS7 also claimed that she would lose her appetite during the examinations due to the stress. However, she claimed to force herself to eat because she knows she needs the energy to prepare for examinations.

YL: Why did you say you don't eat very well before exams?

FS7: Yeah because I get very very nervous before exams so I feel like I have to force myself to eat because I know I really should eat because I need the energy (female second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

Stress over the examination period appears to be managed differently amongst individuals in this study. Some claimed to do comfort eating and some claimed to lose their appetite. Due to the lack of conclusion about

food intake in relation to examination stress, Steptoe et al. (1998) argued that even though there was no reported overall change in total energy intake during the examination period, students' psychosocial resources are likely to be affected. Steptoe et al. conclude that life stresses are likely to affect people's food choice in susceptible individuals. Conforming to their conclusion, most students in this study claimed that they would alter their food practices during the examination period. However, this thesis would argue that the change of their food practices during this period is not always linked to stress. It might also be described as a result of lack of time as discussed previously.

Similar to their discourse about time availability, students also used their term time schedules to justify the change of eating habits. From her previous quote, FS5 claimed to use chocolate and crisps as comfort food during the examination period. However, in her following comment, they are described as 'bad' food which she tries to eat in moderation.

YL: Do you try to eat something moderately because you think it's not good for you?

FS5: Like crisps, junk food basically (female second year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: What do you mean junk food?

FS5: Crisps, chocolate, fried food, unhealthy food.

What she normally considers as bad, e.g. chocolate and crisps, was presented as more acceptable if it takes place during certain time. Examinations were portrayed as the priority over this period of time and therefore if the bad food practices can help with her examinations, it appears to be more acceptable than during non-examination period.

Similarly, in her earlier quote, FS7 claimed that even though she would lose her appetite before examinations, she would force herself to eat. She claimed that this is because she knows that she would need the energy to cope with the examinations. Students' food practices, again, were described as being able to help with the examinations. Not eating was described as inappropriate but it was supposed to be justified by the stress of examinations. Hence, one should not criticise FS7 for not eating properly because she has a legitimate reason to do so. Nonetheless, she constructed an even more considerate image: even though not eating well during the examination period can be justified by her stress, knowing that she should eat properly she nevertheless claimed to force herself to eat against her physical perception. This demonstrates that regardless of the stress, she was still capable of making sensible decisions by making herself eat. This 'good eating' practice was linked to her academic obligations rather than to trying to be healthy. In general, students' academic tasks were described as one of their priorities because they might have believed that it was an appropriate presentation of university students.

Another commonly-mentioned limited resource in students' food was funds. Money was identified as important in their food shopping, food preparation, dietary decisions and all food-related activities. Devine et al. (2006) concluded that 62% of their respondents identified the price of food to be one of the three most important factors in their food purchase decisions, followed by the quality or freshness of the food and whether they knew how to handle the food ingredients. As identified in Chapter Three, several studies (Edwards and Meiselman, 2003, Eves et al., 1995, Maiselman et al., 1999) have worried that limited funds might lead to inadequate nutrient intake in the university student population. These studies all report that the reputation of students' food appears to be only a 'myth'. For example, Eves

et al. (1995) report that students seem to have managed to feed themselves with sufficient nutrients.

In this study, students did not present themselves as conforming to the popular belief that university students would try to spend as little money as possible on food. Their discourse about their food expenditure largely concerns their perceived value for money rather than being simply about the price. Many of them claimed to be willing to spend more money if the quality or the taste of the food is noticeably better. Very few students in this study claimed that they would buy everything that is the cheapest. Overall, students said that they would buy the cheaper option if they cannot tell the difference between the cheaper and the more expensive option. However, if the difference between the two options is noticeable, they claimed that they would rather pay more to get the better quality food regardless of what they said about having to watch their spending on food. MS1 claimed that his purchase decisions are often made on a balance of three factors: health, taste and money.

MS1: [...] you know, it's there's three factors which are health, taste and money. So it's a balancing up between those three factors. Say, for me, the strongest two factors are health and money, money probably the most, money, health then taste (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

MS1 nicely illustrated a sophisticated thinking model behind students' purchasing decisions. Given a limited amount of money, they described their purchase decisions to be made upon careful evaluations of all factors in their life. It is true that most students are likely to express their concern

about the limited funds they have but it should not be assumed that they do not take other considerations into account. This thesis would argue that, unlike the popular belief about students' food, their purchase decisions are rather well thought-through and sophisticated. This was found not only in their discourse but also in their actual shopping trips. During the accompanied shopping trips, it was found that there were certain products for which students would not mind buying the cheaper options, such as pasta or rice. It was said that these foods had no detectable difference between the cheaper and the more expensive options. As for foods like fruits, vegetables, meat or cheese, students claimed to avoid the cheapest option because they are not satisfied with the quality.

Students' discourse about food expenditure once again constructed their image of juggling all the tasks in their lives. With the limited funds that are available to them, students tried to present themselves as being aware of eating food of good quality whilst simultaneously not being able to afford to spend too much money on food. Hence, they portrayed themselves as learning to find a balance between the desired food quality and their food expenditure, in order to make sensible decisions.

Even with limited funds, it has to be noted that most students in this study claimed that they think food prices are reasonable. However, this was expressed on the premise of knowing how to shop according to one's own financial condition. FS6 admitted that she thought food was rather expensive when she started to do food shopping. After a while she claimed to have gotten used to the price of food and this was portrayed as something she had to learn. It seems to have taken her a while to realise how much to spend on food shopping.

YL: Do you think food is expensive?

FS6: I got used to it [...] When I started buying my food I went to uni I just thought it was very expensive. I couldn't get over it for a while, then I had to. Okay what happened to me in my first year, in my first month, I wasn't careful with money. I was like ah I have enough money anyway. In the end I had to live on fresh carrots, mayonnaise and rice for a week and a half. That was the worst experience in my life (female third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

FS6 provided a little story about how she did not know to budget for food in her first month and thus had a bad experience when she first started shopping for herself. University students' feelings about food prices were said to change with their perspective. As identified earlier in this chapter, in students' discourse about learning food practices, the change of perspective was often found in their learning process. This change of perspective was also presented in FS6's feeling about food prices. This was said to be learnt from the experience of shopping. Furthermore, FH5 pointed out that whether food is expensive should be a relative thing and thus it is what she is used to. Hence, when students in this study claimed that they do not think food is expensive, they were actually saying that they are used to the food prices, as can be seen in FH5' quote:

YL: For you, as a student, do you think food is expensive?

FH5: It's probably my main expense (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: Do you think it's expensive?

FH5: It depends where you buy it. Generally I don't think it's that expensive but it's a relative thing so it's what you're used to. [...] I don't think it's that expensive, no.

Even though food was said to be FH5's main expense, she did not consider it to be expensive. Both FS6 and FH5 framed food expense as an essential expenditure in life. Expensive or not, rich or poor, it is unlikely that one can avoid spending money on food. Therefore, it is suspected that students described themselves as having got used to the price because they do not have any other choice.

Students in this study have constructed an image that they are still learning about their independence whilst trying their best to juggle the tasks in their lives. The university student image was constructed through their discourse about food practices. Furthermore, during the construction of this image, students also adopted the image when talking about other aspects of their lives. This has helped to put their student image back into a wider context of their life and demonstrated that, although the focus of this study is to examine university students' discourse about their food practice, it has to be considered in a wider picture. It is to understand why and how students chose to present themselves in particular ways. Decisions students make about their food practices are likely to have taken other considerations into account and therefore the interpretations of their decisions should also include these other considerations.

Self-justification was found to be prevalent in students' discourse about their food practices. This can be related to what Goffman (1959) called 'protective practices'. Whilst talking about their food practices in private accommodation, students had portrayed themselves to be still in the

process of learning to juggle all the tasks in their lives and having to compromise on certain tasks, of which food practice is sometimes one of them. Having constructed their personal images as responsible beings in the society throughout the interviews, students might have felt the compromise of certain food practices could damage the personal images they have established and thus provided self-justification in order to save their own 'show'.

7.3.4 The construction of student image

A more or less typical university student image has emerged in students' discourse about food practices in private accommodation. In their discourse about food practices in university halls, the 'student image' was embedded in hall images which were said to be shared by students living in university halls. Students' food discourse in private accommodation has stressed their personal images. The distinction in the adopted framings might be due to the difference in the nature of university and private accommodation. University halls, as reported in the previous chapter, appear to be regarded as having pre-existing institutional images, which were supposedly created by university students. Hence, the construction of the student image was embedded in students' discourse about university halls, as a part of its hall image. As for students' discourse about private accommodation, in which students' personal images were stressed, their student images were described as a part of their personal images and independent from the institutional images of their private accommodation, which were rarely constructed in their discourse. Students' personal images were presented as constructed by themselves but is likely to be how they wanted to be seen and thus socially constructed. This student image was also assumed in the research design of this study. It was initially assumed that university

students would share similar features and therefore this study examines this particular population, in the hope to find similarities and differences inter- and intra- this population. This assumption was not given much thought before the data were collected and the existence of a student image was taken for granted. Hence, it might be reasonable to suspect that this student image is often assumed to exist in the student population by society. Recognising their student identity, students appeared to have portrayed themselves as conforming to this socially constructed student image.

7.4 Discourse about gender and food practices

As reported in Chapter Five, gender difference was not prominent in students' discourse describing their own food practices at home, whereas it was salient whilst they talked about their parents. It has been proposed to be due to the different roles students adopted in domestic food practices from their parents. Neither gender was expected to take up the responsibility of domestic food preparation in family settings. One might assume that self-catering might put students in the position of being held fully responsible for their own food and thus might be caught in the socially constructed gender roles. However, this thesis found that students did not adopt the assumed gender roles to talk about their food preparation in private accommodation.

All the students of both genders in this study claimed to cook and shop for themselves in private accommodation. Being in a transition stage in their life course, students appeared to have adopted a different role from those in the family setting. Women in the family are expected to be responsible for feeding the family due to their assumed gender role. In this thesis,

students described themselves as expected to be responsible for themselves and themselves alone. Hence, the activities of preparing or shopping for food did not seem to be related to gender in students' discourse. Students did not seem to consider that they were expected to cater for others nor do they expect other people to cook for them on a daily basis during their university life. Therefore, students of both genders talked about food preparation and food shopping in a more or less similar way. Female students did not present themselves to be held liable for food preparation or food shopping more than male students. By the same token, male students did not portray themselves to be less responsible for food practices than female students.

Only a few students in this study claimed to cook for others on a daily basis, and in most cases it is their partners they claimed to cater for. Different from the stereotypical assumed gender roles, more male students claimed to be in charge of daily food preparation. Respondent MS7 claimed to cook for his partner everyday.

YL: But you cook for another (housemates?)-

MS7: Yeah, my girl friend. I live with her so I tend to do all the cooking. She doesn't like cooking at all really (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

MS7 adopted a gender-neutral tone to talk about his role in food preparation within private accommodation. In this quote, it was suggested that he took up the responsibility of cooking due to his partner's dislike of cooking rather than being determined by gender. In a similar household structure, Mansfield and Collard (1988) have documented that women of childless newly weds would take up the responsibility for cooking and are

also expected to do so by their husbands. Therefore, it can be suspected that even though couples might live in a similar household structure to a nuclear family, as long as they are not married, women might not have to adopt the role of the family feeder. This finding suggests that gender roles in food practices have to be understood in terms of relationships instead of being categorised solely by their gender. By the same token, Kemmer et al. (1998b) also argue that changes in both living situations and relationships would contribute to people's changes in food practices. Yet longitudinal data would be required from this particular couple, i.e. MS7 and his partner, after they got married to draw a definite conclusion. Although the data in this thesis are not sufficient to draw a definite conclusion from this observation, it can be found that students have the propensity to adopt a gender-neutral language to talk about the responsibility for food preparation as well as food shopping.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Charles and Kerr (1988) report that women seem to bring up their children conforming to the dominant gender division of labour. However, they also acknowledge that some women did make the effort to ensure their sons and daughters helped in the kitchen equally. From students' discourse in this study, it can be suspected that this gender-determined division of labour might have changed over the years. Students nowadays might believe food activities are supposed to be shared by both genders and therefore have chosen to present their food preparation and food shopping in a gender neutral language, regardless of whether the actual practice has changed.

Students' discourse about their diet, however, is a different story, as briefly mentioned in Chapter Six. The ways in which students talked about their diet are similar to what has been reported in their discourse about their

weight gain in university accommodation. On the one hand, female students are more likely to talk about their awareness of calorie and fat intake and how they try to avoid gaining weight. On the other hand, very few male students talked about their diet in relation to their energy intake, their body images or their weight issues. Female students might have believed that they are supposed to be aware of their figure whereas male students might have believed they should not care about their weight and therefore both genders performed accordingly. In their paper, Craig et al. (2007) suggest that women might be more expressive about their body images. They argued that women sometimes might be put in the position that they 'have to' talk about going on a diet amongst their female peers because they do not want to be regarded as being content with their own bodies. Being interviewed by me, a female researcher, the female students in this study might have been subjected to this pressure and thus deliberately presented themselves to be conscious of their weight in order to avoid being regarded as being content with their own figures. Subsequently, male students might avoid presenting themselves as such.

However, some female students in this study presented themselves as unconcerned about their weight. FH6 talked about her previous issues with food and expressed her belief that it was not healthy.

FH6: [...] But I think I just took it too seriously to a point where I was thinking about it all the time. And that's not healthy (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

Being aware that her previous diet was perhaps not good for her, FH6 portrayed her present self as having gotten over the eating problems and as less focussed on what she eats.

YL: Do you think you've overcome all the issues about food now?

FH6: I think so, I hope so. Like for a while I just like stopped caring altogether, so I stopped doing sports, stopped doing anything but it wasn't a big deal. Like I gained, maybe I gained three kilos and I was like so what.

Although FH6 claimed to have 'stopped caring altogether' and presented herself as not caring if she puts on weight, she admitted that she is still rather conscious of her body image and claimed that she has adopted a supposedly healthier way to watch her weight- to exercise.

FH6: And now because exercising makes me feel really good, but I want it to make me feel good because I want to feel it and it makes me feel happy not because I'm like oh my god I have to work off these two extra pieces of toast that I had this morning or whatever. But it's something that I'm conscious of and I just try and find the control, you know.

FH6 demonstrates that some women might portray themselves to be unconcerned about their weight simply because they do not want to be seen as being overly obsessed with their weight, which is sometimes considered as unhealthy. Hence, she presented her consciousness of weight to be achieved through a healthier approach.

By the same token, FH2 presented herself as conscious of weight throughout the interview but stressed that she would not be concerned about her calorie intake.

FH2: I don't want to get fat. I just don't want to gain weight (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: Would that be a big concern for you?

FH2: If I gain weight? Yeah, I wouldn't be very happy.

YL: When you eat, would the calorie intake concerns you or-

FH2: I usually won't work it out. I eat everything that's there. Actually I concern about what I eat but I don't actually look at that stuff carefully.

Both FH6 and FH2's comments reiterated that, although students' presentation of their food practices in private accommodation as fully independent and autonomous, their personal images were still constructed conforming to what they considered as appropriate or good in society. Although moving into private accommodation means students can literally eat whatever they want, students are found still to try to present their food practices as appropriate and healthy. Their personal images constructed in this discourse, as a result, were to deliver their appropriateness.

7.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter examines university students' discourse about food after they moved out from university halls to private accommodation. Students emphasised their personal images when talking about food practices at this stage and rarely constructed the institutional images, i.e. images of the

private accommodation. Students' self-presentation in private accommodation constructs with four emerging themes in their discourse. The majority of the students in this study claimed to enjoy food preparation. However, it was found that when they claimed to enjoy cooking, it was only certain aspects of cooking that they actually enjoy. However, most of them still chose to present cooking as enjoyable. This was suspected to be due to their beliefs that they were supposed to enjoy the independence they had acquired in private accommodation and thus presented it through their discourse about food preparation. Furthermore, breakfast skipping was also said to be common practice amongst university students. Breakfast is the meal that was said to be less important and therefore, most likely to be omitted by university students. This demonstrates students have obtained full autonomy in food practices at this period of time and therefore are in control of their food. In the meantime, their discourse about breakfast skipping is found to have constructed a 'responsible student' image, conforming to the social norms. Moreover, students also constructed their images as juggling multiple tasks in their busy lives with limited resources in terms of time and money. When making food decisions, they presented themselves as taking all considerations into account and trying to make the most sensible decisions, in order to demonstrate that they are responsible independent beings in society. A process of 'trading-off' has been presented in their decision-making. This has demonstrated that students' decisions about food are well-thought through and sophisticated. Their food practices were framed as revolving around other tasks in life. Indicating that even though food is the focus of this study, it is important to put the issue back into a broader context in order to see why and how students chose to present themselves in this particular manner.

In students' discourse about their food practices, they have also constructed the images of being students. The student images constructed in private accommodation were found to be distinct from those constructed in university halls. When talking about their life in halls, the student images were found to be linked to hall images. In contrast, when talking about their life in private accommodation, student images were embedded in their personal images.

The majority of the students in this study adopted a gender-neutral language to talk about food preparation during their life in private accommodation. They did not seem to consider that the stereotypical gender roles should be applied to them at this particular stage of life. Some of the students in this study portrayed their living situations as similar to newly-wedded childless families but their discourse about food preparation did not conform to the findings reported in a previous study (Mansfield and Collard, 1988). Further study would be required to make speculation about their food practices at other stages in their life course in order to draw a conclusion on whether this gender-neutral discourse about food preparation would change after marriage, or having children. Moreover, this thesis also suspects the impression that it is women who are supposed to be responsible for food preparation has gradually changed in the UK university student population. They seemed to have believed that food preparation is no longer women's responsibility and presented themselves as such. On the other hand, students' discourse about their diet conforms to the social constructed gender stereotype. In their discourse about diet, gender still plays a crucial part in their discourse about body image and it seems to be regarded as appropriate for females to be conscious of their weight and males to be apathetic about it. Hence, by constructing such images, students can be regarded as 'doing gender'. However, a few

female students tried to avoid presenting themselves as overly concerned about their weight. This was to escape from being seen as sacrificing their health for beauty. Even though students in private accommodation have full autonomy to determine their food practices, their discourse and self-presentation are still found to largely conform to the socially constructed appropriateness.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCOURSE ABOUT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY APPLIED TO FOOD PRODUCTION

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data derived from the original research questions. Although most students in this study claimed to know little about GM food, this thesis believes that the analysis of their discourse about GM food can provide a STS element to the sociology of food and eating. Therefore, this chapter uses GM food as a case study to examine university students' discourse about science and technology applied to food production. Not only this, since this study also examines university students' discourse about their food practices in everyday life, their discourse about more 'mundane' science and technology is also included. It has been demonstrated in the previous three chapters that there was no distinctive difference between science and HSS students' discourse about their non-science related daily food practices. This chapter highlights that the difference in their discourse is only salient when they were talking about the 'scientific aspects' of food issues.

This chapter starts by giving a brief introduction about the GM debate. This is followed by a discussion of how university students used the term 'science' in an over-generalised way and the implied authority that is attached to this over-generalised term.

This chapter then presents the distinctive framing science and HSS students adopted when speaking about GM food issues. This includes their claiming/disclaiming of general scientific knowledge and their information

acquisition. Finally, this chapter illustrates the ways in which science and HSS students talked about their GM food information sources.

8.2 The GM food debate

As briefly mentioned in Chapter One, genetically modified food has received much public attention since the introduction of the first products to the UK market in 1996. Debate has been intense and the introduction of this technology has been strongly resisted. Its advocates believe that the technology could be a solution to otherwise insoluble problems of food supply and security. Opponents worry that it might result in unforeseen risks to health, environment and the whole ecosystem (Barling et al., 1999). Others worry about the power of multinational corporation over the food supply chain.

The impact of the GM food debate has not been exclusively felt in UK domestic policy but has also caused international trade controversies. Disagreements between the US and the EU on GM food issues have surfaced in international dispute resolution processes (Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology, 2005). US agricultural interests believe that more restrictive labelling policies, a moratorium on approving new GM crops, and grocery store bans on GM food are simply ways for the EU to protect domestic agriculture from international competition. The EU argues that their precautionary policies towards GM food are the result of the public's concerns for food safety. The US first filed a complaint over the EU's position on GM food issues with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in May 2003 (Lusk et al., 2006). As a result, the self-imposed moratorium on importing GM food in Europe was lifted in 2004, meaning it is now legal to import GM food into Europe. The WTO declared that the EU's GM food ban

was illegal in 2006. The ruling is a victory for the US GM crop farmers, the biotechnology industry, and large food companies such as Monsanto and Syngenta, which have been frustrated by the moratorium and the slow pace of approvals for new GM products. But this ruling has been castigated by European environmental and consumer groups, who see it as an example of international trade organisations overturning local democratic decisions aimed at protecting consumer health and safety. Daniel Mittler, Greenpeace International's trade adviser, claimed the ruling resulted from the US's 'bullying tactics' (Borger et al., 2006). Claire Oxborrow of Friends of the Earth International believes this is 'a desperate attempt to force these products on an unwilling market. This will lead to even greater opposition to GM crops' (Borger et al., 2006). Furthermore, after the moratorium was lifted, only GM animal feed is imported to the EU. No foods for human consumption containing GM ingredients were on sale in the UK during the fieldwork period. Regardless of the WTO ruling, it is unlikely that the dispute over GM food will be settled.

Nevertheless, in the past decade, the public attention given to GM food has declined, in particular among the 'mass media' (Marks and Kalaitzandonakes, 2001). According to Marks and Kalaitzandonakes, UK media coverage of GM food reached its peak in 1999 and has subsequently declined, whereas in the US media, GM food coverage has continued at a steady pace. In its peak time, UK coverage of GM food was two to three times more than that in the US. They showed that the UK media's interest in GM food increased and decreased more rapidly than in the US. However, in comparison to other European countries, public debate on GM food is relatively more active in the UK (Asplund et al., 2008).

Although all of the participating students claimed to be familiar with the term 'GM food', they also acknowledged that their knowledge about it was either limited or non-existent. The students in this study were between 18-25 years old when the interviews were carried out. When the media coverage in the UK reached its peak, they were likely to have been too young to be concerned. This might account for their beliefs that their knowledge about GM food was outdated. These findings suggest that, while environmental groups have maintained a high level of mobilisation around GM food issues, their popular significance has declined. GM food issues are, then, a good way to investigate students' awareness of wider concerns around food and environmental policy as possible contexts for their decisions about what to eat.

8.3 The boundary between 'science' and 'non-science'

The boundary between 'science' and 'non-science' has been discussed in the STS literature, which is known as 'the demarcation of science from non-science'. In his paper, Gieryn (1983) proposes that scientists construct a boundary between science and non-science, which he refers to as 'boundary work', as he writes:

[Scientists'] attribution of selected characteristics to the institution of science (i.e. to its practitioners, methods, stock of knowledge, values and work organization) for purposes of constructing a social boundary that distinguishes some intellectual activities as 'non-science' (Gieryn, 1983:782).

According to Gieryn, the construction of a boundary between science and non-science describes 'science' as a single thing, which is useful for scientists to acquire intellectual authority and career opportunities. In a later paper, Gieryn (1994:393) describes 'essentialists'²² as those who 'argue for the possibility and analytic desirability of identifying unique, necessary, and invariant qualities that set science apart from other cultural practices and products, and that explain its singular achievement. It was found that university students' discourse, conforming to the arguments of the 'essentialists', also created the boundary between 'science', 'scientist' and 'scientific' as opposed to 'non-science', 'non-scientist' and 'non-scientific'.

In university students' discourse, 'science' appears to be regarded to have innate credibility. It is not to say 'science' do not have more authority in their domains of study. Nevertheless, 'science' is a broad term and the knowledge involved in various scientific disciplines can vary considerably. For example, science student FS3 claimed to have the knowledge about food because her father used to tell her what was good for her when she was young.

FS3: I think I already have knowledge of it, 'cause when I was younger I'd ask my dad like is this good for me? Like when we were having dinner, like what has it got in it. And he'll tell me like this is a source of blah blah blah. 'Cause he is a scientist and he'd say this is good for blood, this and that. And so I just have that knowledge. And sometimes he'd tell me magazines and TV get it wrong and say oh you

²² The term 'essentialist' was adopted from Gieryn's paper (1994), in contrast to 'constructivist'.

shouldn't eat fats but actually fats are really really important and you definitely have to eat them (female third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

In her comment, FS3 claimed that she trusts her father as an information source, not simply because he is her father but more so because he is a scientist. She did not specify whether her father was a biologist, a food scientist, a dietician or a physician. It was implied that the fact that her father is a 'scientist' is supposed to increase the credibility of his information. Therefore, her father was described as more authoritative than other information sources in this comment. This repertoire is not only pervasive in the discourse of science students but also HSS students.

In his comment about the ways in which nutrients in fruits are killed during pasteurisation, HSS student MH2 was able to describe the detail of the 'science' behind this process. However, he stressed that 'scientists' should know more than he does.

YL: Why do they have to kill the enzyme in the fruit?

MH2: Well its enzymes are destroyed by heat and pasteurisation if exposing something to high temperature. So the longer it's been placed in high temperature, the most of the enzymes will be destroyed. [...] I'm not scientist but I know it's more that an active living part of the cell or structure or something like that. I know vitamins and stuff like that if you subject them to high temperatures, say whatever. I have kind of a rudimentary understanding, which I think is correct (male third year HSS student; never been in halls).

It can be detected in his tone that he was fairly confident about his knowledge in the process of pasteurisation, which he believes to be correct. However, he described his understanding of it as 'rudimentary' because he is not a 'scientist', suggesting that a 'scientist' would naturally possess more knowledge than he does.

The third wave of science studies has challenged the distinction between 'science' and 'non-science'. Collins and Evans (2002) stress the idea that science should be seen as a domain of knowledge that has no more right than other domains of knowledge. Furthermore, they argue that people who have the expertise in one domain of 'science' should be seen as a layperson in another domain of science. They stress the importance of 'expertise' in their paper. They argue that the advice of scientists is valued more than other members of the society, is because they have expertise on that particular domain of knowledge. This thesis found that the boundary between 'science' and 'non-science' is still deeply rooted in both science and HSS students' discourse, which reflects on the discussion in the literature. Further more, university students did not only construct the boundary between 'science' and 'non-science', they also presented themselves as a member in either 'science' or 'non-science' community, as can be seen in the following.

8.4 The construct of science/HSS student images

Science and HSS students in this study employed distinctive framings to talk about GM food. This distinction, however, is not found in their discourse about their food practices in everyday life. It only became salient when they were talking about GM food, i.e. scientific matters. In this case study, science students adopted a more 'scientific framing'. That is to say,

science students tended to choose more scientific/technological terms and use biological jargon.

Many science students described GM food as a novel technology that can resolve different problems in farming under critical conditions.

YL: What do you know about it?

MS4: It's just the genes that's been modified to suit its place, like the cold weather, the food or the rice or the potato where people can't grow in the weather or condition (male second year science student; never been in halls).

Of all the science students' discourse about GM food, only respondent MS5 talked about inserting or removing genes– the basic technique used in genetic modification.

YL: Are you familiar with the term genetically modified food?

MS5: Reasonably, yeah, yeah (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: Can you talk about it?

MS5: As far as I understand it, it's modifying the genetics of plants to get desired characteristics. [...] It's similar kind of techniques to human genetics in terms of the inserting different genes or removing genes.

Some science students seem to have been a little unsure of what GM technology actually involves. Although MS1 adopted more scientific framing to talk about GM food, he was not able give a clear statement of what he knew about GM food.

YL: Have you heard of the term genetically modified food?

MS1: Yes.

YL: Can you remember what you know about it [GM food]?

MS1: You- there's technical- well all food is technically genetic modified because it's produced from that- you know, the cows you eat and the fish you eat all like bred, cross breed over. [...] for certain characteristics like you have those cows [...] like the size of himself or stuff like that. But cross breed to get a certain way with genetically modification is specifically altering like the, some of the DNA [...] 'Cause I work in changing the genes of an animal so suddenly without like an evolutionary sort of- I suppose, I don't know [...] that's about altering the genes I think may alter the whole like chemistry of whole animal and hence you don't really know what is going on (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

It seems that science students tended to adopt a scientific framing to talk about what they believed to be 'scientific matters', i.e. GM food in this case, even though they might not be particularly familiar with that aspect of 'science'. However, using a scientific framing does not mean they understand the technology better, as can be seen in MS1's response.

The use of scientific framing to talk about GM food amongst HSS students was less prevalent. HSS student MH3 talked about GM food using relatively less scientific jargon and framed it as a social issue.

YL: Have you heard of the term genetically modified food?

MH3: Yes.

YL: What have you heard about it?

MH3: Very little to be honest. I know that British people, British society was largely anti- and we saw a great rise in GM food and faced a bit of a backlash. That's pretty much disappeared in the UK now. We don't purchase GM food at all, it's not accepted in this country. I don't know why I suppose it's moral issues, and health issues largely; a lot of uncertainties surrounding GM food (male third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

In contrast to science students, HSS students appear to have the tendency to present themselves as 'non-scientists' on scientific topics. As a result, when being asked about scientific matters, HSS students are apt to talk about the 'non-scientific' side of the story. In this particular case, MH3 presented himself as knowing about the social debates surrounding GM food issue rather than the GM technological background. It might be because of this, his choice of language was quite different from science student MS1. In other words, students did not merely draw the boundary between 'science' and 'non-science', but also presented themselves as playing a part in either community.

Although university students were crudely divided into science and HSS students in this study, it was discovered that some of the disciplines can have the qualities of both science and HSS disciplines. Archaeology student FH1 was identified as a HSS student before the interview. However, she adopted a more scientific framing to talk about GM food than most of the HSS students.

YL: Can you talk about it?

FH1: Well I don't know a lot of the detail it involves. Manipulating things to make them grow bigger or I think or juicer or tastier or have certain properties. I think quite a lot of it involves selective breeding, so the farmers will pick two biggest tomatoes plants and use those. But I don't really know a great deal of the mechanics of it (female second year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

The discourse FH1 adapted was closer to science students than non-science students. Many science students in this study compared selective breeding with GM food whereas very few HSS students did. Intrigued by her response, I pursued further information regarding to the course she had taken in the past and discovered that she presented archaeology as a domain of knowledge on the borderline of social science and natural science. As a result, the archaeology student FH1 did not seem to fit perfectly in the category of either science or HSS student.

YL: Have you taken any course about GM food?

FH1: No specifically about GM food. I did a module in archaeology which is about the domestication of the crops, which was involved a lot of selective breeding, which is sort of a long thing [...] but not the thing which happens now. So that has aided my understanding slightly but it's not really specific to modifying [...] I did a module this year on bio-archaeology. We looked at archaeological animal remains and sea remains and what we could learn from those. So we looked at the changes in these things over time between hunting and between agriculture and how they change.

The crude division between science and HSS students in this study was therefore found to be insufficient. Nevertheless, this case reinforces the ways in which students present themselves by conforming to their university degrees. For this archaeology student, the course she had done was on the borderline of science and HSS disciplines and therefore her discourse about GM food also adopted the framing on the borderline of science and HSS students. Hence, it can be suspected that school education does not only provide academic knowledge and training but also teaches students how to present themselves in their domain of study.

8.4.1 Claiming/disclaiming of general scientific knowledge

The distinction between science and HSS students was also found in their claiming/disclaiming of general scientific knowledge. Many science students claimed that they are better informed about, or at least more aware of, GM food than non-scientists. By contrast, HSS students claimed to know very little about GM food, even though in some cases their understanding was found to be rather similar. When talking about GM food, science students presented themselves as having 'general scientific knowledge' whereas HSS students presented themselves as have no 'general scientific knowledge'.

Science students' general scientific knowledge was claimed in both a direct and an indirect manner. The following science student FS1 claimed to be well informed about GM food and believed she knew more than other people:

YL: Do you think you are well informed about GM food?

FS1: Yeah I would say [...] because people just say oh I don't like it, a lot of people would be like not knowing what is going on (female second year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

In this quote, FS1 claimed to know more about GM food than others because 'other people do not know what is going on', suggesting she is different from 'other people'. Furthermore, FS1 claimed that people do not like GM food because they do not understand it; an assumed deficit model²³ was suggested in her comment. This is an example of science student's claiming of general scientific knowledge directly.

Science student MS1 claimed to know a lot about GM food because he had done some work in 'changing genes of animals', as can be seen in the following quote.

MS1: I suppose if I actually did really know a lot about- 'Cause I work in changing the genes of an animal so suddenly without like an evolutionary sort of- I suppose, I don't know [...] that's about altering the genes I think may alter the whole like chemistry of whole animal and hence you don't really know what is going on (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

Claiming scientific knowledge on GM food matters, MS1 presented himself as authoritative by referring to his past experience dealing with genes. However, when MS1 was asked for further detailed questions about GM

²³ 'The assumption that it is a lack of public understanding or knowledge that has led to the present climate of scepticism towards science underpins what has come to be known as the 'deficit model'' (Sturgis and Allum, 2004: 4).

food, he claimed that it was only one topic in a genetics module he had taken and thus he did not know that much about it, as can be seen in the following quote:

YL: Do you have modules about GM food?

MS1: We've got modules about genetics and GM was a topic in that, so I don't really know that much about it.

When MS1 first claimed to know much about GM food, it can be seen as a manifestation of his scientific knowledge, which is more likely to be observed amongst science students. However, when he was asked further about GM food, MS1 was not able to comment on some issues about GM food and thus slightly modified his claim to be less authoritative than his original comment. The modification of his claiming of knowledge in GM food might have served both as a justification for his not being able to answer GM questions and as a cue for the researcher to stop asking further questions in order to avoid awkwardness in this social encounter. This change of self-presentation was seen amongst science students but not in HSS students' discourse. When asked about GM food, science students were more likely to stress that they used to know more about it in the past but they were not updated anymore. As can be seen in the following quote:

FSS: I do remember ages ago reading about it but then I haven't read it recently so I don't know [...] (female second year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

HSS students, on the other hand, often claimed that they knew little about GM food from the beginning. More discussion about HSS students' discourse can be found later in this section.

Science student FS2's comment demonstrates another example of science students claiming their general scientific knowledge in a direct manner. She talked about herself as a science student as opposed to 'the average general public'

YL: Do you think you are well informed about GM food?

FS2: [...] I don't think that average general public are as well informed because I don't think there's not that much out there. To be quite honest, if I was reading a paper and I wasn't interested in science- I mean I do it now because the stories, I'm not really interested in politics so I follow other stories. So a lot of the general public aren't that interested in science and stuff, I don't think on the whole they are as well informed (female second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

In this quote, FS2 claimed that the 'average general public' is not well informed about GM food because of their lack of interest in scientific matters. Whereas she described herself as interested in science and therefore claimed to be more informed about GM food. The distinction between scientists and non-scientists was not only highlighted in such a direct way, but also found to be implied in other science students' discourse indirectly. Science student MS5 claimed that he does not consider himself as particularly well informed about GM food. However, he claimed to be more aware of this issue than 'other people'. Although MS5

did not consider himself to be well informed about GM food, he believed that he would have more awareness than 'average people'. Moreover, MS5 emphasised that he was in no sense an expert amongst his peers. This comment shows that MS5 identified his peers and himself as being inside the scientific community and therefore more aware of 'scientific matters' than people outside the scientific community, whether they are informed about the topic or not.

MS5: I wouldn't say I'm better informed than an average person. Possibly just because I'm a little bit more aware of science and things then I may have a little bit more information than those people. But I'm no sense of an expert, not even among my peers (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year).

Unlike MS1, MS5 appears to be very modest about his scientific knowledge. He described himself as not better informed than an 'average person' concerning GM food. However, he claimed to be more aware of science and thus have more information than 'those people', i.e. people outside the scientific community. In this quote, MS5 demonstrated that he was careful not to claim knowledge about GM food. However, he expressed his belief that he would have more information than people outside the scientific community because he is 'more aware of science'. In the following quote, he also highlighted the importance of 'science background' and 'formal science training'.

YL: Would you say you're more informed about this [GM food] than the general public in the UK?

MS5: It really depends on who you are talking out of the general public, probably not, no, not hugely more informed. I mean just coming from a science background now just means the way I think about- I have a slightly different view on these things to somebody who doesn't have any formal kind of science training.

Although MS5 did not claim to be better informed about GM food than people outside the scientific community, he claimed that his view about 'these things' would be somewhat different from them due to the 'formal science training' he had received. This suggests that MS5 might believe that those who have received 'formal science training', such as himself, would look at scientific matters differently from those who have not received such training, whether they are informed about the topic or not. What he meant by 'a different view' can be interpreted as 'a scientific view' as opposed to 'a non-scientific view', which is positioned as less valid than the former. In addition to the assumed scientific ignorance of the public, an assumed scientific expertise was observed in science students' discourse.

As briefly mentioned in the beginning of this section, the distinction between science and HSS students' discourse is only salient when talking about GM food. The ways in which they talked about their mundane food practices did not reflect their academic discipline in the same way. MS4 was the only respondent who claimed more general scientific knowledge in his discourse about food in everyday life. It has to be noted, however, that this comment was made when he was talking about GM food. MS4 claimed that studying a 'science-based' subject gave him more knowledge about GM food. He then stretched this comment and claimed that people who do not study science subjects would not know much about 'nutrition or

vitamins or GM food', i.e. what he considers as scientific matters. These people, according to MS4, would just 'go with the general public'.

MS4: It's just because I'm studying the science-based subject, that's why I have the knowledge about it. But I think if I was a normal individual, studying a non-science subject, I wouldn't know much about nutrition or vitamins or GM food. I would just go with the general public really. I think it's just people who study science have more knowledge about this subject (male second year science student; never been in halls).

Once again, this science student distinguished himself from those who are not in the scientific community because he was studying a 'science-based subject'. This might suggest that science students' claiming of general knowledge in science is not only limited to controversial or novel technologies such as GM food. However, since only one science student linked general scientific knowledge to their mundane food practices, this is simply an observation that can be explored further.

In contrast to science students, HSS students were prone to disclaim general scientific knowledge. They presented themselves as rightly knowing nothing about science because they identified themselves as outside the scientific community. In other words, the distinction between people inside and outside the scientific community was found not only in the discourse of science students but also HSS students. HSS student MH1 did not seem to think that he needed to be well informed about GM food because he believed the food industry would look after him.

YL: Would you say that you're well informed about GM food?

MH1: No, I wouldn't (male third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: Do you think you should?

MH1: No, I'm going to rely on the food industry yet again. If there are any serious risks then they would stop going on the shelves. I'm confident that there are other people looking after me.

Student MH1 presented himself as being rightly ill-informed about GM food, unlike the science students discussed previously. Some of the HSS students in this study even presented their lack of information on scientific matters as an entitlement. In contrast to science students, HSS students might have believed that they are not expected to know much about scientific matters and thus present themselves accordingly. As a result, acquiring information about GM food or other scientific matters were portrayed as unnecessary by HSS students.

This has demonstrated that science and HSS students have different ways to express their knowledge about GM food. Borrowing Goffman's dramaturgical terms, the researcher can be seen as the audience and the students as the performers. Goffman (1959) argues that in order to put on a play, the performers and the audiences have to work together. The performers can rely upon their audiences to pick up cues as a sign of something important about the play. In a retrospective account, many students had put me in the position that it would be awkward to ask further questions about GM food since they stated that their knowledge about GM food is either outdated or nonexistent.

8.4.2 Discourse about information acquisition

Both science and HSS students in this study claim to not have actively looked for information about GM food. This was then justified by their claiming/ disclaiming of general scientific knowledge.

Presenting themselves as having general scientific knowledge, science students expressed the belief that they do not have to acquire further knowledge about GM food because they are supposed to be more informed than people outside the scientific community.

MS5: I'm happy enough with my view but there- that GM food such as is available at the moment isn't dangerous. I'm happy enough with that. But I don't feel I need to find out any more (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year).

MS6: Probably bad to ask me now 'cause it's been out of the news for a while so I'm less well informed than I have been but I would consider myself adequately informed to make decisions that you asked (male third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

Both science students MS5 and MS6 claimed that they consider themselves to possess sufficient knowledge about GM food and therefore believed they do not have to learn more on this topic. Interestingly, although MS5 was doing a science degree at the time of the interview, he used to be a HSS student not long before the interview. Despite this recent switch from a HSS to a science discipline, he had already started to claim to have general knowledge in science as the other science students.

HSS student FH3 did not think she was 'scientifically minded' and therefore had never paid attention to information about GM food.

FH3: I don't know, I just- I'm not very scientifically minded, I don't really think about stuff like that. I don't ever really like listen to that sort of thing that much [...] I do actually think it is just because I don't know about science so in my head I kind of switch off a bit. When they start to talk about that sort of things I just like oh. I don't know, I don't understand what they're talking about so I'm not gonna bother listening basically (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: Have you tried to listen [to GM food information]?

FH3: No, just not even bothered.

YL: Do you find all the GM food information is about science?

FH3: Yeah, most about science really, I just- it doesn't really affect me, like it's not really anything to do with my course or to do what I'm interested in so I don't really care that much.

FH3 claimed that she had never paid attention to information about GM food simply because she did not think she would understand what 'they' are talking about. In addition, she claimed that it was also partly due to the fact that GM food issue does not really affect her, suggesting the importance of students' perceived personal relevance in knowledge acquisition.

Similar to FH3, FH6 described herself as not a 'scientific' person and thus assumed she would not understand 'scientific' information.

FH6: I don't know. I'm just a bit worried because I'm not very much a scientific person. And so it's something that I think oh god it's too complicated for me to understand (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

Both HSS students above demonstrate the belief that there is an assumed scientific knowledge deficiency on the part of people outside the scientific community. As members of the non-scientific community, they seemed to be intimidated by scientific information and therefore claimed to have the tendency to 'switch off' when scientific information is available to them. It was suggested that even if scientific information is accessible, they would be reluctant to learn about it because they were convinced that they would not be able to understand 'scientific matters'. It is, however, not always straightforward as to what is 'scientific' and what is not. For student FH6, GM food issues did not seem to interest her as much as organic food and fair-trade issues:

YL: Have you read anything [about GM food] and thought it was too scientific?

FH6: I haven't really read very much about it, it's something that doesn't grab me as much as like learning more about organic food, learning more about fair-trade.

YL: Why?

FH6: 'Cause organic and fair-trade is so much easier to understand. Organic is just like pesticide free, not got chemical on its record, it's simple to understand. Fair-trade is simple to understand as well, you know guaranteeing farmers of minimum salary goes back into the community

so it's like okay. Whereas GM is like oh I don't really know what goes on. I think it's got something with modifying the genes but I don't know what that means. If it means that people working in the lab and going through the DNA and then maybe, I don't know.

Two questions were raised from this comment: firstly, organic food, fair-trade and GM food topics are involved in science and society debates to various extents. Why did FH6 perceive GM food to be particularly scientific compared to the other two? Secondly, if FH6 had looked into organic food and fair-trade, she would probably know that they are not at all science-free. Why did she think organic food and fair-trade were easier to understand than GM food? The following quote might shed some light on these questions. FH6 claimed to be aware of the non-scientific aspects of GM food but was intimidated by the scientific aspects of it.

YL: Do you think the [GM food] issue is definitely related to the science and technology itself or it might be politics or-

FH6: I think it is politics but it's something I just would avoid because I'm intimidated by the scientific aspects of it, because I'm not a scientist.

According to this response, FH6 claimed to have avoided all the information about GM food because of the scientific aspect of it. This was because of her assumption that she would not understand much about science as a 'non-scientist' and thus is entitled to be ill-informed. It can be seen that HSS students' disclaiming of scientific expertise has served as a justification for their lack of interest in GM food information. Although recognising the non-scientific aspects of GM food, FH6 portrayed it as more

scientific than fair-trade and organic food in order to justify her limited knowledge on the GM issue. In this comment, organic food and fair-trade issues were framed as less scientific because she might have been more interested in these issues and consequently devoted more time researching them compared to GM food. However, FH6 described these two topics to be mainly associated with social justice and environmental issues in the interview; presenting her supposedly expected image as HSS student who knows more about the social aspects of the issues. In addition to that, it can also be suspected that whilst doing research, scientific information might have been filtered out from her research because she had claimed to try to avoid scientific information in her previous quotes. As a result, the research she had done on organic food and fair-trade was mainly in social, humanities and ecological aspects but did not concern science or technology. Since it might be impossible and probably unnecessary²⁴ to have access to and read every single piece of information on a particular topic, people's access to information is likely to be selective, based on what is perceived as more relevant or 'interesting'²⁵ to their everyday life. In line with the literature, this study suspects that information selecting is likely to be determined by one's perception of the personal relevance of the information as well as one's existing knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, Schutz, 1973).

It has been demonstrated that the science students in this study have the tendency to claim they have general scientific knowledge whereas HSS students were prone to disclaim it. By and large, university students

²⁴ Schutz (1971: 32): His interest in these elements is of different degrees, and for this reason he does not aspire to become acquainted with all of them with equal thoroughness.

²⁵ Interests often tie to personal relevance: "Typically, my interest in the far zones is less intense and certainly less urgent. I am interestingly interested in the cluster of objects involved in my daily occupation." (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:22)

presented themselves as not actively looking for information about GM food, which was justified by their claiming/disclaiming of general scientific knowledge. Nonetheless, the need for justification implies they might have felt that they should know more about GM food. This shows that GM food is something that students considered they should understand. FH5 claimed that she would be interested in understanding more about GM food because she wants to know 'what is going on', as she said:

YL: Why? Is it an interesting-

FH5: I think it's quite interesting, yeah. I don't know that much about it, I think that's another reason why I'd read it because I don't understand it that much. [...] So if you don't know what's going on and you see a story about it then a lot of the time you would be tempted to read it to find out what's going on (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

FH5 further claimed that the media are part of the reasons why she would be interested in GM food knowledge:

YL: Why?

FH5: Because it was so prominent in the media and I wanted to know what they were talking about.

In the interview, FH5 presented herself as a curious individual who cares about what is going on in the world. Wagner (2007) proposes several reasons for people to acquire information about GM food, one of which is for social exchange and discourse. He argues that people will acquire science knowledge in order to stay connected to scientific issues.

Lack of knowledge puts conversation partners in a highly unpleasant situation because it excludes them from taking part in the pleasure created by communication and sharing ideas (Wagner, 2007:11).

In another paper, Wagner and colleagues (2002) suggest that people's understanding of new technologies or scientific achievements is driven by this 'inter-individual and mass media communication'. They further suggest that, when GM food was firstly introduced, people seemed to perceive their ignorance and lack of interest in this technology to be legitimate. They argue that, after GM food was made a more important issue in personal conversation, public discourse, political controversy and media, people felt the need to understand what it was about. HSS student FH5's comment, at first glance, might appear to have conformed to Wagner and colleague's proposal for people's motives in acquiring scientific knowledge. Reading between the lines, however, it was found that even though she claimed to be interested in information about GM food, she was not practicing this statement when she was interviewed.

YL: Have you read anything about it?

FH5: Not for a while.

Student FH5 presented herself as being interested in GM food because of the public discourse and the media attention on this particular issue. However, her professed interest in the topic did not seem to be sufficient to become a driving force for her to acquire the knowledge. Hence, this thesis would argue that the conception in Wagner et al.'s paper is perhaps only a part of the picture. What Wagner et al. argue to be the reasons for people to acquire knowledge about science and technology was presented as

mainly contributing to students' feeling of obligation to acquire scientific knowledge but did not necessarily motivate them to put this feeling into practice.

HSS student MH5 claimed that he has never looked into GM food issues because GM food is not currently widespread and it does not seem to get into his diet.

YL: Are you familiar with the term genetically modified food?

MH5: Again it's something that I've never looked into it in great detail. [...] I've just never bought it, I don't buy the kind- well you know obviously GM food is not currently particularly widespread. I have noticed in a few very processed food where they use some GM crops but again I don't buy that kind of food. If it became fruits and vegetables then I'll become more worried because that's the main things in my diet then I'd probably think more about the consequences (male second year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

MH5 claimed that he would perhaps pay more attention to the GM food issue if his personal diet was influenced. His comment suggests that when discussing the issues of what Wagner et al. called 'awareness', thus should be considered on both the personal level and the proposed social level; both of which are likely to be intertwined and sometimes cannot be separated. Wagner's 'social relevance' was found to have contributed to students' feeling of obligation in acquiring scientific knowledge but this thesis argues that 'personal relevance' appears to determine whether students would actually acquire scientific knowledge.

YL: Why haven't you felt it's [GM food] a big worry?

MH5: Again it's one of those things I suppose it's not-, it hasn't for me yet got a sense of immediacy because it hasn't come into a wide scale farming yet. It hasn't become a worry, which I suppose it's a bad way of looking things because you probably should be looking to stop GM happening now if it's a problem rather than when it comes in, trying to deal with GM when itself is a problem later on. Yeah just that lack of sense of immediacy.

In this comment MH5 justified his lack of motivation in learning about GM food as a result of the 'lack of sense of immediacy', which was to say that he did not think it was relevant to him on a personal level. Simultaneously, MH5 also claimed that his lack of interest in GM food was a 'bad way of looking things'. This shows that Wagner's social relevance might have contributed to MH5's feeling of obligation in acquiring information but it does not necessarily affect how he behaves.

Students' family images were sometimes found in their discourse about acquiring GM food information. FH4 claimed to have read a lot about GM food because her family feel strongly about it and thus 'just care more'.

YL: You said you have read quite a lot about GM food? Why?

FH4: I don't know, I guess it was just a topic that I don't know, was quite talked about on the news media in general (female third year HSS student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: When was that, is it now?

FH4: Oh no, a while ago. Like the whole gene food thing, I don't know I think a couple of years back since it started and then since my family feel so strongly about it then obviously, just care more.

FH4 presented the opposition towards GM food as a familial image rather than a personal image. This might be because whilst GM food was a major issue in the UK public domain in the 1990s, all the students in this study were still living at home. Hence, the discourse she adopted to talk about the information received back at home was presented as an institutional image rather than a personal one.

It has to be clarified that although sometimes the term 'information' and 'knowledge' are used interchangeably in this thesis, there is a slight distinction between the two. 'Information' can be regarded as external knowledge and knowledge can be regarded as internal information. When people receive a piece of information, consciously or not, they would turn it into part of their knowledge or life experience. This study does not intend to identify the distinction between the two terms beyond this general usage.

8.5 GM food information sources

In this study, the two major GM food information sources identified by students were the media and school education. Both of these have been portrayed as the major scientific information sources in Wagner's scientific knowledge sources in modern societies (Wagner et al., 2002, Wagner, 2007). FS1 claimed that her information about GM food was acquired from a module and the media. By the same token, MS5 reported he acquired GM information from A-level and the news, i.e. school and the media.

YL: Where do you think you obtain the information about GM food mostly?

FS1: Well I did a module on it so- but I did read about it before. I have read about it and well I don't know how much you can take from the media or the newspapers but they do do both sides (female second year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: Where did you get that information from?

MS5: [...] when I was a bit younger when I was doing my A-level, we were taught about it as part of general studies A-level cause it's kind of an issue that people would be interested in, so there has been some teaching as well as just reading things on the news (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year).

The term 'media' was largely used to refer to TV, newspapers and the internet. More specifically, MS5 referred to the 'popular media' as the tabloid newspapers and occasionally television, which were described as sensational journalism.

YL: What do you mean the popular media?

MS5: The tabloid newspapers, occasionally the television would use a lot of sensational language, they won't- they'll talk about the GM menace or something like that. It won't actually discuss the science in any detail; it's just from sensational journalism.

This thesis shows that school education²⁶ is a major information source for scientific topics on top of the media reporting for student population. In line with this finding, Norris and colleagues argue that media reporting is a significant information source of current scientific information, particularly for those who are not students (Norris et al., 2003). What is left unsaid in their statement is that the student population is likely to have other information sources in addition to the media reporting. School education is one of them.

The discourse adopted to talk about their school education as an information source was, nevertheless, distinctive between science and HSS students. Many science students mentioned their education as one of their major GM food information sources while only a few HSS students talked about receiving GM food information from school education.

This thesis would suggest that even though university students are more likely to describe themselves as receiving extra information from school than non-student population, the relevance between the information and the academic disciplines to which they belong is a determinant of the information that is available to them. Science students were more prone to present themselves as receiving information about GM food from their course than HSS students possibly because it was considered as a 'scientific' topic, which was believed to be relevant to their school education. Similarly, HSS students consider GM issues as less relevant to their school education and thus framed it as such in their discourse.

²⁶ School education was mentioned as a GM food information source using the terms such as 'university modules,' 'secondary schools,' or 'A-level' in this study.

Comparing the framing students adopted to talk about the media and school education, university students had the tendency to portray the media as less trustworthy. For example:

FS8: But again that's something the media takes a bit out of proportion quite often (female third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

YL: What do you mean the media takes a bit out of proportion?

FS8: Well sometimes like they might just want to sell the story, like it's more important for them to make a story than it is for them to educate the world about genetically modified food.

Portraying the media as not always trustworthy, students have constructed the personal image as being thorough and considerate individuals. This image was constructed through showing their ability to acquire information with a critical eye. 'The media' have long been criticised for sensational journalism and it appears that students have adopted this criticism and presented themselves as always carefully evaluating the information they received from the media. Differently students did not talk about the information they receive from school education in the same way. In contrast to the framing they used to talk about the media being sensational and exaggerated, information from their school education was portrayed as facts. For instance, FS8 claimed that her knowledge about GM tomatoes came from A-level biology. The claim was phrased as a matter-of-fact; no evidence of doubt in the information source or the information per se was detected. As an information source, school education was found to be portrayed as more trustworthy than the media. For instance:

YL: Where did you get all the information about GM food from?

FS8: I did A-level biology and we did a bit about it in that, that's how I know about [GM] tomatoes.

The way in which FS8 talked about the information she received from school education suggests that what she learnt at school was 'facts' and there was no need to be critical about it. In this quote, school education was portrayed as self-evident enough to be trustworthy so that it did not require other evidence to prove its facticity. This finding, nonetheless, might require further examination because students in this study were reluctant to talk about what they had learned about GM food at school. Student MS1 claimed to have learnt a lot about GM food from school and university but was unable to convey what exactly he had learned about it:

YL: You've talked quite a lot about GM food, where did you get this information from?

MS1: Loads of it, school and university (male second year science student; catered hall in the first year).

YL: Do you have modules about GM food?

MS1: We've got modules about genetics and GM was a topic in that, so I don't really know that much about it.

When student MS1 was encouraged to elaborate on what he had learnt about GM food in university courses, he was unable to do so and therefore possibly tried to avoid going further on this topic by saying he did not really know much about it. As demonstrated previously, MS1 had also given a similar cue to the researcher in his other quote, claiming that he did not know much about GM food. This was suspected to avoid creating

further awkwardness in this social encounter. Students' reluctance in talking about the knowledge received from school education appears to be rooted in their difficulties in articulating the information. Having presented themselves as knowledgeable and respectable students throughout the interview, students might have assumed that they were expected to know more about GM food if they had learnt about it in school education. This was perhaps why students were reluctant to comment on it, especially in front of a graduate student who might know the 'right' answer.

Presenting information received from school education as more trustworthy than the media, students appear to have suggested that information coming from trustworthy sources should be inherently more reliable than that from less credible sources. This is what Beck (1992) described in his book *Risk Society*, in which he argues that we are moving from 'industrial society' to 'risk society'. In industrial society, experts tell people what to do to minimise risks in daily lives and people trust them without many objections. In the risk society, the experts cannot agree upon what is risk-free. As a result of that, individuals have to find solutions to handle risks on their own. Therefore, the burden is placed upon the shoulders of the individuals. Beck argues that people are not capable of understanding everything and making the best choice for themselves. In order to save time and effort, people would often choose to trust their own 'expert panel' and trust these experts' opinions. However, although students in this study expressed their general scepticism towards the information received from the media, they appear to be more familiar with it. This was shown from the defensive framing students' adopted to talk about GM food.

By and large, university students adopted a 'defensive framing' to talk about GM food. Students talked about it in the sense that they were 'not

against it', they had 'no problem' with it or they found it very hard to 'avoid'. Their discourse seems to have implied that they might be expected to have problems with, to be against or to avoid GM food. One can suspect that when talking about GM food, to defend the negative connotations which GM food carries, students adopted this defensive framing to show that they are aware of the issues behind this topic and they are not necessarily conforming to the public discourse. Two examples are given as follows:

MS3: I'm not against GM food per se but the business implication it can bring. [...] I can't say all GM food to be bad or- it depends on their situation (male third year science student; catered hall in the first year).

FH5: I'm not against it, I wouldn't say but then like I said I don't know huge amount about it. I'd say I wasn't against it but I'd like to know more about it (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

By the same token, FS3's support for GM food was also embedded in a defensive discourse. Even if FS3 thought GM food was a good idea, a defensive framing of GM food was again adopted to talk about it. Her suggested support for GM food was described as 'not against' it.

YL: So you haven't decided what you think about GM food personally?

FS3: I think it's very hard to avoid, a lot of food is genetically modified I think people don't even realise it. [...] 'Cause it's new, I think it's a good idea really so I'm not

against it until there's any proof otherwise (female third year science student; self-catered hall in the first year).

It can be found that the three students quoted above talked about GM food using the phrase 'I am not against it but...' which has been examined by some discourse analysts. In the paper he gave in ISPP 32nd Annual Scientific Meeting, Gibson (2009) examines UK televised debate carried out in early 2003 about the Iraq War. He emphasizes that the ways in which speakers talked about the military intervention were generally framed to counter the potential criticisms. Therefore, they would frame their arguments with phrases such as 'I'm not a war monger but...' Similarly, this defensive framing was also found in another context. BurrIDGE (2004) studied the discourse of the 'morally conservative' and found that a 'disclaiming' is often employed to avoid an attribution of homophobia, which was considered as undesirable in that context. By the same token, students in this study might have also perceived GM food as undesirable and therefore adopted this defensive framing to avoid being seen as a GM food advocate.

Students' choice of this defensive framing suggests that they might have adopted the language that is used to discuss GM food issues, most likely from the media. It has been identified that the GM food image which the media has been sending out is often associated with negative metaphors such as 'Franken food' or 'killer tomatoes' (Nerlich et al., 2000). It appears that information from the media is more likely to be remembered by students, according to FH5:

YL: Why would you think that [media] was exaggerating?

FH5: Because of the way they did it. It was also over the top [...] it was all SO exaggerated that it kind of, rather than make you believe them, it make you doubt them. [...] but they're the ones that kind of stick in your head, aren't they? The ones that are just exaggerated (female third year HSS student; self-catered hall in the first year).

In this quote FH5 provided an explanation of the reasons that students were more capable of remembering information they received from the media but not from school education. She claimed that it is because the media exaggeration usually 'sticks in your head'. Notwithstanding students' efforts at presenting themselves as thoughtful individuals, who read information from the media critically, it can be argued that their knowledge and understanding about GM food was still largely derived from the media. The information they received about GM food was portrayed as either negative, i.e. from the media, or factual, i.e. from school education. A lack of positive framing can be found in students' discourse. Nonetheless, it is not suggested here that students do not receive positive information about it. It only suggests that when students were reflecting upon the information they received about GM food, the negative framing was more likely to emerge in their discourse.

It was found that whilst students were asked to identify what they meant by the term 'media', the use of the term was rather dynamic throughout the conversation. They could have been referring to different elements of the media at different points in the interview. Whilst students portrayed themselves as placing more trust in the information received from school education than the media, they also claimed to find certain media information sources more credible than the others.

YL: Why?

MS4: Because they are very good newspapers, it's not like the Sun you know [...] these are reputable UK national papers. So you know most of their news is the same as the news anyway, yeah that's that (male second year science student; never been in halls).

Frewer and colleagues contended that 'quality' newspapers²⁷ and university scientists are the sources that are regarded as more trustworthy in food-related hazards issues (Frewer et al., 1996). Hence, the term media was used in a fairly broad sense and there are certain parts of the media students find more trustworthy than the others. Furthermore, students' discourse about their trust in the 'quality' media were often found in the discourse talking about food related information but not specifically on GM food. The media was presented as less trustworthy as a GM food information source than a general food information source. This also shows that students presented themselves as being more critical whilst reading information about novel technology and scientific debates such as GM food issues but not on more mundane food issues such as information about food in general.

8.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter examines students' discourse about science and technology applied to food production via the case study of GM food. It was found that science students had the tendency to adopt scientific jargon to talk about scientific issues such as GM food, whereas HSS students were more likely

²⁷ A definition was not given to what they meant by 'quality newspaper' but it was used as opposed to tabloid newspaper in their study.

to talk about the social implications and issues arise from it. This distinction was interpreted as their presentation of selves as being science or HSS students. However, students' choice of language does not necessarily reflect their understanding of the particular science or technology in question.

The ways in which students claimed/disclaimed their general scientific knowledge were also found to be another attempt to construct their appropriate student images. It was observed that science students were predisposed to claim general knowledge in science whereas HSS students were prone to claim that they do not know anything about science. Moreover, their claiming and disclaiming of general scientific knowledge was also used to justify their lack of motivation to acquire information about GM food. Science students claimed to not have been actively researching on this topic because they believed they were sufficiently informed about it by being science students. On the other hand, HSS students claimed that they would not be able to understand the information because they are not 'scientists'. Therefore they did not try to acquire such information. However, I was intrigued by the fact that university student felt the need to justify their lack of interest in GM food.

Wagner et al. (2002) propose that 'inter-individual and mass media communication' would raise people's awareness of GM food and result in people's interest in understanding relevant topics in order to function in the society. This thesis suggests that 'inter-individual and mass media communication' have only created a feeling of obligation amongst university students. In the interviews, students expressed their belief that they are supposed to know about GM food issues. However, this belief was

not portrayed as a strong enough driving force for them to actually learn about it.

School education as an information source was portrayed as more trustworthy than 'the media'. Students presented themselves as more critical about the information they acquired from 'the media' and talked about the information received from school education as facts. The reputation of 'the media' might be the reason why students felt they should present themselves reading its information critically. However, it was found that students were more capable of articulating what was described as sensational or exaggerated information. This was demonstrated when all of them adopted a defensive framing to talk about GM food, whether they personally think it is a good idea or not. However, when talking about the information obtained from the media regarding to less controversial food issues, their critical reading was not stressed. This suggests that students consider information about controversial issues, such as GM food, should be read more critically.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a concluding note for this thesis. First, the transition in students' discourse about their food practices from home to university is summarised. In this summary, the three stages examined during students' university are linked and discussed using Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor. Two types of images were constructed in students' discourse, namely institutional images and personal images. The summary presents a shift in focus in students' discourse from constructing institutional images to personal images. This shift can be related to the changes of living situations, the changes of social relations with cohabiters in these living situations and students' acquisition of autonomy and independence. Further, this conclusion discusses the ways in which students used their discourse about food and eating to present themselves. Food is such an essential part in people's life that it was used to express 'unapparent facts' (Goffman, 1959). Students' presentation of selves is found to be constructed conforming to social norms, which is supposed to be 'appropriate' in different social encounters.

This chapter also demonstrates the distinction found between science and HSS students' self-presentation. C.P. Snow's (1959) famous lecture is referenced to examine the different framings adopted in science and HSS students' discourse. This is followed by a discussion of Jenkin's (2007) paper about the problems in the UK science education. This thesis further examines the implications that the ingrained distinction between 'science' and 'non-science' embedded in students' discourse.

This chapter provides a summary of the implications of this thesis, which does not only aim to contribute to the literature of studies of food and eating but also intends to provide some considerations for policy-making. This chapter finishes with some final reflections on the general limitations of this thesis.

9.2 Change of focus in students' discourse

This thesis found that two types of images were constructed when students were talking about their food practices, namely institutional images and personal images. The term 'institutional image' is the image that students constructed to present their living situations, such as their families, university accommodation and private accommodation. The institutional image is similar to what Goffman refers as the 'team impression':

Whether the members of a team stage similar individual performances or stage dissimilar performances which fit together into a whole, an emergent team impression arises which can conveniently be treated as a fact in its own right [...] (Goffman, 1959:85).

On the other hand, students' personal images are the images they constructed to present their individuality. In this thesis, a shift of focus is found in students' discourse about these three living situations examined. Whilst talking about their food practices at home, more emphasis was given to the institutional images of their families, which were often said to be largely decided by their parents as reported in Chapter Five. Their personal images, at this stage, were less prominent in their discourse. Students were predisposed to describe their personal images conforming

to their family images. Furthermore, their personal images were not portrayed as having much impact on the shaping of their family images since their involvement in domestic food practices was described as limited. The importance of family images was stressed and thus when students' personal images contradicted their family images, students tried to reconcile the two images employing various strategies. If the two images cannot be reconciled, students were prone to place more weight upon their family images in their discourse about food practices at home.

After entering university, the focus of students' discourse is found to have gradually shifted from constructing institutional images towards their personal images. The constructed hall images were portrayed as pre-determined by previous hall residents, which were often described as unhealthy as reported in Chapter Six. Students' personal images were described as conforming to the pre-determined hall images when they first moved into halls. As more experience with food was gained, students' personal images became more prominent when they were talking about the end of their hall life. In contrast to their discourse about food practices at home, students did not seem to place as much weight on constructing the institutional images of university halls. Whilst talking about the contradiction between institutional images and personal images, they did not try to reconcile the two images as they did for family images. Many claimed to have compromised university hall images and presented their personal images as dominant images.

Finally, students' discourse about their food practices in private accommodation emphasised their personal images. Their food practices in this setting were described as personal experiences. Although all of them were sharing houses with at least one other person, they rarely

constructed institutional images of private accommodation when talking about their food practices at this stage. Different from the previous two living situations, their personal images were framed as not being affected by institutional images. Most of the participating students were living in private accommodation at the time they were interviewed. Therefore the images that were constructed about this living situation are likely to be students' 'present selves'.

It was initially suspected that self-catered hall students' discourse might adopt similar framing to talk about their food practices as in private accommodation. This is because students in both living situations had to cater for themselves. This speculation was found to be only partially true. In comparison to catered hall students, self-catered halls students' food discourse might be closer to it is in private accommodation but the difference in focus can still be observed. As identified in Chapter Six, self-catered hall students felt the need to justify their reasons for choosing self-catered halls over catered halls, and thus stressed more on their personal images of being conscious of having full autonomy in food in order to demonstrate that they had made the correct decision in choosing self-catered university accommodation. Students' discourse about private accommodation did not seem to place such weight on this image because it appears to be the norm at the University of Nottingham to move into private accommodation for the second year. Hence, it was not portrayed as an active choice and thus no justification was felt necessary. Students' discourse about their food practices in self-catered halls and in private accommodation should not be regarded as the same. This reiterates that students' discourse about their food practices should be examined not only in relation to the cooking facilities in their living situations, i.e. the material constraints. Their discourse should also be associated with the symbolic

implications of the living situations, such as the autonomy embedded in choosing to cater for themselves.

To summarise, there is an obvious shift in the focus of students' discourse about their food practices in the three different living situations. The institutional images were stressed while students talked about family images. The construction of their personal images gradually became more salient after they moved away from home to university halls. Eventually, their personal images dominate their discourse about food practices in private accommodation. This shift in focus in students' discourse can be due to various reasons. Firstly, the change of living situations is likely to affect food availability and cooking facilities that are available. Therefore, food practices that are viable to them might change, if their living situations change.

Furthermore, the nature of students' relationship with their cohabiters in the three living situations varied. It is more likely for students to talk about their food practices at home constructing institutional images because their relationship with the family members is supposed to be closer than their relationship with their cohabiters in university halls and private accommodation. Therefore, students are more likely to be attached to their family images and thus consider it as a unique entity in its own right. In addition, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, even though students have moved away from home, they seemed to feel that they are still obliged to maintain their family images when they go home. Consequently, the institutional images of their families might still play an important role in their self-presentation, and thus were stressed in the interviews. Students' relationship with their cohabiters in halls and private accommodation is likely to be temporary and it is unlikely for students to go back after they

leave these living situations. As a result, they might feel less obliged to construct such institutional images in their discourse.

Finally, as demonstrated in the first three data chapters, many students linked the acquisition of autonomy in food practices directly to their acquisition of independence. Hence, the emphasis on their personal images can be related to their acquisition of autonomy and independence after moving away from home. More pertinently, this can be considered as students' beliefs that they should acquire independence during university period. They seemed to think it was appropriate to portray their roles at home as dependent and their images as conforming to their family images. Entering university was their first chance to step out from the institutional images of their families and thus they might have initially adopted the institutional images of university halls as they are used to with the home images. More emphasis was placed on constructing their personal images in their discourse about food practices later in university halls. This transition in their discourse can be seen as a period of learning to acquire independence. After moving into private accommodation, with the food experience gained in the previous year and having acquired full autonomy in food, students' personal images were the major foci in their discourse at this stage. In order to demonstrate their present selves as having learnt to be independent individuals during university period, students might have presented this stage as having some distinctive features different from their previous living situations, i.e. university halls and home. Private accommodation is very likely to be the last major change in their food practices during their university life as undergraduate students. Hence, by providing students' accounts from the first to the last stage of their university period, this thesis hopes to illustrate students' transitions in food to university. The images constructed in this thesis were found to

constantly change not only in different living situations, i.e. material constraint, but also in different social contexts, e.g. social relations with cohabiters and at different points of time in discussion, e.g. the images considered appropriate for that time point.

9.3 The construction of self-presentation

Food activities are so essential to human society that the functionalist authors claim that social relations are maintained by it (Goody, 1982). Furthermore, the structuralist (e.g. Douglas, 1975, Lévi-Strauss, 1966) approach tries to examine the rules and convention that shape the ways in which food is considered and handled, trying to look into the 'deep structure' of people's food and eating. Both the fundamentalist and the structuralist approaches have tried to underpin the underlying social relations embedded in people's food practices. The materialist/developmentalist authors, on the other hand, argue that although the symbolic implications that food practices carry should be recognised, the material level of food practices should also be understood. In other words, the materialist approach to the study of food and eating argue that the development of certain food practices are also shaped by various material conditions such as the availability of certain food substances.

In addition to the three theoretical approaches, this thesis argues that discourse about food practices can serve as a useful tool to explore people's presentation of selves in everyday life. People's discourse about food is not only closely tied to their interactions with others in society, but also associated with the ways in which they see and present themselves. In

other words, this thesis examines people's discourse about food practices on a more individual level.

The construction of personal and institutional images in students' discourse about food can be regarded as their attempts to present themselves as appropriate individuals in society, as Goffman (1959) argues that the role of expression is to convey impressions of self:

[T]he expressive component of social life has been treated as a source of impressions given to or taken by others. Impression, in turn, has been treated as a source of information about unapparent facts and as a means by which the recipients can guide their response to the informant without having to wait for the full consequences of the informant's actions to be felt (Goffman, 1959:241).

The images constructed by university students, according to Goffman, would serve as a source of information about their 'unapparent facts', which is their appropriateness in various living situations.

Goffman further argues that the ways in which people treat others are based on the impression they give now about their past and the future. This is to say that the images which students constructed about their food practices in the past are likely to be framed conforming to their present images. Goffman suggests that this is when 'communicative acts are translated into moral ones' (Goffman, 1959:242). He argues that these impressions would be regarded as people's promises to a moral character. These moral characters, therefore, were likely to be kept whilst students constructed their images. Hence, students' discourse about their food

practices in the past can be considered as a means of conveying the impressions they wanted to portray about their present selves. This is not to say that students would not present the 'reality' about their food practices in the past in order to maintain these constructed images. One's 'reality' can be interpreted and presented in various ways. Therefore, what were presented in students' discourse can be their interpretations of the 'reality' about their food practices in their food transitions in the interview. By the same token, what is reported in this thesis is my interpretation of their reality for the purpose of this research.

Notwithstanding this thesis analyses students' food practices on a more individual level, it ought to be stressed that their construction of self-presentation is embedded in their social relations with others. University students' self-presentation in various living situations and contexts is found to have conformed to the socially constructed appropriateness, which can be regarded as students' interpretations of the social norms. Schutz (1973) contends that people's interpretation of the world is a result of their past experiences, including their personal experiences and what is taught by others.

All interpretation of this world is based on a stock of previous experiences of it, our own or those handed down to us by parents or teacher; these experiences in the form of 'knowledge at hand' function as a scheme of reference (Schutz, 1973:7).

University students' interpretation of socially recognised appropriateness can also be considered as being learnt from their past experiences. Students seemed to share similar beliefs about the 'appropriateness' for

university students and therefore portrayed themselves as such. This belief can be understood as the knowledge they have learnt through the process of socialisation. In other words, students' knowledge about the 'appropriateness' might be formed in the world around them as Schutz (1971) writes:

In so far as he is interested in knowledge of his social world, he organizes this knowledge not in terms of a scientific system but in terms of relevance to his actions. He groups the world around himself (as the centre) as a field of domination and is therefore especially interested in that segment which is within his actual or potential reach (Schutz, 1971:32).

Schutz believes that people's thoughts and knowledge are likely to be constructed by the social world in which they are situated. The common features in the images constructed by students in this thesis are believed to be due to their relatively similar background. For example, all of them are undergraduate students at the University of Nottingham and therefore they might share a similar socialisation process over their university life. This process is suspected to be reciprocal. Through the construction of the 'appropriateness' in their personal images, students were also shaping the socially recognised 'appropriateness'.

9.4 University students in two cultures

The reported distinction between science and HSS students' self-presentation in this study can be discussed by reference to the 'two cultures' in C. P. Snow's (1959) famous lecture *Two Cultures and the*

Scientific Revolution. In this paper he identifies a 'gulf of mutual incomprehension' between scientists and literary intellectuals. Snow observes that both literary intellectuals and scientists have an ingrained impression of each other, not necessarily completely wrong, but 'destructive'. He argues that the misunderstanding between the two is largely the consequence of mutual misunderstanding and misinterpretations. He suggests that natural scientists do share certain features and so do non-scientists, whether they like it or not. Furthermore, Snow portrays the ways in which literary intellectuals dismiss the idea of understanding the Second Law of Thermodynamics as much as scientists do the idea of reading Shakespeare. Therefore, Snow observes that the members in one culture express their entitlement to be ignorant about another, which is also found in HSS students' discourse, as reported in Chapter Eight.

The divide between the two cultures was demonstrated in students' self-presentation in this study, particularly in claiming and disclaiming general scientific knowledge. As discussed previously, university students' self-presentation was divided between science and HSS students. This shows that in addition to the process of socialisation, school education might have also affected the ways in which they perceive and present themselves as 'appropriate' students. Subsequently, science students in this study chose to present themselves as having general scientific knowledge whereas HSS students share other similar features of disclaiming all knowledge in science.

In his paper, Snow argues that the divide between the two cultures is particularly salient in the UK because of people's belief in educational specialisation. Furthermore, he claims that once a cultural divide is

established, social forces operate to make it more rigid, which he refers as the crystallising of social forms. Hence, Snow suggests that a rethinking of education is the solution to this cultural gulf. He suggests that education should be broadened; students should be educated in more than one academic skill. Snow argues that it is not that scientists are not interested in literature, but much more that 'the whole literature of the traditional culture doesn't seem to them relevant to those interests' (Snow, 1959:15). In other words, he argues that students should have access to knowledge of a wider scope. In so doing, Snow suggests that mutual understanding can be increased and misinterpretations can be decreased. However, drawing from the findings presented in Chapter Eight, this thesis would argue that the availability of information does not necessarily increase people's interest in acquiring that particular information. People's motivation for acquiring specific knowledge, as has been discussed in Chapter Eight, is closely associated to its perceived relevance, on both a social and a personal level. Once the information is considered irrelevant, people's motivation for acquiring that particular body of knowledge can decrease. Snow's proposition was made based on the assumption that scientists are more interested in the Second Law of Thermodynamics, i.e. scientific matters, and literary intellectuals are more interested in Shakespeare, i.e. the literary knowledge. This thesis has demonstrated that science students do not necessarily find information about all 'scientific matters' as more relevant and HSS students as less. In the case of GM food, most students did not seem to consider it as relevant. The difference in science and HSS students' discourse about GM food is only observed in their justification of their lack of motivation to learn about it, as shown in Chapter Eight. Therefore, this thesis challenges Snow's assumption: after all, biologists might not find the Second Law of Thermodynamics more relevant than Shakespeare. In his lecture, Snow seems to not have

escaped from the dichotomous framing of 'science' and 'non-science'. Regardless, Snow has identified an important problem in the UK education. Fifty years after his lecture, this thesis finds the gulf between the two cultures remains in university students' discourse.

The former Director of the Centre for Studies in Science and Mathematics Education, Edgar Jenkins, is interested in policy and practice in science education and public understanding of science in the UK. He identifies one of the problems with the UK's current education as the promotion of a unifying scientific method (Jenkins, 2007). According to Jenkins, some important philosophical, conceptual and methodological differences have been ignored. He reports that since the mid-19th century in Britain, science has emerged as a political construct and thus instead of teaching specific scientific subjects, e.g. chemistry, physics or biology, schools have been teaching science as a coherent curriculum component. Jenkins reports that this started from Herschel's concentration on scientific methods in his *Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy* in 1831. This, Jenkins argues, has had important and enduring consequences for school science education in the UK. This thesis would speculate that because science has been treated as a unified school curriculum, students in this thesis regarded it as a uniform body of knowledge. As a result, the typical images of 'scientists' are constructed by science students, and 'non-scientists' constructed by HSS students. However, it ought to be stressed that this thesis does not have evidence to claim that all the participating students went to schools that have a curriculum like this. However, the way in which students in this thesis adopted the dichotomous framing of 'science' and 'non-science' is obvious.

By incorporating Snow's lecture and Jenkin's paper into the discussion, it can be suspected that UK students have been imbued with the distinction between 'science' and 'non-science' at an early stage in school education. After students entered university, which is supposed to be a training period for their future career, they appeared to believe that it is appropriate to construct their student images as conforming to the culture to which their degree belongs. It is speculated that science students' 'scientific' images were not only constructed for the people outside the scientific community but also to show people inside their own culture that they are appropriate members of this community. This self-presentation was also employed by HSS students who presented themselves as outside the scientific community.

The problem of scientists' claiming general scientific knowledge can be linked to Collins and Evans' (2002) discussion about the third wave of science studies: *Studies of Expertise and Experience (SEE)*. They argue that in the first wave of science studies, social scientists and public used to regard a good scientific training as 'putting a person in a position to speak with authority in their own field, and often in other fields, too' (2002:239). In their paper, they refer to this stage as 'The age of authority'. They continue to claim that the second wave of science studies, which they call 'The age of democracy', stresses that scientific knowledge is like other forms of knowledge. As a result, sociologists have become unsure about how to talk about it to make it different. This, according to Collins and Evans, has resulted in the difficulty for sociologists to claim any expertise themselves. This is a problem that Collins and Evans believe the third wave of science studies can resolve. The role of expertise is emphasised in their paper. The core argument of the third wave of science studies is that the question of whose opinion should be taken into account in the decision-

making should depend on their 'expertise' rather than whether they are a member of the scientific community. What Collins and Evans meant by 'expertise', nevertheless, is very specific to facilitate their arguments. They argue that in the third wave of science studies, the scientific community no longer plays any special part in the decision-making process since 'the idea that scientists have special authority purely in virtue of their scientific qualifications and training has often been misleading and damaging' (Collins and Evans, 2002:250). They contend the expertise that has been developed through experience should be recognised as being as legitimate as the official recognised expertise. People who are in the scientific community but not involved in the scientific matter in question should be treated as members of the public since they do not possess more expertise in that particular domain than other people in the public. Collins and Evans' idea is very much similar to what Schutz (1973) argues:

I am an 'expert' in a small field and 'layman' in many others, and so are you. Any individual's stock of knowledge at hand is at any moment of his life structured as having zones of various degrees of clarity, distinctness and precision (Schutz, 1973:14).

Collins and Evans (2002) have highlighted the importance of acquainting people with the idea that science as a domain of knowledge has no more privilege than other domains of knowledge, e.g. social science or philosophy. This thesis has only crudely divided the University of Nottingham undergraduate students into science and HSS students; science disciplines can vary considerably, as can HSS disciplines. For instance, science students who are doing a degree in chemistry and those who are studying physics would possess completely different expertise,

even though both of them are 'science students'. By the same token, a HSS student whose expertise is in sociology might not necessarily be an expert in history. However, science students in this study presented themselves to possess general knowledge in science as a uniform subject. It is not the intention of this case study but further research could examine whether HSS students also generalise the term 'social science' and claim general knowledge in social science. It can provide more information about the similarities/differences people look at 'science' and 'social science'. This might answer questions such as, is social science seen as a uniform body of knowledge? Do people think about the terms of 'science' and 'social science' differently and why? Although the third wave is still being debated in STS, it has raised the issue that receiving 'scientific training' should not automatically endow people with more expertise in all 'science'. Following Collins and Evans' observation, this thesis suggests that in order to dissolve the ingrained impression of science and HSS students, this discussion should be introduced in students' university training. That is, science students should not consider themselves as qualified to claim authority in 'science' and HSS students should not consider themselves as being entitled to know nothing about 'science'. As demonstrated in Chapter Eight, on the one hand, science students claimed to know more about scientific matters than others and therefore did not think they have to acquire further information. On the other hand, HSS students claimed to know nothing about science and thus claimed to avoid all the information about GM food. Hence, the claiming and disclaiming of scientific knowledge might be used to justify students' lack of motivation in learning about what is considered as 'scientific matter', which might eventually lead to a student population that considers acquiring information about 'science' as irrelevant.

The Food Standard Agency (FSA) has recently published a report 'Exploring attitudes to GM food' (Sheldon et al., 2009). According to this report, 'confident' participants answered their questions about GM food in more length and greater detail. They tended to talk about the process of altering DNA or genes. Moreover, they also cited a wide range of information sources, including news media, education and scientific periodicals. By contrast, 'less confident' participants used less certain expression such as 'I suppose' or 'I guess'. Moreover, they were portrayed as not usually giving an account of the process of genetic modification and describing a narrower range of information sources. The descriptions of the discourse of the 'confident' and the 'less confident' participants are rather similar to the responses of science and HSS students respectively in the present study. However, it has to be stressed that even though the discourse of science and HSS students in this thesis matched the 'confident' and 'less confident' participants in Sheldon et al.'s study, some science students did sound less certain when talking about GM food. Similarly, some HSS students also gave detailed accounts of GM food that included aspects of a social context. Furthermore, this thesis also demonstrated that science students might present themselves as more knowledgeable about the scientific process of GM food whereas HSS students might present themselves as knowing more about the social aspects. Drawing upon both studies, even though the 'more confident' might tend to use scientific jargon, it cannot be certain that those who use scientific jargon are necessarily more confident about their knowledge. The way in which they want to be seen should also be taken into consideration. It might be interesting for future research to explore the relationship between students from different disciplines and their confidence in the topic of GM food.

In the FSA report, the authors claim that educational level and age might affect people's confidence in talking about GM food in the workshops. From an interactionist point of view, it can also be suggested that people who have received higher education might try to present themselves as more knowledgeable than others. However, the fact that they have received higher education might also discourage them from discussion if they are not confident about their knowledge. They might try to say as little as they can so that their lack of knowledge would not be revealed to other people in the discussion group. Drawing from this speculation, an interactionist perspective might shed some light on future research that aims to measure people's knowledge on GM food in a small group workshop. For instance, if science students in this thesis were put in small discussion groups, even if they had wished to present themselves as knowledgeable about scientific matters, they might be discouraged from participating in the discussion if they thought their knowledge about GM food is limited. In one-to-one interviews, it was perhaps easier for students to avoid answering questions by diverting the focus of the discussion.

The authors in the FSA report stress the importance of ensuring sufficient homogeneity in terms of educational background amongst participants in the study of complex scientific issues such as GM food. This thesis, however, would argue that the diversity in the educational background could provide different insights through the interactionist perspective.

9.5 Implications of this thesis

As discussed previously, three main theoretical approaches have dominated the sociological study of food and eating for more than two decades. These three theoretical approaches have provided different

perspectives to understand the data in this study. One of the main objectives of this thesis is to argue that this repertoire should be expanded by introducing Goffman's ideas about the study of everyday life to the field. Therefore, I shall start with a discussion about the ways in which the data can be interpreted within the three theoretical approaches. This is then followed by a discussion about the ways in which Goffman's concepts can contribute to the studies of food and eating, providing another perspective.

Firstly, similar to functionalist authors' observation, university students also described their food practices as an essential part of their lives. The importance they attached to food gradually increased in the transition from home to private accommodation. When talking about food practices at home, they were presented as determined by others so that the students had not had to concern themselves with this aspect of life. Food practices only became important issues for them when they started to cook for themselves. Nonetheless, even in students' discourse about the food practices in private accommodations, food was not said as such an essential part of their lives as what was reported by the functionalist authors. In contrast to the societies studied by anthropologists, UK university students, or at least those attending the University of Nottingham, had grown up in an environment where food supplies were secure and easily accessible. Even if they did not prioritise food practices in their lives, food would still be easier to obtain than in many traditional societies and therefore its availability could be taken for granted. However, the role that food plays in students' life is still closely related to their place in the society. At the transition stage of life, university students are learning to look after themselves and taking on a new role as independent individuals. The transition in their food practices can be regarded as part of

this life-transition to different responsibilities, including self-care and self-management. This difference was clearly expressed in university students' discourse. Employing completely different research methods from the functionalist authors such as Radcliffe-Brown and Richards, studying completely different cultures in different contexts, this thesis finds that the functionalist approach is still able to provide informative insights about contemporary UK university students.

Second, the ways in which students in this study talked about food also can be examined within a structuralist paradigm, if put loosely. Structuralist approaches look at the rules and conventions that shape the ways in which food items are handled and considered. The surface rules of food practices are manifestation of deeper, underlying structures. Through Goffman's concepts of self-presentation, this thesis provides a different focus to the structuralist paradigm in the study of food and eating. Instead of looking at only food substances per se, this thesis investigates the ways in which the surface features of food practices were considered and framed, in order to understand the deeper meaning in students' discourse. Food practices were not only described as more than their material forms but also carried symbolic implications. In the interviews, university students presented what they consider to be appropriate images of themselves through their descriptions of food practices. As discussed throughout this thesis, the ways in which food practices were described by university students reflect the stages of life they were referring to. When talking about their food practices at home, students used their family food practices to create family images that showed me how they were being nurtured by their family, as something to be taken for granted, suggesting that this is a period of time when they consider it is acceptable to be dependent and

looked after. After they moved out from home, some students expressed their desire to be seen as independent through their discourse about food and food practices. They were presented as capable of looking after themselves. The structuralist approach has proven to be informative when examining university students' discourse about their food practices from a different viewpoint from the functionalist approach. However, the importance of the symbolic meaning of food and its practices does not mean the material meanings of food practices should be neglected, as we will now see.

When Murcott (1988) introduced the category of 'materialist' in her review paper, she acknowledged the diversity within this group. The common feature of the authors she describes as 'materialists' was their shared dissatisfaction with the structuralist approach. Hence, this thesis reviews this theoretical approach in its most open sense – the approach that investigates food and eating in their material aspects. This thesis found that the materialist approach can be useful to understand university students' food practices. For instance, students' decisions about what to eat were constrained by various material considerations, such as their financial situation, access to shops and kitchen facilities.

It can be seen that all three theoretical approaches are essential to the study of food. Overlooking any of them is likely to result in a partial understanding. The debate in the literature can also be seen as an implication that no one theoretical approach can provide a complete picture so that these three theoretical approaches should not be regarded as competing theories. Rather, they should be seen as complimenting each other in the study of food and eating. However, it has to be pointed out that

the three theoretical approaches that were used to examine university students' discourse about their food practices were understood and interpreted in a rather loose sense. Therefore, the discussion might have been carried out in an over-generalised way.

Hence, this thesis suggests that the categorisation of the theoretical approaches should be reconsidered. Although this categorisation might be useful to give a general introduction to the development of this domain of knowledge, I would suggest that future researchers should avoid thinking only within this categorisation and rejecting the possibility that other theoretical approaches might be relevant.

This thesis is also a contribution to studies of university students and food. As demonstrated earlier, university students' food and eating have long been marginalised in the literature. It is important to understand this particular group's food practices because it is a unique period of their lives. It is the first time, for most students, that they lived away from home and had to face the challenge of feeding themselves. In doing so, they may be establishing food practices that have long-term implications.

As discussed in Chapter Three, many studies of university students and food have focused on their nutritional intake with little attention to the social and cultural context of their food consumption. For instance, in Meiselman et al.'s (1999) study, the authors only examine changes in students' 'eating behaviours' through their measurement scales. While they do acknowledge that students' 'eating behaviours' will change in different living environments, they have simply assumed that all students' living environments would be similar. Hence, they drew the conclusion that university students' 'eating behaviours' do not necessarily change in

different living environments. In contrast, this thesis did not assume students would talk about their food practices in different living situations differently. When students talked about different living situations, they gave more detailed accounts about what the living situations are like and how they affect the ways in which they eat. These nuances in their discourse might not have been noticed if this thesis had made prior assumptions about students' discourse about food practices and their living situations. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the current understanding of university students' food and eating.

This thesis might be criticised for concentrating on students' presentation of self, which might compromise the accuracy of reporting about their food practices. As mentioned in the methods chapter, however, interview accounts can provide a certain degree of 'reality'. Therefore, although the data in this thesis are acquired through interviews, this does not mean that they do not reflect to some degree of students' actual food practices. This thesis has demonstrated that university students are more concerned about their food practices than what the long-established stereotype implies. It might be problematic to assume that university students do not *care* about eating well based on the observation that they do not eat well. Various restrictions in their life might also play importance roles in shaping their food practices. This might also have policy implications for 'improving' people's eating. Before people's eating can be 'improved', the reasons that they do not have a better dietary habit should be understood. By removing the reasons that are stopping them from having a better diet, the policy might be made more effective.

This thesis also has implications for GM food policies. When the policy makers are trying to engage 'the public's' views about GM food, it is

important to understand that people's views might vary in different contexts. As demonstrated in this thesis, scientists might try to present themselves in a certain way to reinforce their place in scientific community whereas 'non-scientists' might consider themselves as not qualified to make comments on the topic. This self-presentation is not constantly found in students' discourse. The distinction between science and HSS students' discourse is only salient when they talked about 'scientific matters', i.e. GM food in this thesis. This difference, however, is not seen when they were talking about daily food practices. Therefore, it is important to understand the ways in which people present themselves in different context. Not only this, this thesis also suggests that people's understanding of GM food is not determined by the access of information alone. Previous GM studies have linked consumers' knowledge about biotechnology and their acceptance of GM food (Bredahl, 2001, Lusk, 2003). 'Communication with the public' has also been highlighted in various studies (Frewer et al., 2004, Marris et al., 2001, Sheldon et al., 2009). This thesis suggests that while making information more accessible might raise people's awareness of GM food, it does not necessarily motivate people to acquire the information if it is perceived as irrelevant. Hence, while the ways in which GM information is communicated should be clear, accessible and concise (Sheldon et al., 2009), it also has to be made relevant to people's day-to-day life. Otherwise, the accessibility might only increase people's feeling of obligation to understand instead of increasing people's actual understanding. Most students in this study did not know the availability of GM food in the UK. By the same token, Sheldon et al.'s (2009) study also reported that people have very limited knowledge about the extent to which GM food is available, both in the UK and internationally. People seem to be unaware of the extent to which GM food is applied in their life. Therefore, this thesis concludes that if the policy makers aim to increase

people's understanding about GM food, making it a relevant topic to people's daily life might be a good point to start. Finally, this thesis also reinforces the idea that GM food policy making should not regard 'the public' as the only source of the problem (Marris et al., 2001). It has been demonstrated that people rarely concern too much about GM food in their everyday life. Their (lack of) acceptance should not be seen as the central problem, as it implies that the problems lie with the public. Instead, the problems should be considered in a broader context.

9.6 Final reflections

Notwithstanding this thesis' attempt to unfold students' transitions in food practices to university, it became obvious that the three stages examined in this study are perhaps not sufficient. As continuously stressed in this thesis, students' food practices have been portrayed as constantly changing. Nonetheless, their changes in food practices at home were omitted from this thesis. The literature about young people's food and eating has also treated their food practices at home as static. For instance, in the book *Young People, Health and Family Life*, the authors included a chapter talking about young people's eating and the ways in which household members negotiate about food (Brannen et al., 1994). Regardless of their efforts to present young people's negotiation of autonomy in food, this period was examined in a rather static manner. The researchers only conducted one interview with young people about their food practices at the time when they were interviewed. Young people's previous food practices were not reported in their work. In this thesis, students' discourse about food practices at home is found to have stressed their childhood in particular. It might be because, when they were asked about their food practices at home, students might have tried to construct

a distinction between their present food practices before entering university. This could have been, again, an attempt to describe their past conforming to the images that were being constructed about their present selves. As a result, the transitions in students' food discourse before entering university might have been overlooked in this thesis.

Moreover, as identified in Chapter Eight, this thesis might have overlooked the broad range of academic disciplines by categorising students into either 'science students' or 'HSS students'. Although only one borderline case is found in this thesis, a more sophisticated classification can benefit future studies. This thesis proposes that instead of classifying students into either science or HSS students, students should be asked to categorise their own domains of study. This is to see whether they consider themselves as science students, HSS students or other categories. This would help the exploration of the ways in which students see their own academic disciplines and the reasons embedded in this self-reported categorisation.

In conclusion, this thesis has examined the transitions in students' food practices to university through Goffman's lens. Therefore, this thesis can be described as related to food as well as people's presentation of selves in everyday life. It began by trying shed light on people's thinking about GM food and latter changed into a study of discourse about food. The focus gradually moved away from food whilst the data were analysed through an interactionist' approach. Nevertheless, I have come to realise that this thesis has not moved away from the debate in social anthropology and sociology of food after all. Through Goffman's lens, this thesis has demonstrated that food is 'good to think' as well as 'good to eat': people's discourse about food carries not only a symbolic implication but also a material significance. Neither should be omitted in studies about food and

eating. On the one hand, food practices were used to construct the images students wanted to present themselves and their social relationship with others. On the other hand, food practices were also discussed on a material level in their discourse. For example, students talked about their food practices as under the constraint of money and time, their preference in food and the ways in which food is used to deal with their stress.

Because food is so essential to human society it can provide a useful means to study people's presentation of selves. Its importance has made it difficult to escape from people's discourse about their everyday lives. Furthermore, people's discourse about food often carries both material and symbolic implications. Therefore, this thesis suggests that food can serve as a useful means to understand people's self-presentation in everyday life and to illustrate both the material significance as well as the underlying symbolic meaning of food practices.

The findings in this thesis should be regarded as socially constructed. On the one hand, the images students constructed in the interviews are what were considered as appropriate. On the other hand, the way in which this presentation is portrayed is my interpretation of students' discourse for the purpose of this thesis. More pertinently, the ways in which these themes were picked up and presented in this thesis are constructed by my personal experiences. Therefore, my analysis of the data should only be regarded as one of the many ways to interpret students' discourse about their food practices.

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**APPENDIX ONE: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC
DESCRIPTIONS**

Code name	1 st year accommodation	Year of study at the time of interview	Gender
MS1	Catered hall	2	M
FS1	Self-catered hall	2	F
FS2	Catered hall	2	F
MS2	Catered hall	2	M
FS3	Self-catered hall	3	F
FH1	Catered hall	2	F
FS4	Self-catered hall	2	F
FS5	Self-catered hall	2	F
FS6	Self-catered hall	3	F
FS7	Catered hall	2	F
MS3	Catered hall	3	M
FH2	Catered hall	3	F
FH3	Self-catered hall	3	F
FS8	Self-catered hall	3	F
FH4	Catered hall	3	F
MH1	Self-catered hall	3	M
MS4	Never been in halls	2	M
MH2	Never been in halls	3	M
MH3	Catered hall	3	M
MS5	Catered hall	3	M
FH5	Self-catered hall	3	F
FH6	Self-catered hall	3	F
FH7	Catered hall	3	F
FS9	Self-catered hall	3	F

MS6	Self-catered hall	3	M
MS7	Catered hall	2	M
MH4	Catered hall	2	M
MH5	Self-catered hall	2	M
MH6	Self-catered hall	2	M

**APPENDIX TWO: KITCHEN VISITS AND ACCOMPANIED SHOPPING
PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS**

Code name	Type of visit	Time of visit
FS5	Kitchen visit	3rd June 2007 13.00
FS3	Kitchen visit	13th June 2007 13.00
MH1	Accompanied shopping	13th October 2007 10.00
MH1	Kitchen visit	18th October 2007 18.00
FH6	Accompanied shopping	21st October 2007 12.00
MS6	Accompanied shopping	3rd November 2007 12.00
FH6	Kitchen visit	4th November 2007 13.00
MH5	Kitchen visit	8th November 2007 19.00
FS3	Accompanied shopping	11th November 2007 11.00
MS6	Kitchen visit	14th November 2007 18.00

APPENDIX THREE: INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE

1. Introducing the purpose of this study, their entitlement and consent for participation.

2. Demographic questions such as degree of study, age, family background, living situations. Starting with innocuous questions to make students less stressful and get them to think about the upcoming questions in the context of their daily lives.

3. Discourse about food preparation, e.g. Do you cook? Can you talk about what kind of cooking do you do? Can you give some examples? How often do you cook? How do you feel about cooking? This is to find their own definitions of 'cooking' so when they say they 'cook', I would be able to know what activities are involved.

4. Discourse about eating out, e.g. Do you go out for meals often? When was the last time you eat out and why? What do you consider as eating out? How do you feel about eating out?

5. Discourse about takeaway

Have you tried takeaway? When was the last time you ordered takeaway and what was the occasion? Do you enjoy takeaway food? What is the difference between eating out and takeaway?

6. Discourse about food shopping

Do you do food shopping yourself? How often do you do food shopping? How do you go to the shops? Where do you shop there and why? It was considered important to know where students shop to get a broad idea

about what sort of environments and activities are involved in their food shopping. Do you enjoy going food shopping and why do you feel like that? The reasons that students do or do not enjoy food shopping might be relevant to the ways in which they think about food. How do you decide what food products to buy when you are in the shops? Do you read food labels when you do food shopping? What kind of information are you interested? Why?

7. Discourse about food practices at home

Is what you eat now a lot the same as what you eat as a child? Are your food activities a lot different from home? Why cooks at home?

8. Discourse about food practices at university accommodation

Where did you live in your first year? Do you like it and why? What is it like to live in halls?

9. Food information source

Where do you usually get food information from? Mostly about what? When was the last time you actively look for information about food? What was it you were looking for? Did you find what you want? How do you decide what to believe and what not to?

10. GM food case study

Are you familiar with the term GM food? Can you remember any story you heard about it? What do you think of GM food personally? Why? Can you elaborate on that? Where do you get information about GM food?