REPRESENTATIONS OF HOUSEWIFE IDENTITY IN BBC HOME FRONT RADIO BROADCASTS, 1939-1945

Kimberly Erin Rewinkel

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Committee:
Douglas J. Forsyth, Advisor
Beth A. Griech-Polelle
While British food policy during the Second World War was a resounding success, it relied on and reinforced traditional gender roles. An equal shares model for food control provided a sense of national solidarity, but housewives were still represented as inferior to men.

This thesis examines women’s gender identity as present in BBC radio programmes aimed at housewives, specifically broadcasts that dealt with rationing and cooking. Broadcasts regularly emphasized women’s ingenuity and ability to cook nutritious meals using limited food options while also devaluing women’s existing knowledge. Men were frequently considered experts whether or not they were authority figures. Also, the association of meat with masculinity and sugar with femininity provided a redefinition of women’s identity but failed to challenge traditional gender norms or these gendered connections. Thus, traditional gender roles were maintained even while wartime conditions provided changing opportunities and an increased sense of national unity and equality.
To

Ken and Kris, for making everything possible

Katherine, for always being there for me

and

Chris, for limitless patience, love, and support
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Over the course of the past two years, many people have guided and supported me in my endeavors. I owe a debt of gratitude to Samantha Blake, archivist at the BBC Written Archives Center, who assisted and guided me in locating and navigating material. I am also thankful to my family for their support and understanding.
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<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOA</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture</td>
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<td>MOF</td>
<td>Ministry of Food</td>
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<td>MOH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
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<td>MOI</td>
<td>Ministry of Information</td>
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<td>Ministry of Labour</td>
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INTRODUCTION

The success of food controls and rationing in Britain during the Second World War contained within it a contradiction: it created a sense of national solidarity with equal shares for everyone, while relying on women’s inferior position to men. It is generally accepted that the health of the lower third of the population was significantly raised during the war, and that the population on the whole was healthier than before the war. Gender hierarchies were maintained and served as a way to ensure the preparation of healthy meals. Nutrition policy and the needs for women to take care of the health of the nation had a great influence on the content of radio broadcasts, and was a central component of the conceived identity of housewives. This thesis identifies and analyzes the representation of housewives’ gender identity during the war, as illustrated in British Broadcasting Corporation radio programmes.

The government recognized that food availability and national health would be central to winning the war, which necessitated the education of women in how to prepare nutritious meals with available foods. As women were traditionally responsible for preparing meals, radio broadcasts catering to the housewife population carried instructional messages regarding rationing and proper cooking methods. Radio broadcasts regularly reflected the expected characteristics, abilities, and needs of housewives, and it is these aspects of construction that are examined here. Using broadcast transcripts, this paper examines wartime radio broadcasts aimed at the housewife population in order to determine the identity characteristics of British, middle- and upper-middle class housewives during the Second World War. How was female housewife identity depicted? What characteristics were emphasized? How was the ideal image of a British, wartime housewife described? How were women’s identities reflected in messages about food?
Using theories of gender as a social construction that is unique to a specific time and place, it is possible to determine what aspects of housewives’ gender identity are depicted through language and content.

BACKGROUND

Much writing on rationing in Britain during the inter-war period and the Second World War has looked at the governmental regulation and implementation of food controls. These writings tend to rely heavily on government documents such as minutes from government meetings, Parliament decisions and policy, and Ministry of Food (MOF) and Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) files. The few works that examine social aspects of rationing tend to focus on the attitudes and personal experiences of British individuals. Diaries are used regularly, cookbooks and recipe pamphlets are referred to occasionally, and sometimes radio programmes are mentioned. When radio is used, the main one referenced is *The Kitchen Front*, a daily five-minute programme aired in the morning that was produced cooperatively by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the MOF. *The Kitchen Front* programme presented recipes, explained new rationing rules and systems, and was frequently propagandistic by encouraging women to view meals and cooking as ways of “hitting back” at the enemy: proper nutrition and health was critically important to the war effort. While *The Kitchen Front* was very popular and ran for nearly the entire war, other women’s programmes also engaged issues of rationing, food preparation, and the importance of growing your own vegetables. Such

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1 The British spelling has been retained throughout this work, as this is the accepted norm in BBC scholarship.
3 According to BBC Listener Research in 1941, approximately 5.4 million adults (or about fifteen percent of the listening public) listened to *The Kitchen Front* on a daily basis. See R.J.E. Silvey, “Listening in 1940,” BBC Handbook 1941, 79.
programmes as *At Home Today*, *Over the Border*, and *In Your Garden* incorporated topics about
food and rationing or gave information about growing vegetables.

The director of talks, Sir Richard Maconachie, noted that although radio had existed for a
long time before the war, broadcasting played a very large role in the war that brought it to an
unprecedented level of involvement in the public’s lives. He noted that broadcasts were often
intended to aid the national war effort, and they tried to “inspire determination to see the war
through” and to reflect personal experiences, and to tell citizens what they must do, and why, “to
cope with the practical problems” that were associated with total war.\(^4\) Specifically, practical
instruction was given on subjects such as farming, gardening, cookery, first aid, and health. Sir
Maconachie explicitly stated that many of these programmes were scheduled in the morning or
early afternoon and “together with others on more general topics, [were] intended specially for
women.”\(^5\) R.J.E. Silvey reiterated the idea of certain programmes being intended for the female
audience, stating how “each bulletin has its own type of audience.”\(^6\) 7AM bulletins had an
audience of workers who rose awake early to arrive at work on time and were mostly males\(^7\). By
contrast programmes starting at 8:00am and peaking around 1PM had predominantly female
audiences.

Although food rationing during the Second World War has been researched extensively,
no monograph relies heavily upon BBC radio broadcasts, and in fact many of the programmes
have remained nameless and unexplored.\(^8\) While many sources mention *The Kitchen Front* they
almost always reference *The Echo of War*, which is the only monograph to analyze the content of

\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Silvey, “Listening in 1940,” 76.
\(^8\) Daniel Smith does name several other programmes, but does not delve into analysis of them. See *The Spade as Mighty as the Sword: The Story of the Second World War ‘Dig For Victory’ Campaign* (London: Aurum Press Limited, 2011), 146-150.
wartime Home Front broadcasts. In this original work Nicholas argues that *The Kitchen Front* was a highly successful example of home front propaganda in Britain during the war. Analyzing the broadcast messages as they connected to rationing and the importance of women’s cooking in making rationing function and maintain health in the country is not part of Nicholas’ larger goal. The absence of other research into the topic leaves room for bringing to light otherwise obscure radio programmes in the context of how women’s gendered identity was constructed through language and topics in radio broadcasts.

Programmes other than *The Kitchen Front* have the potential to be more revealing of the construction of women’s gender identities and roles because they were not connected to any government ministry. While the content still would have needed to pass censors in the government and the BBC itself, writers were not as constrained in what they discussed and how they discussed it. The resulting broadcasts can be seen as important ways of understanding how rationing and cooking influenced housewives’ identities during the war.

The interactions between the listening public and the radio programme language and content are outside the scope of this paper. While this can be a weakness as it perhaps gives the illusion of programme content standing apart from real housewives’ experiences, it is worthwhile to analyze the construction of identity as depicted by broadcasts. The stories behind the broadcasts —interactions between the BBC and government entities such as the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Food, or the struggle within the BBC to define its role in the war and its responsibilities for encouraging the population and maintaining morale— also lies outside the bounds of this paper.
ANALYZING RADIO BROADCASTS

Radio is inherently an auditory medium, intended to be heard in the moment of broadcast. J.B. Priestley succinctly expressed this idea by stating that he never wanted to have his broadcasts published as they were not to be “read in cold print … [and] examined at leisure.”

Ideally, it would be possible to listen to recorded broadcasts when studying programmes, but in many cases this is not possible. As Simon Rooks has explained, broadcast recording was not practical until 1931, and while mobile and studio facilities were available in 1939, many programmes were not recorded. In the early years of recording, the Empire Service broadcasts were recorded in advance as time differences between Britain and target countries would have required off-hour work. Recording was expensive and the acetate disks could not withstand being replayed multiple times. Only if a programme could be shown to be worth the cost of £5 or £6 for a 4½-minute recording, would it be added to the permanent archive collection in the Recorded Programmes Department. The decided priority for recordings was three-fold: to record things that happen when people are asleep or at work; to record material outside the studio; and to preserve for posterity the items that characterized the “life and times.” The recordings that remain from the Second World War are mainly news bulletins and radio talks dealing with important concerns of the time – unemployment, women’s issues, health, disarmament, the environment– and speeches by important figures. Due to the limited number

11 Ibid., 179.
12 Interview with Marie Slocombe, BBC Sound Archive, reference number 18SX5546, Recorded 25 November 1986, cited in Rooks, 179.
14 Jacqueline Kavanagh, “The BBC’s Written Archives as a Source for Media History,” Media History 5 (1) (1999), 84.
of radio broadcast recordings, it was necessary to rely on broadcast scripts.\textsuperscript{15}

In examining these scripts, it is also important to note that these programmes sought to educate and entertain the audience. Without nuance of speech, analyzing broadcasts is difficult. Nuance of tone, intonation, pacing, and non-spoken signals such as laughter add important details. However, in many cases the tone is visible in the language itself – the comedy of a man cooking and his wife uprooting and replanting trees, for example, with the conclusion that “a woman’s place is in the kitchen.”\textsuperscript{16} The language in this broadcast clearly expresses humor in the form of exaggeration and parody.

Analyzing historical materials carries with it the danger of transplanting modern opinions and interpretations onto terms and ideas from the past. In attempt to minimize this risk, one must be conscious of the “textuality” of the material and rigorously attentive to the nuances of the period. I have attempted to navigate this issue by collecting a variety of programmes from the period in order to have a macro picture of the contents of broadcasts. When I do apply more modern theories, I attempt to draw connections between characteristics of gender identity during the Second World War and the present. Some of the themes present during the war are repeated in the after-war period, and the continuity of these ideas helps to validate my observations and conclusions.\textsuperscript{17}

MATERIALS

Multiple programmes are examined in this work in order to create a context for

\textsuperscript{15} All of the broadcast scripts used here are marked “as broadcast.” If a script was labeled as not having been checked with the “as broadcast” script, it was not used.

\textsuperscript{16} “Of Course I Can Cook,” \textit{At Home Today}, Roy Cole, 24 January 1940, British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archives Centre (hereafter BBC WAC), microfilm reel T23.

interpretation as well as give a representative view of housewife-targeted broadcast content during the Second World War. The programmes most utilized are *At Home Today*, *Wise Housekeeping*, and *Make-Do and Mend*, with occasional use of *Over the Border*, *Around the House*, *Away from the House*, and *The Kitchen Front*.

Unlike programmes such as *The Kitchen Front*, *At Home Today* was a weekly, not daily, programme, and each week it contained three segments on different topics. Some of the segments were entirely of an educational value: a story of an almoner working in a hospital, a more efficient way to ride a bike and ways to care for the gears, an opinion piece about whether the war would be the death of the theatre, and an argument for how English women marrying Dutch men were symbolic of the cooperation between the two countries, for example.\(^\text{18}\) Also, perhaps due to its format as a magazine programme, *At Home Today* covered many issues including buying and preserving food, growing vegetables and herbs, taking care of the house, and volunteering time in war work. Thus, this programme provided a wide variety of messages that could be examined for the assumptions made and the language used to speak to the housewife audience.

Olive Shapley, who joined the BBC in 1934 as an organizer of *Children’s Hour*, argued that *Wise Housekeeping* was unique among other radio shows at the time of the Second World War. She noted that while the program tried to “lighten the household chores and give listeners a new interest, albeit a feminine one, it also tried to open a window on the world outside.”\(^\text{19}\)

Lord Woolton, the Minister of Food during the war, stated that a main intention of *The Kitchen Front* was to “remove the slur of bad and wasteful cookery” by teaching the public of

\(^{18}\) Miss Edminson on 18 September 1940, Alex Josey on 12 Feb 1941, Harold Hobson on 13 Nov 1941, and Mrs. I. E. Fischer on 14 April 1943, respectively.

the important nutritious qualities of foodstuffs and allow for the proper preparation of food. This programme was coordinated between the BBC and the MOF and informed listening housewives about the food items that were available and in season and how to properly prepare and preserve these abundant foods.

I focused on broadcasts that were not educational pieces in the strictest sense. Just as in a printed magazine, the more educational pieces serve to give information to an audience, but they are more intended to share personal interest stories or to illustrate the lives of others, and the language is less indicative of ideal roles. While the selection of topics is indicative of the way in which gender was understood and shaped, this paper is more interested in the language within the broadcasts. Used here are the broadcast talks that spoke directly to women and targeted them as an audience with interests not only in facts and diversions, but also as needing information about how to survive in wartime. The assumption that women needed to have this information is a good starting point for analyzing the formation of housewife identity in the broadcasts. Furthermore, the way in which the information is communicated is just as important as the content itself. The language and wording is an important key to creating a full understanding of the construction of gender in these broadcasts.

METHODOLOGY

“Gender” has been used as a term to differentiate male and female characteristics since the 1970s when feminist theorists used it as a way of emphasizing the social nature of differences between the sexes. Gender broke away from the idea of female/male, woman/man as being a sexual, physical differentiation, and instead emphasized the construction of identity unique to a

society, time period, and location. Using “gender” allows for the analysis of the construction of identity, and emphasizes the way in which differences between dualities of male and female are not universal and unchanging. The construction of gender usually depends on a construction of opposites, with male being everything “female” is not: strong, not weak; logical, not emotional; or public sphere, not private. These opposites not only include definitions of what the idea/characteristic is, but also what it is not. A male/strong is defined in opposition to female/weak – the definition of male contains within itself the converse of female. “Strong” is at the same time muscul arity or emotional tenacity and the absence or opposite of weakness or emotional frailty. Barbara Johnson has referred to this as “the warring forces of signification within the text itself.”\(^{21}\) The opposition inherent in words is important to my analysis here because it allows for a fuller understanding of the definitions of housewife identity.

As words such as “female” shift in meaning based on context – for example, the “virgin/whore” dichotomy– it is possible to analyze the “temporary fixing of meaning.”\(^ {22}\) The construction behind words can be broken down and examined, and analyzing texts in this way allows for the direct examination of identity construction. It is important, per Joan Wallach Scott, that gender be deconstructed and historicized in order to examine the assumptions and projections of women’s gender identity.

With the theory of gender as a social construction based on opposing characteristics, it becomes possible to analyze the construction of female identity. What is most useful in examining the programme scripts from BBC radio broadcasts is what Scott describes as the

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“importance of textuality”: how arguments are structured and what is actually said. Examining words (such as “ingenuity,” one of the main constructs studied here) and the way in which words are used to structure broadcasts intended to motivate action will yield an understanding of what constituted the gender identity espoused in the broadcasts.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Radio in Britain was synonymous with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) during the war. It was the primary radio broadcast organization in Britain and due to its special position as a public service organization, it would play an important role in World War II with regard to propaganda, entertainment programs, and news reporting.

Radio in Britain, as per the Telegraphy Acts of 1869 and 1904, was originally under the control of the Post Office. As radio technology developed, funding became a concern and, wanting to avoid the “anarchy” of American radio, in 1923 the Sykes Committee rejected advertising as a possible source of money. The Crawford Committee in 1925 added to the Sykes ruling, setting up the British Broadcasting Company to be an independent, public entity “free from commercial and direct government or political interference.” It included a statement acknowledging the importance of radio’s “ultimate impact on the education and temperament of the country,” signaling that the government was concerned with how radio could be used and misused. Debates culminated in 1927 with the founding of the British Broadcasting Corporation by Royal Charter under the control of John Reith.

Under Reith’s control, the BBC began to develop its own path. Reith had a strong value

23 Scott, Gender, 7.
25 Ibid.
system for how a public entity ought to be run, and he described the BBC’s responsibility as “carry[ing] into the greatest possible number of homes everything that is best in every department of human knowledge, endeavor and achievement, and to avoid the things which are, or may be, hurtful.”

During the interwar era the BBC envisioned itself above all as a news operation, and prided itself on its independence from the government.

In 1938 Reith left the BBC and F. W. Ogilvie took over as the Director-General of the BBC. Ogilvie did not see his job—or the job of the BBC—to be that of a propagandist, but with disparaging propaganda coming from enemy countries, the BBC and the British government faced a growing need to respond in kind. The BBC originally was reluctant to contemplate “‘deliberate perversion of the truth in order to maintain national morale.’” Eventually, though, the BBC would end up broadcasting a significant amount of propaganda both within and without Britain.

The idea of public morale began to develop in the 1930s with the concept of “‘individuals’ attitudes and behaviour’ [as] peculiarly susceptible to manipulation in the conditions of modern ‘mass’ society.” With the success of fascist dictators, the British government became aware that “the urban masses acted in response to crowd psychology and not according to rational

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29 Ibid., 7, referring to “War Time Propaganda,” an undated BBC Paper thought to be from December 1939.
30 For extensive research on this topic, see Cole, *Britain and the War of Words* and Briggs, *War of Words*, 420-87.
31 I have maintained the British spellings within quotations per the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed., 13.7.
While there were debates in Parliament regarding propaganda and the morality of using such techniques, the BBC would end up using what they termed “democratic propaganda.” In contrast to totalitarian propaganda as used in Germany at the time, the purpose was not to appeal to mass emotion and create citizens who embraced a herd mentality, but to address and fortify the intelligence of the individuals.

The clearest statement on propaganda was written by the Honorable Harold Nicholson, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Information, and printed in the 1941 BBC Handbook. It stated, “no permanent propaganda policy can in the modern world be based on untruthfulness.” Thus the propaganda was to present truthfulness and varied views and perspectives (that nevertheless had to pass government censors). Andrew Crisell has argued that the BBC made a choice to “tell the truth as far as it could rather than create propaganda,” emphasizing the news as an important focus for the BBC. He notes that the BBC adopted a “policy decision to tell the truth, as far as the truth could be ascertained.”

Patriotic feeling was not only present in the senior management of the BBC, but even “producers and scriptwriters recognized the need for strong national morale” and believed their broadcasting to be part of their war contributions. Siân Nicholas approaches the BBC’s actions during the war from the point of view of the BBC having the “clearly defined” job as propagandist and morale-builder, and that this was unquestioned. What was uncertain and “disputed, time and again, was the way [the BBC] exercised this role, and in particular, the

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36 Ibid., 61.
37 Nicholas, Echo of War, 5.
extent to which the government itself exercised this role.” Thus, like the other literature on the subject, Nicholas argues that the BBC was not alone in its propaganda making and disseminating, but that it was a “cog in the machine” that was driven by the government and the perceived responsibility of the BBC to use the power of radio to unite and maintain the morale of the British. Still, Nicholas’s work differs greatly from previous writers arguing that the BBC was a tool allowing the government to broadcast on the radio; she responds directly to the previous research and seeks to restore the BBC to a central role in the production of wartime propaganda.

Radio units themselves had not been conducive to family listening up until the mid 1930s as they had originally been designed for a headset. The male head of the household usually had first choice of which programmes were listened to, and other members of the family would either have to try to listen by sharing the headset or simply not listen at all.

Radios become more of a furniture piece in living rooms, and broadcasting began to be addressed to women, centering on women’s daily routines. Daytime broadcasts offered childcare advice and household and family management. Doctors were part of weekly broadcasting, and would give information regarding health and nutrition. Shaun Moores argues that these housewife-targeted programmes marked a significant change in broadcast content, and that they changed attitudes toward housekeeping and motherhood. Broadcasts at this time set the stage for wartime programme organization by mixing information regarding housekeeping as well as civic responsibilities, and political and cultural issues.

One of the main programmes examined here, At Home Today, grew out of the creation of

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38 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 34.
the magazine radio format that began in the 1930s by adapting women’s print magazines, and
programmes such as *The Women’s Magazine of the Air* were quite popular.\textsuperscript{42}

CHAPTER I: INGENUITY AND THE IDEAL HOUSEWIFE

“The radio which begins with the houseworking day, and accompanies every stage of it until the television goes on in the evening, has a domestic ideology, a sexual division of labour, threaded into its very fabric. Therefore it occupies a very special relationship with women’s lives –a commentary or counterpoint.”

Anne Karpf, “Women and Radio”

While Karpf wrote about late 1970s British radio, her statement about the content and gendered nature of radio is very similar to the nature of radio aimed at housewives during the Second World War. Radio programmes began at 8:00am and continued into the early afternoon. According to BBC Listener Research findings, the majority of listeners during the morning hours were housewives. As a result it can be expected that the messages broadcast in morning programmes were tailored to this audience, and intended to appeal to the listener and help to make her feel part of a larger whole – to connect her to other English housewives who were keeping house and feeding family members under wartime conditions. While broadcasts likely did not intend to shape housewife identity, the language used in the broadcasts indicates the characteristics and roles that shaped gender norms for housewives.

The domestic ideology and a sexual division of labor was not something questioned in the same way it was in the 1970s; being a housewife was not necessarily viewed as restrictive or oppressive, and many enlisted women expressed a desire to return to domestic duties after the war.43 A Wartime Social Survey in October 1941 showed that 32 percent of 1000 women did not wish to take up war work because of domestic responsibilities and because they “disliked the

43 See interviews in D. White, D for Doris, V for Victory (Milton Keynes, 1980), an autobiography of a wartime engineer who left her job after the war to be a full-time housewife. See also female interviews regarding post-war eagerness to leave work and return to domestic duties in Elizabeth Roberts, Women and Families (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 51-58 and 117-133
prospect of leaving the home."44 This is not to claim that all women wanted this, but merely to emphasize that more recent views of housework as an undervalued activity do not apply to the general housewife’s experience of her work.

DEFINING THE HOUSEWIFE

Before delving into an examination of the construction of housewife identity, it is important to identify who constituted a “housewife” during the war. Women in this category would have been home during the day and made up the majority of radio listeners in the morning hours. They sometimes would volunteer time with Women’s Institutes (WI) or work part-time at factories, but generally were exempt from enlistment due to family responsibilities. At the height of mobilization in 1943, 8.75 million women were full-time housewives as compared to the 7.25 million women who were enlisted in the Forces, making housewives a substantial audience to target with propaganda and radio programmes that attempted to shape behavior and communicate information regarding food controls and rationing.45 Government regulation for women’s enlistment during the war was convoluted, but their definition of the family and the household was central to the construction of a group defined as “housewives.”

The Ministry of Labour (MOL) accepted the view that men could not be expected to do their own housework – whether they owned their homes or were tenants – and thus a woman could be exempt from war work if she were part of a household in which she looked after a man,

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looked after his interests in the case of his absence, or had children under the age of fourteen.\textsuperscript{46}

Thus, the household is “something which a woman made for a man, or worker or children.”\textsuperscript{47}

In the first years of the war, the greatest emphasis for housewives’ responsibilities was placed on food preparation and providing for their families’ nutrition and health. In a broadcast regarding the Ministry of Food (MOF) cooking demonstrations Florence Ingillson stated that she would rather “see a woman let the door handles … go dirty than skimp on cooking.”\textsuperscript{48} Rena Bosanquet mentioned in two consecutive broadcasts that it would be important for women to decide whether or not they would be an asset or a liability to their country.\textsuperscript{49} It was not the MOF or a local food controller who was accountable for the health of the nation, but each individual housewife who held the responsibility to handle the “vital question” of feeding the nation.\textsuperscript{50} Each woman had the choice to either “serve [Britain] in its hour of need or leave it to its fate,” choosing one or the other through the food she fed her family and whether or not it was properly prepared. What Bosanquet meant, she explains, is that it is housewives who determine whether people are healthy or ill. It was considered part of a housewife’s war work to make sure that she obtained the best food available.\textsuperscript{51} Housewives had the responsibility of buying the right kinds of food, serving them appetizingly, and giving the maximum amount of nourishment as possible.\textsuperscript{52} One woman went so far as to say that her husband would “go to pieces if he didn’t have proper

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 406.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Watching it Done}, Mrs. Ingillson and Mrs. Hatch, 12 July 1940, BBC WAC T252.
\textsuperscript{49} “Vegetables in Season,” \textit{The Kitchen in Wartime}, Rena Bosanquet, 2 July 1940, BBC WAC T48.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{The Kitchen in Wartime}, Rena Bosanquet, 25 June 1940, BBC WAC T48. This was one of the first broadcasts of \textit{The Kitchen in Wartime} programme, which aired at 10:45am every Tuesday. The programme was described as one that took on the issues of how to properly cook foods that were at the height of their season as a way of promoting the demonstrations put on by the MOF.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{The Kitchen Front}, Helen Burke, 22 April 1941, BBC WAC T63.
\textsuperscript{52} “Fitness in the Forces,” \textit{At Home Today}, Flight-Lieutenant John Barnes, 2 July 1941, BBC WAC T23.
food.”

By 1941 this emphasis on food and care of the family had somewhat shifted: women were urged, immaterial of their age or domestic responsibilities, to volunteer their time. The government called for the institution of part-time work in order to encourage women to work outside the home without disrupting the more “conventional” roles of housewives. Women were told to begin “telescoping” housework and putting down luxury and comfort in order for women to give “every ounce of our energy to serious and vitally necessary” work. Housework (which included cooking) was no longer the most important aspect of women’s contributions to the war, and young women who thought that they did everything they needed by just keeping house for a husband ought to instead contribute to necessary work.

While the implementation of part-time work can be interpreted (as Summerfield does) of the government’s commitment to not upsetting domestic duties, it is equally likely that this was an astute method of encouraging women who would otherwise not be willing to engage in outside work. As mentioned above, many women were happy with being full-time housewives and were not interested in working outside of the home if it were to take away from or add additional work to their household responsibilities. By creating the option of part-time work, the government could try to get additional labor from nearly half of the non-working female population. Several radio broadcasts illustrated instances of housewives who organized with their neighbors to make it possible to obtain rationed and controlled foods while working at a factory. One broadcast interview with a blind woman who worked in a munitions factory involved a statement from the young woman that she could get by just fine providing food for herself and

53 How I Manage, Edna Thorpe, 10 April 1944, BBC WAC T568.
54 Summerfield, Women Workers, 103.
55 Ibid., 104.
56 At Home Today, Mrs. W. Lutyens, 3 December 1941, BBC WAC T23.
her sister, and doing the regular housekeeping on her own without the need of help from anyone else. Whether or not this example was true or fictional, it illustrates the degree to which women were expected to live up to certain ideals of sacrifice and being able to succeed in all realms in which the country needed them. It was important for the housewife to plan ahead to avoid the monotony of the same meals, and to save herself work.

Cleaning that maintained the household – even if only to maintain the cheerful, restful nature of the home – was still of vital importance. Spring-cleaning was the topic of dozens of broadcasts. These deep, thorough, annual cleanings were not optional, and the problem discussed was how to go about doing them as economically as possible. The issue was balance in order to do important war work while keeping household items in good repair. Balancing housekeeping and work outside the home was important and entirely possible, as evidenced by several visiting speakers who described the ease with which they kept house and worked full-time at a factory. It was impossible to have a full-time job and maintain an ordinary, pre-war domestic life, but it was entirely possible to have housekeeping as a part-time, restricted activity.

By 1944 Lady Reading, the head of the Women’s Voluntary Services (WVS), was urging women to temporarily abandon their wifely role in its entirety. She asked women to “forget your home, leave beds unmade, leave the house dusty, don’t look after your husband’s meals,” and

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57 *At Home Today*, Miss Doreen Rickard interviewing Ella Bartlett and Emily Davies, 3 March 1943, BBC WAC T24.
58 See *Calling the Home Front*, I.M. Rolfe, 16 July 1942, BBC WAC T442.
instead asked that women take up war work.\textsuperscript{60} It is unlikely that Lady Reading intended for her message to be taken literally, but instead intended her statement to encourage housewives to leave the home and take up war work, not unlike the government’s attempts in creating part-time D. G. Waring invoked Rudyard Kipling, applying his statement about the unlisted Legion without a crest, and argued that the British housewife was the same sort of heroine of the time.\textsuperscript{61} The housewife received little recognition, Waring states, unless it was to tell her to collect something, conserve something, or cook something. The housewife was not a person who was away from the home all day, but instead had the home as her “kingdom and place of business.”\textsuperscript{62}

Using an Ulsterwoman as an example, the ideal housewife was described as hardworking, cheerful, “tough as her native granite,” and hospitable. Belfast women exemplify courage, capacity for enjoyment, and loyalty to the nation. In an amusing aside about a barrage balloon floating over his country “farmlets,” he says that women, while kindly, are also prepared to “give a not-so-kindly welcome to the common enemy.”

This illustrates the way in which certain women – in this case Irish housewives – are depicted as being a very strict type of character. This broadcast provides a very direct illustration of the ideal housewife’s ability to be kind, hardworking, cheerful, and dedicated to her country.

Another direct expression of housewife identity as presented in radio broadcasts is the statement by Ruth Drew in December 1942. Drew stated that it was her New Year resolution to try to embody a three hundred year old definition of an English housewife. Drew wrote that, in accordance with this definition, she should strive to be

Of chaste thought, stout courage, patient, untired, watchful, diligent, witty, pleasant,


\textsuperscript{61} \textit{The Unsung}, D.G. Waring, 22 March 1941, BBC WAC T628.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
constant in friendship, full of good neighbourhood, wise in discourse, but not frequent therein, sharp and quick of speech, but not bitter or talkative, secret in my affairs, comfortable in my counsels, and generally skillful in all the worthy knowledges which do belong to my vocation.63

Outside of statements that directly connected housewives and the characteristics they ought to have, this broadcast is perhaps the most explicit statement of the ideal way for housewives to be. It is interesting that a definition from the seventeenth century would be used to describe the ideal for an English housewife during the twentieth century. One wonders how Ruth Drew came to this definition and what the intention was in using it. The language is explicit and almost exactly demonstrates the characteristics described in the broadcasts that are examined here, most specifically being skillful and knowledgeable about things related to the housewife vocation (in this instance, cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and family). Also courage, patience, pleasantness, and joining together with other housewives in the area are displayed in broadcasts.

Women were urged to do what they could and remember that as women they should be ready to play their role as women: “we must be kind – yes, that is what our men will be looking for and needing in us. Nature has made us the guardians of her most precious gifts, love, home life, and our children.”64 Women were not fighting on the front line for their lives, but were instead fighting for the happiness of their men and children.65 The housewife needed to maintain unity in their homes and hearts. For housewives whose husbands were still home, it was important for them to help make their men forget their worries by keeping a bright smile, having his slippers ready, and providing a nicely cooked meal. Tact and ingenuity were central to

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64 “How to Clean the Atmosphere of War Depression,” At Home Today, A Woman Magistrate, 10 July 1940, BBC WAC T23.
65 At Home Today, Colleen Grey, 19 June 1940, BBC WAC T23. The speaker does not mention the happiness of women themselves, but instead the happiness of their families.
making a husband happy.

Unity was again mentioned as an important characteristic, coupled with “inward poise,” as a way to be strong and fit for the purpose of not being an “exhausted bundle of nerves” due to individual weakness due to fretting.\textsuperscript{66}

In this work, the duties examined will be the knowledge of housewife skills of managing to cook delicious, nutritive foods using the restricted supply of rations and controlled foods. The characteristic that permeates nearly all broadcasts is ingenuity, or the ability to be clever, creative, and adaptive.\textsuperscript{67} This characteristic was common throughout propaganda, especially in films where “smart, cheerful housewives [made] inventive meals with the family rations.”\textsuperscript{68}

[MALE] EXPERTS AND [FEMALE] HOUSEWIVES

Right from the beginning of the war BBC broadcasts to housewives delivered messages of the importance of cleverness and creativity. Women were told that it was up to them to keep meals interesting, and that it was not difficult to do so.\textsuperscript{69}

\textit{The Kitchen Front} broadcasts bombarded women with recipes on a daily basis (and \textit{At Home Today} provided similar information every Wednesday). They would be given recipes and told how to prepare oddments and leftovers into complete meals by putting their wits to work.\textsuperscript{70} Women would be told to stop what they were doing and grab a pencil and a bit of paper, or to put

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{At Home Today}, Vivienne de Watteville, 3 July 1940, BBC WAC T23.

\textsuperscript{67} Relying on a dictionary definition of the term “ingenuity” would give a false sense of being able to understand the word as it was used at the time. Thus, the definition analyzed here is the as used and defined within the radio broadcasts themselves.


\textsuperscript{69} \textit{The Kitchen Front}, Agnes Wilkes, 22 February 1941, BBC WAC T651.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
down their rolling pin or duster and listen “rather carefully … to get the hang of it.”\textsuperscript{71} Women were told that they could be “really daring” and experiment on their own by embracing their creativity to work with limited foodstuffs that could otherwise restrict their ability to prepare meals.

Agnes Wilkes, the hostess of the imaginary Black Dog restaurant, argued that she and other housewives had become lazy before the war. They had slipped into a state of not trying anything new, but regularly preparing the same dishes such as “rosbif” and Yorkshire pudding, and in response to this she began to get away from these two standby dishes.\textsuperscript{72} Even though the husband was not a cook, his statement directly influenced his wife’s attitude toward which foods should be prepared. Wilkes argued in a later broadcast that “the stomach likes to be surprised,” and she encouraged that housewives try new things and make dishes using abundant foodstuffs such as potatoes.

While women were regularly referred to as able to creatively utilize limited supplies and new foodstuffs and create tasty and nutritive meals for their families, they were also assumed to not have knowledge of how to do this. This is not to say that women were unable to cook on their own, or that they possessed no cooking skills. Women were generally spoken to as though they knew the basics of cooking, but that they needed help becoming creative with new materials. Only one broadcast directly addressed the cook who had not “learnt her job” like the ones who stuck to what they were taught.\textsuperscript{73} The differentiation between these women who used a trial and error method that was wasteful and costly, and those who followed the instructions they had ostensibly learned from radio broadcasts, illustrates the degree to which women were

\textsuperscript{72} The Kitchen Front, Agnes Wilkes, 19 February 1941, BBC WAC T651.
\textsuperscript{73} “Why it Happened,” The Kitchen Front, Helen Burke, 2 May 1944, BBC WAC T63.
expected to have learned and applied new cooking knowledge.

The need for education in using new materials was grounded in a real necessity: British housewives had been given responsibility for maintaining the health of their families and the nation, and they had to do so with limited amounts of foodstuffs. The war required them to begin cooking different foods than they had before the war, and often they needed to know how to make substitutions for or “mock” versions of old, familiar dishes. The nature of cooking programs is naturally one of inequality: the listener knows less than the instructor, and thus benefits from the imparted knowledge. This hierarchy is perhaps eternal – arguably the same format motivates modern cooking programs on television and in cookbooks.  

However, certain additional aspects of cooking and recipe broadcasts during the war gave an entirely different tenor to this hierarchy: the positioning of men as experts and females as housewives. One morning broadcast included a visit from an official of the MOF. Florence Ingillson, a regular in morning programmes, told the official that she was looking forward to experimenting with new ways of cooking and making rations stretch further, and the official complimented her, stating that this was how “the clever housewife will help – full of ideas of that kind.”  

Immediately after this statement, however, he corrected her, stating that it would be a pity if people considered food supplies only in terms of what was rationed. This sort of thinking was focusing on the wrong aspects of supplies as it sought only conservation and not utilization of more abundant sources of unrationed foods such as potatoes and herrings.

Women ought not view the restriction of food as the only modification to the foods they were preparing for their families. Instead, they should be creative in utilizing foods that were available to them. Broadcasts would subsequently include recipes that incorporated abundant

74 Also, the celebrity of cooking programs serves to reify the expert status of the instructor.

75 The Kitchen in Wartime, Mrs. Florence Ingillson, Lilian Edgell, and Mr. Harris from the MOF, 9 January 1940, BBC WAC T252.
foods (such as herrings and potatoes) and would emphasize the conservation of meat and cooking fats. While these recipes could be indicative of a way to direct housewives and provide them guidance, it emphasizes the idea that women are unable to be creative on their own. The assumption is that women would not know what to do with a herring, or that women would never consider feeding herring to her family as a breakfast food in place of bacon. While it is possible that many women would not have thought to do this, the assumption leaves no room for those women who would have happily thought of these things on their own. Assuming that women need instruction indicates that women are inherently lost without expert guidance. The fact that this sort of guidance lasted the entire war goes against the idea that women were developing (or already had) a clever way of dealing with new foodstuffs on their own.

Alongside the emphasis for women to be ingenious was the reminder that they did not know enough (or were misguided in their methods) to rely solely upon themselves for success in providing food to their families during the war. There is a fine line between education by a cook who possesses knowledge in food preparation that can benefit a listener, and speaking to the same listener in a way that diminishes the skills she already possessed. Experts (who were generally male) would speak from a position of power and would convey messages regarding the proper use of foodstuffs. Generally these experts were brought onto a regular programme broadcast, and in these cases they were treated with respect and a sort of reverence for their knowledge and ability to bestow this information to housewives.

Whenever men enter the realm of the kitchen it is as a guide, judge, or expert bringing science and skill. Men elevated everyday cooking to a higher level of scientific preparation. For

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76 *At Home Today*, Mrs. L.S. Horton from the Herring Industry Board, 8 November 1939, BBC WAC T23.
men, “the emphasis is on cooking as a skill; for women, it is on service.” By nature of their distance from the activity of daily food preparation, the logical conclusion would be that men are not suited to making statements and arguments to women about how to do their jobs. This idea was originally espoused by Harris when he stated that the MOF would need housewives’ experience, and that no man would dare to tell them how to go about their business. Women, doing food preparation and shopping on a daily basis would have the experience on how to best navigate the world of rations and food controls while providing for her family. Still, her character is expected to devalue her own experience in order to give an elevated position to the men who know better.

An expert named Maclunan spoke with Edna Thorpe, and while she seemed to disagree with his statement that women have a certain responsibility to do more – there is a challenge to housewives to “apply the old principles more thoroughly” – she conceded that “this is no time to argue” and that they (not just the speakers, but housewives in general) should “get down to it.”

This conversation may seem rather straightforward, but it reinforces the idea that (male) experts are to have the final word whether or not the female speaker agrees. As in other broadcasts, the female dissenting may be intended to represent the general housewife’s opinion, and the recommended (or requisite, as the case may be) deferral to the expert’s perspective.

The argument that men would look foolish if they were to try telling women how to run their households did not last through the war. Some BBC historians have stated that no women presenters were part of The Kitchen Front, but this is not entirely true. Women speakers were often the regular speakers to the degree that they were practically hosts of their own

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78 Fuel Front, Mrs. Edna Thrope and Mr. Maclunan, 11 October 1943, BBC WAC T568.

79 See especially Hugh Chignell, Public Issue Radio, 54-55.
programmes. Still, the guests who would come and speak did tend to be male and were the representatives of the mostly-male government ministries. Women broadcasters would regularly recognize the superior knowledge of (male) experts.

Several men were chosen to be the experts on certain specialty topics. Dr. Charles Hill, known to the listening audience only as the “Radio Doctor,” spoke weekly about digestive issues and health, and was recognized as an expert on issues of food and nutrition. Ambrose Heath was a *Kitchen Front* regular and spoke about the importance of breakfast, and eating fresh, instead of canned, fruits and vegetables. On occasion he would repeat official MOF messages and give suggestions for how housewives might be able to implement advice. Mr. Middleton who had an entire programme regarding the gardening of edibles and flowers. J. Drummond also regularly spoke or was referenced as an expert who was consulted, but in many cases he was introduced by his title (the MOF Nutritional Advisor) or as an anonymous MOF official. Mr. Mais also was frequently featured. He had been a travel writer and radio personality before the war, and during the war was given the responsibility of talking about vegetables, cooking greens, and explaining welfare schemes.

Women who had positions in various ministries or organizations would occasionally be part of programmes. L.S. Horton from the Herring Industry Board spoke about the versatility of herrings and how they could be a satisfactory replacement for bacon, and she referenced how doctors (who would have been true experts in health) wanted individuals to consume more protective foods that would help them resist infection and colds. Alice Marshall, a Food Official, spoke once about how women needed to listen closely to wireless announcements in

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80 See *The Kitchen Front*, 6 January 1941, BBC WAC T204.
82 *At Home Today*, Mrs. L.S.Horton, 8 November 1939, BBC WAC T23.
order to be more responsible and not waste the time of workers in Food Offices.\textsuperscript{83}

Susan M. Rankin Hayes from the MOF represented a different style of communicating expertise that was common in many other broadcasts. Although she was associated with a ministry and thus had a position of power, she stated that she was not going to pretend to be an expert cook or housewife, but instead just a conveyor of the information provided by the MOF’s Nutritional Advisor (J. Drummond).\textsuperscript{84} She adjusted her message about fruits to suit the (assumed) level of knowledge of listeners; instead of describing in detail why dried fruits were important to diet, she mentioned calcium and Vitamin B, and then stated she wouldn’t go “further into scientific details.” It was enough to know that “we can get good values” from dried fruits, and thus they were important to incorporate into a diet.

Ruth Drew, the host of Wise Housekeeping, frequently tempered her position of authority by bringing others to speak, or qualifying her knowledge by announcing herself as merely a housewife. This diminished the hierarchy inherent in the speaker-listener relationship as she was emphasizing her similarity to the audience. She regularly reported the information she had collected from “experts” to the degree that she stated how regular listeners must think “I spend my time trotting round talking to experts of one kind and another.”\textsuperscript{85} She agrees that she does this, emphasizing how she does this on behalf of the listening audience – she gathers the information that is conveyed as one housewife speaking to another, reporting the helpful knowledge she has gathered. She would reference conversations with many unnamed experts, although she would occasionally consult the Radio Doctor or the MOF.

Ruth Drew, the regular speaker for Wise Housekeeping, repeatedly sought information

\textsuperscript{83} At Home Today, Alice Marshall, 22 September 1940, BBC WAC T23.
\textsuperscript{84} “Dried Fruits,” At Home Today, Susan M. Rankin Hayes, 10 January 1940, BBC WAC T23.
\textsuperscript{85} “The Housewife in Wartime,” Wise Housekeeping, 15 June 1943, BBC WAC T118.
from experts over the course of the war. Drew stated that she was providing a sort of “weekly bulletin” of information that could be helpful to housewives. She stated explicitly that she was not an authority; she would gather information from experts and bring along “people who know what they’re talking about.” Only once did she set herself up as an expert when she said that she had five years’ worth experience in making sandwiches. Somehow this activity was enough to render her an expert, which rather goes against the contradictory statements about housewives and cooking. Housewives started the war as experts who could advise the MOF and then speak to one another about how to handle rationing and cooking during the war, and over the course of the war they were informed that they were not educated enough and instead needed to learn from those who knew more than themselves. Then, in the last year of the war, Drew argues that experience is enough to make her an expert.

The representation of housewives as recognizing the power differential between the (humble) woman’s point of view and the (dominant) male expert’s point of view shows the degree to which housewives were expected to accept the information given to them, even if it went against what the housewife herself believed to be the best course of action. This idea figured prominently in the emphasis placed on housewives’ attendance at MOF demonstrations, as explored below.

One of the few reversals of the roles of male expert and inexperienced female housewife occurred in a conversation between Florence Ingillson, Mr. Harris of the MOF, and Lilian Edgell. Harris requested that women give their experience and expert advice to the MOF regarding cooking for themselves and their families. The exaggerated and somewhat flippant language used results in this broadcast being both overly lighthearted about an important issue.

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87 *Around the House*, Ruth Drew, 19 February 1945, BBC WAC T118.
poking fun at women who ought to help the “mere men” in the MOF. The reversal of roles is humorous and the language emphasizes how housewives are only experts in a token way.

Harris stated that in the matter of food “we poor men realise that we are entirely in the hands of the women!” He later referred to himself as a “mere man,” and thanked Ingillson for recognizing the importance of what the men (at the MOF) were doing to make food rations supply the whole of Britain. Ingillson proceeded to describe a ‘most beautiful’ soup she made, and Harris agreed that that is where they (the men) will “want the experience and knowledge of you housewives.” Lilian Edgell cut in to ask whether or not the “boot’s rather on the other foot, and we women are in the hands of the men.” Mr. Harris noted that men would look “extremely foolish” if women buy their food and then are told by men how to cook it. The only exception, he said, was if the man were “a chef or jack tar.” Instead of telling women what to do, Harris described the goal of the MOF as just organizing women so that everyone received “good and friendly advice.”

Another instance of this is a series describing cooking demonstrations the speakers had attended. These educational demonstrations were organized by the MOF, and even housewives who had years of experience cooking were urged to attend at least one. Two women who spoke about their visit to a demonstration were introduced as “two practical housewives” and one speaker noted that even though she had years of experience with preparing food for her family and had given demonstrations of her own, she felt it was “so very important” that housewives should “learn something about cooking.” She states further that housewives’ primary way of

88 The Kitchen in Wartime, Mrs. Florence Ingillson, Lilian Edgell, and Mr. Harris from the MOF, 9 January 1940, BBC WAC T252. This interview was broadcast the day after rationing of bacon, ham, butter, and sugar began. Meat, tea, and cheese followed later that month, followed by margarine and cooking fat. See Katherine Knight, Rationing in Second World War: Spuds, Spam and Eating for Victory, 3rd ed. (Stroud, UK: The History Press, 2011), 23.
89 Watching it Done, Mrs. Ingillson and Mrs. Hatch, 12 July 1940, BBC WAC T252.
helping the war is to “keep our families in good health and spirits by giving them the right food to eat.” It is the housewife’s responsibility to give their families the best meals possible, and if they have listened to the “broadcast food talks AND … can obtain the necessary supplies” there should be no impediment to their success. This clearly states that it is the housewife’s responsibility to educate herself using the information from experts in radio broadcasts.

This description hardly matches Harris’ claim that the “mere men” at the MOF are the ones in need of advising from women as to how to cook and provide nourishment to their families. Instead, housewives ought to attend a demonstration to teach them how to do what they have done successfully for years. The idea that experienced women would be inept at cooking during the war emphasizes the degree to which women were assumed to be unable to handle the restrictions imposed by food scarcity. Women needed to be taught how to handle situations, and previous experience could not be applied or adapted to the current wartime situation.

The explicit language that women should “learn something” indicates that women do not already know enough. Women are thus not the experts and need to listen to and watch experts cook in order to raise her knowledge and skills to a more acceptable level. This emphasizes the degree to which practical knowledge is not as important or recognized as the knowledge of experts. In contrast to the male experts who would speak in broadcasts, women did not know the details of why they ought to cook a certain way, and they did not understand the importance of maintaining the nutritious qualities of vegetables.

90 “Cooperative Movement in Preserving Fruit,” At Home Today, Miss Tomlinson, 31 July 1940, BBC WAC T23.
91 A common argument was that women boiled the nutrition out of their vegetables, and that this was both wasteful of fuel (too much heat for cooking so much and so long) but also wasteful of the food items themselves. Women were told to even save the water used for boiling potatoes as it held much of the nutrition leached from the cooking process. See At Home Today, 24 January 1940, BBC WAC T23, or Ministry of Food, Food Facts for the Kitchen Front: A Book of Wartime Recipes and Hints, 2nd ed. reprint (London: Harper Press, 2009).
A broadcast on *The Kitchen in Wartime* – a once-a-week special programme that was aired on Tuesdays during the regular hour of *The Kitchen Front* – again emphasized the need for women to attend demonstrations to learn how to cook properly with the kinds of food that were most available and in season. These programmes were common, and all of them have a degree of urging women to learn to cook with the proper foods in the proper way so as to maintain the nutritious qualities of the foods themselves.

How can these two conflicting depictions of the ideal housewife be reconciled? One possible conclusion is that “ingenuity” is not intended to spur women to come up with things on their own, but to feel that the expert advice of those more knowledgeable frees them to engage in activities that they themselves would never have thought of. In other words, they are *made* ingenious through education by others more knowledgeable than themselves. Never mind that they may have years of experience, but they need to know how to do things *in wartime*. Another possible conclusion is that women are expected to do both – to be creative and clever in coming up with their own solutions on the one hand, and to accept the expert advice of male speakers – at different times. The difficulty then becomes when a housewife ought to one or the other. By having the female voice dissent with the male voice in this program, for example, indicates that the male expert knows best how a housewife ought to cope with a situation. She on her own would be unable to design or follow a method of conservation of fuel, but instead needs to be educated to make her personal use of energy more like the effective use of fuel in industry situations.

The resulting reflection of housewives’ identity is thus the trust in messages: a certain flexibility of position and understanding; a willingness to defer; and the responsibility to act both in the way she is instructed and to adapt and alter these things to best fit her needs (without
violating the messages she receives). This fits with the idea of women being subject to the words and knowledge of male experts, and reiterates the degree to which women are secondary or lesser in their knowledge of the world and household activities.
CHAPTER II: GENDER, IDENTITY, AND RATIONED FOODS

As food controls and rationing played an important role in a housewife’s ability to purchase items and prepare meals that were nutritious and tasty, it is important to briefly explore the mechanisms involved in rationing and the context for the creation of food control schemes.

Cooking with limited rations of meat and sugar were themes that recurred in programmes aimed at housewives over the course of the war. Messages regarding the preparation of food (including which foods were appropriate to make) changed frequently, and broadcasts would often promote conflicting messages. Sandwiches, for example, were supported and derided in equal parts, with conflicting messages often broadcast within weeks of each other. The sandwich was lauded in January 1940; declared improper in October 1940, as it did not sustain workers; praised again six days later; and described as dull in February 1941. This pattern continued throughout the war, but despite the conflicting messages there was a constant underlying theme: women ought to provide the appropriate foods for her family. If sandwiches were made properly they could feed workers as good lunches; if they were not, they were dull, boring, and left men feeling they had eaten nothing at all. Women needed to be attentive to the needs of their families, and adjust their food preparation to suit.

Some foods had a certain gendered nature: meat was associated with activity, masculinity, and strength; sugar was something indulged in by women and children. These correlations contain within them messages of identity: women should attempt to make their husbands content with a healthy meal, even if it lacks meat as a central dish, and women ought to

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92 Other examples include messages given in October 1941, March 1942, July 1942, and September 1942. After this messages regarding sandwiches became less frequent, but were still present in 1945 in Around the House and Away from the House broadcasts (both of these were specialty programmes aired Monday mornings during The Kitchen Front time slot).
get by with less sugar in their tea or porridge, and should reduce their usage of jams and preserves. Guidelines espoused in broadcasts emphasized women’s responsibility to feed their families and provide for their nutritional needs, and failure to do so carried consequences not only for her family, but also for the country at large. Women were deemed the ones responsible for the health of the nation, deciding whether people were ill or well.93 Adjusting and following guidelines would require women to accept guidance and at the same time create delicious meals with whatever foods were available to them.

This chapter will examine the ways in which meat consumption was connected to men and masculinity, and how sugar and jams were associated with women and femininity. While nutrition was emphasized as more important than the amount of meat consumed, it was difficult to convince men that alternatives to meat were healthy and sufficient.94 Also, meat was frequently depicted as something husbands wanted and not something needed for the general family’s nutrition. The usage of sugar figured predominantly in the discussion of sweetening tea or breakfast porridge, and making jams or puddings.95 Jam was described as central to a woman’s sense of self-worth and accomplishment, giving the impression that to be unable to make one’s own jam was damaging to one’s sense of self. Broadcasts took on the tone of minimizing this characteristic, and instead steered women toward communal action and conservation of foods that were expensive to ship.

93 See “Vegetables in Season,” The Kitchen in Wartime, Rena Bosanquet, 2 July 1940, BBC WAC T48; The Kitchen in Wartime, Rena Bosanquet, 25 June 1940, BBC WAC T48; and The Kitchen Front, Helen Burke, 22 April 1941, BBC WAC T63.
95 “Pudding” refers in this case to any food item part of the after-dinner meal course.
NUTRITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND HEALTH OUTCOMES

Sir Henry Rew wrote in 1920 that so long as transportation by land and sea was unhampered, famine was a risk shared by all nations: if one location suffered poor crops or the deaths of stock animals, it was still possible to obtain sufficient food through trade. This argument was substantiated in both the First and Second World Wars when a lack of transportation was a direct threat to having enough food for an island country. Britain had become concerned about wartime food supplies in the midst of the First World War, and attempts at rationing were made in early 1918 to counter issues of hoarding. Similar concerns about hoarding and fair shares would be a defining component of rationing and food control schemes during the Second World War.

The “phony war” (or “bore war” as it would be called after the war) delayed the institution of rationing as there did not seem to be immediate threats to Britain’s food supply. Bacon, butter, and sugar were the first items to be rationed in January 1940.

Knowledge of nutrition before and during the Second World War was similar to modern understanding of calories, vitamins, and food values, but this knowledge was not well known outside of the scientific community. The Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Food (MOF) did not consult nutritional scientists to have a nutritionally balanced ration, but instead used what was available until officials became concerned about diet providing enough energy to

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99 Ibid., 19.
sustain the war effort.\textsuperscript{100} The MOH convened the first meeting of the Scientific Sub-Committee on Food Policy in April 1940, and resulted in the appointment of Jack Drummond, a professor and eminent nutritionist, as Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Food, placing him in a powerful position to address nutritional inadequacy.\textsuperscript{101}

After Drummond’s appointment he instituted the provision of foods such as dehydrated eggs and vegetables, as well as welfare programs such as National Household Milk that provided subsidized milk to pregnant and nursing mothers and children under five years old. At this point rationing became a method of direct government control over maintaining and improving the nutritional value of diets.

Micronutrients and vitamins had become dominant in nutritional research in the early twentieth century, marked by what E.V. McCollum called the Newer Knowledge of Nutrition.\textsuperscript{102} Reflecting this new knowledge, protein, milk, and fats were emphasized as most important – these items were recognized to be needed in greater quantities for certain segments of the population, such as young children and expectant or nursing women.\textsuperscript{103} Consuming meat was (and is yet) considered a masculine activity (as explored below) and it is frequently argued that men require more protein due to more muscle mass than women. However, nutritional knowledge at the time emphasized the degree to which protein was needed for growing bodies. R.A. McCance –who later became influential in wartime nutrition policies– had determined that

\textsuperscript{100} Derek J. Oddy, \textit{From Plain Fare to Fusion Food: British Diet from the 1890s to the 1990s} (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 142-143.
\textsuperscript{101} See Jack Drummond and Anne Wilbraham, \textit{The Englishman’s Food: A History of Five Centuries of English Diet} (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940).
\textsuperscript{102} E.V. McCollum, \textit{The Newer Knowledge of Nutrition: The Use of Food for the Preservation of Vitality and Health} (New York, 1918).
anemia in working-class women was due to a lack of iron and protein in their diet.\textsuperscript{104} Cheese took less shipping space than meat and was considered a more efficient source of protein than meat. Furthermore, the government felt that it was better to divert grains directly to the population in the form of bread instead of using it to feed livestock for slaughter.\textsuperscript{105} Frozen and canned meat, which took limited shipping space, and calcium-rich dairy products were given priority for importation as the best way to provide protein needs.\textsuperscript{106}

Rationing and food controls are generally credited with increased health in Britain, especially in the lower classes. Government intervention in food distribution made it possible for people of all classes to eat a nutritionally balanced diet. The government attempted to provide fair and equal amounts to each individual and disseminated education on how to prepare food in ways to retain the highest nutritive values possible. Drummond’s institution of welfare subsidization of milk, cod liver oil, blackcurrant juice, and dried orange juice for children and expectant and nursing mothers were also responsible for better nutrition.

Maternal mortality rates (which had increased 22 percent between 1922 and 1933)\textsuperscript{107} dropped during the war, as did infant mortality rates;\textsuperscript{108} tuberculosis rates rose at the start of the war but declined by 1942; children’s height and weight differences between social classes decreased by the end of the war; deficiency diseases such as rickets were nearly eradicated; and

\textsuperscript{104} Charles Webster, “Healthy or Hungry Thirties?” \textit{History Workshop Journal} 13 (1982), 118-120, cited in Collingham, \textit{Taste of War}, 349.
\textsuperscript{105} During the war Britain ceased importing large amounts of butter from New Zealand, and instead purchased cheese. Cheese was determined to have more than twice the amount of energy and protein than frozen lamb meat per cubic foot of shipping space. See J.V.T. Baker, \textit{The New Zealand People at War: War Economy} (Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington: Historical Publications, 1965) and Collingham, \textit{Taste of War}, 99.
\textsuperscript{106} Hammond, \textit{Food}, 155.
\textsuperscript{107} Webster, “Healthy or Hungry Thirties?” 117.
daily calories remained at or above 3,000 calories per day. Diet for poor families was seen as “leveling up” to the health status of upper class families. Near-full employment, increased wages, and food availability made it possible for lower class families to have access to vitamin-rich foods such as eggs, dairy products, and meat.

Food distribution was not entirely fair due to upper classes often having access to their own plots of land and fresh eggs and the ability to afford meals in restaurants. Still, the dietary standards of the lower classes were significantly raised to levels of nutritional adequacy.

Arguments of increased health during the war rely heavily on limited sources and studies, and recent literature questions these conclusions. Burnett has argued that vitamin intake increased significantly during the war, specifically calcium, iron, vitamins B and C, and nicotinic acid. However, government surveys in 1940 and 1941 found that the poorest third of the population still consumed deficient levels of vitamins and calcium. However, MOF internal analysis found that upper classes still had higher vitamin levels than lower classes. The conclusion was that this was due to the availability of vitamin supplements, which would have potentially counteracted the limitations of wartime rationing. This same study found that increased nutrition had not significantly affected the gap in infant mortality rates between upper and lower classes. Arguments that anemia became less frequent was also not substantiated by the

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109 One study found that caloric intake dropped from the pre-war average of 3,000 calories to 2,820 calories between 1940 and 1942. By 1944 it had risen again to around 3,100 calories per day. See Burnett, Plenty and Want, 329-330.
111 Collingham, 332.
113 Burnett, Plenty and Want, 329-330.
114 Oddy, Plain Fare, 142-143.
data. Increased iron and protein consumption was tentatively determined to have had little effect, perhaps because of a dearth of pre-war normal levels by which to compare wartime and post-war blood levels.\textsuperscript{116} Average body weights also dropped during the war, but the MOH interpreted this as a sign of increased health – or at least not detrimental to health – and thus supported the success of rationing. Zweiniger-Bargielowska argued that while there were no signs of vitamin deficiency and associated illness, nutritional status was not surveyed frequently or in large enough populations to be fully conclusive.\textsuperscript{117}

**FOOD CONTROL SCHEMES**

During the war there were two different methods of controlling food supplies: rationing and the points system.\textsuperscript{118} Rationed foods could only be purchased in the quantity of tickets allotted to an individual, thus guaranteeing each citizen a fair share of food. This distribution required individuals to register themselves and their families with their local shopkeeper, and the shopkeeper was supplied with foods in quantities commensurate to the number of persons registered at the shop. The points system was instituted to control the purchase of items that were not available in sufficient quantities so as to be guaranteed to all individuals.\textsuperscript{119} The foods on the points system were important but not essential, such as tinned meat, fish, fruit, dried fruits, rice, and breakfast cereals.\textsuperscript{120} This system allowed more choice in what food items were purchased – a person could spend more points on tinned meat or chocolate, or spend fewer points on low-grade

\textsuperscript{116} Ministry of Health 1946, 120, cited in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Fair Shares,” 134.
\textsuperscript{117} Wartime Food Surveys looked at only 600 to 700 families per month and concluded from these studies that diet was sufficient for health.
\textsuperscript{118} Some historians argue that there were three control schemes – they include uncontrolled foods such as bread and potatoes. As this work focuses mainly on the foods that were controlled, I will refer to just these two systems of food distribution.
\textsuperscript{119} Not all foods were on the points or rationing systems; some were available in any quantity. Items such as these were herrings and potatoes.
\textsuperscript{120} Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 327.
fresh meat such as offal or sheep hearts.

Food items (and clothing, eventually) were put on the ration or points system at different times. For example, bacon, ham, butter, and sugar started to be rationed in January 1940, but the points system for meat did not begin until December 1941.\textsuperscript{121} Ration books were color-coded, with different colors for adults, children over five, children under five, pregnant or nursing mothers, and men who did heavy labor. Ordinary rations for adults during the war included the following:\textsuperscript{122}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bacon and ham</td>
<td>4 oz (maximum 8 oz)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>12 oz (fluctuated between 8 oz and 1 lb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>2 oz (maximum 4 oz)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>1/10d (maximum 2/2d;\textsuperscript{123} children had only half the adult amount)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>1 oz (maximum 8 oz; higher allotment for children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserves (per four weeks)</td>
<td>8 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter</td>
<td>4 oz (minimum 2 oz)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking fat</td>
<td>2 oz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MEAT AND VEGETABLES**

In general, women were urged to be creative to do the best they could with the materials available to them. At a point this challenge was described as a great thrill because it was “rather exciting” to discover that one was capable of producing an “interesting meal” out of what would at first seem to be inadequate.\textsuperscript{124} Women were instructed to conserve sugar and make the most of

\textsuperscript{121} Prior to putting meat on the points system, the purchase of meat was controlled by price. This was similar to the points system but was more complicated and difficult to control. See Knight, *Rationing*, 20-24.


\textsuperscript{123} These amounts translate as 1 shilling 10 pence and 2 shillings 2 pence, respectively.

a limited supply of meat. Meat was not a guaranteed item, so women bought from the butcher what they could (triggering several broadcasts about how to treat your butcher nicely and that butchers were not purposely keeping the best aside for themselves or preferred customers).

A side effect of rationed meat during the war was the reliance on vegetables for meals. The importance of vegetables needed to be presented in a way that downplayed the vegetarian nature of the diet: it was not a diet that replaced or avoided meat, but one that simply increased the consumption of vegetables. Also, consuming less meat by cooking and eating highly nutritious vegetables, women were told they were contributing to the war effort. The issue of men needing or wanting more meat than their ration allowed was posed not as fact but as a misguided belief held by women.

Meat can have important gender implications given a cultural tendency to see meat as a food especially important to men. At times when food and meat is abundant, sex roles are not as obvious, but in times of scarcity the importance for men to consume meat becomes more salient. Hammond concluded that working class women were most affected by wartime rationing as they tended to sacrifice a significant share of their meals –especially meat– to their husbands and children.

The gendered implications of meat have been explored through investigation of British citizens’ wartime attitudes toward rationing and the adequacy of their diets. Zweiniger-Bargielowska’s research reveals that men, especially those in physically demanding occupations

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125 Meat began to be rationed in March 1940 and was restricted by price instead of weight. Individuals could decide whether to purchase a smaller amount of high-quality meats, or a larger amount of lower-quality meats. The amount allotted varied with a low of 1/- in March 1941 and average of 1/10d. See Knight, *Rationing*, 23.


such as mining, were regularly dissatisfied with the amount of meat they consumed, and viewed this lack as indicative of an insufficient diet.\textsuperscript{128}

Information from inquiries in April and July 1942 illustrates the degree to which men felt their ration of meat resulted in an insufficient diet. 58 percent of men in heavy industry and 45 percent of men in light industry believed that they had an adequate diet to maintain fitness (as compared to 78 percent of housewives who felt their diet adequate). For those who felt they had an insufficient diet, too little food was the main reason stated by both men and women. However, when asked to name specific foods that were most lacking from their diet, men overwhelmingly stated that there was not enough meat to remain healthy while women found fats to be the main reason for an inadequate diet.\textsuperscript{129}

Several morning broadcasts sought to dispel the belief that men needed more meat in their diet than women or children. One example is especially emblematic of the attitudes present in broadcasts. The Radio Doctor was interviewed regarding the idea (perpetuated by women, according to the speaker) that men “ought to have most of the meat that’s going.”\textsuperscript{130} He stated that people who were growing needed the most meat because it was a “building food.” As a man is fully built, he needed only energy for his work and his rationed share of meat to “repair the tissue he’s breaking down,” and therefore did not need a larger share than women or children.

Given the Radio Doctor’s argument, it would be expected for children to have a larger share of meat than adults, but this was not the case. Instead, children were given half the adult ration. Instead, they were given larger shares of milk and cheese. Instructions in ration books

\textsuperscript{128} See Zweiniger-Bargielowska, \textit{Austerity}, 74-76.
\textsuperscript{129} Regarding meat, 56 percent of men in heavy industry and 37 percent of men in light industry felt there was insufficient meat in their diet, compared to only 23 percent of housewives who felt the same. These numbers both increased in 1943, but men still responded in significantly higher numbers that meat rations were the main reason their diets were not finished. See Zweiniger-Bargielowska, \textit{Austerity}, 75-76.
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Wise Housekeeping}, Ruth Drew, 9 February 1943, BBC WAC T118.
detailed that pregnant and nursing mothers should register with their local rations office in order to have the guaranteed ration of one pint per day of milk for children under five years of age.\textsuperscript{131} This was a greater ration of milk than adults and older children, which would point to the belief that either young, growing bodies did not need an increased ration of meat, because milk could be a satisfactory replacement. Also, the amount did not change for pregnant or nursing women. If a woman were pregnant or nursing she would be eligible for increased amounts of milk, but this was the only difference in her rations.

Lord Woolton, the Minister of Food, stated that the health of pregnant women and nursing mothers was “where the greatest need existed for teaching food values.”\textsuperscript{132} Woolton noted that his scientific advisers listed milk, fruit juices, cod-liver oil, halibut oil, and eggs as the necessary foods in such circumstances. There is no recommended increase in meat intake even though they were “building” their bodies and their children’s bodies. Instead, the emphasis is on teaching women the values of food so that they can provide the proper nutrition for themselves and their families. The opinion that women needed proper education to provide for their families had been one supported by the MOH since the 1930s when it rejected nutritional studies that showed ill-health to be connected to income. The MOH insisted that poor diet and ill-health were due to ignorance, and “bad cooking, bad marketing, [and] bad household economy.”\textsuperscript{133} Thus the MOF tried to educate British women in the basic principles of food preparation and new understandings of nutrition.

Educating women in cooking foods and making do without pre-war quantities of meat

\textsuperscript{131} Woolton, Memoirs, 226.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., italics added. Collingham has argued that Woolton was not belittling women but instead providing nutritional information that was unknown to the general population. See Collingham, Taste of War, 392.
shifted responsibility for health from the government to women, and made it seem completely natural to do so. Even though growing persons were supposed to need meat more than persons who were fully grown, the message given by the Radio Doctor seems more intended to argue against giving a larger meat ration to men (or discouraging women from allowing men to have others’ meat rations) and not a statement about actual food policy.

As this broadcast was aimed at housewives at a time of day when women were the main audience members, it is questionable as to whether or not the Radio Doctor’s statement did anything to challenge the general norms of connection between masculinity and the need for males to consume amounts of meat above the rationed allotment. By targeting only half of the population with this message, it is difficult to change the general perception of meat eating. Instead, the message is that women who believe men ought to eat more meat are mistaken, and it is their responsibility to make sure men eat only their rationed amount. Women then become the gatekeepers of consumption, reining in men’s dietary desires. It would make sense that women would be in charge of making meat last and making the most of their meat points. If a woman were able to buy a greater quantity of lower-quality meat, make it last over the course of a week, and make it resemble higher-quality meats, then men might be satisfied.\(^{134}\)

The statement that men did not need more meat than women or children seems to break away from the cultural tradition of associating meat with a strength food and one that was necessary for men who were assumed to be more active than women. But the terminology for meat (‘‘building’’) is an active term, often associated with the male realm of work outside the home. This does not sever the cultural connection between masculinity and maleness. Instead of

\(^{134}\) The government contradicted their own statements of men’s need for protein in the form of meat by setting up canteens near factories that allowed off-coupon rations of meat. These canteens allowed for men to consume double the meat allowance permitted even at regular restaurants. See Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 293.
addressing the cultural issue of maleness and meat consumption and focusing instead on the needs for vitamins and the three groups of foods (protective, energy, and building), the Radio Doctor can avoid any true discussion of or challenge to the socio-cultural myths of meat consumption. The way physical need for meat is explained re-inscribes the new wartime, government- and scientist-sanctioned norms for cooking and consumption. By focusing on these new norms and the idea that balanced diets ought to have enough of each of the three groups of foods, the speaker can shift the argument away from the availability of meat and the need to give men what they feel they need, and focus on the way in which women are supposed to provide nutrition and be in charge of making sure that the family is eating their proper shares of meat.

This broadcasts (like many others) employed a male as an expert who informed the female housewife population. The Radio Doctor was regularly introduced as both a man of science and a family man, and the way in which the doctor is positioned as the “expert” interviewed for reliable information emphasizes the degree to which women ought to believe what he said with regard to men and meat consumption. Broadcasts such as this were at least partly intended as an antidote to the complaints and “misinformation” floating about in queues, on trains, and amongst friends, and did little to directly challenge the depiction of meat as something more meaningful than just another food with beneficial vitamins and calories.

Another interesting aspect of meat consumption during the war related to women adapting cheaper cuts of meat so that they would appear to be better quality. As meat was on the points system, women would often purchase meats that were of a lower quality and prepare it to

135 Energy foods were starches, fats, and sugar. Body-building foods were those described as especially important for children and included meat, fish, eggs, cheese, milk, and the “second line of defence” in more plentiful foods such as oatmeal, potatoes, and green vegetables. Protective foods were those that prevented against illness, depression, and infection, such as wheatmeal bread, oatmeal, and green and root vegetables. See MOF, Food Facts, 5-9.
136 The interview with the Radio Doctor explicitly states explicitly that it is trying to disprove some women’s “baloney” idea that meat is more important for men than for women.
resemble higher-quality meats. In both cases examined here, the meat is cooked in a particular way so as to please the husband: the housewife herself does not express a need for this, but instead engages in this admitted deception for the sake of her husband.

Agnes Wilkes, announced as the hostess of the (imaginary) Black Dog restaurant, discusses the issue of “tricking” her husband with regard to what meat dishes he ate. In one instance, she discussed using sheep hearts to make “poor man’s goose.” Even after her husband had eaten the meal and expressed how much he liked it, she did not inform him as to the true nature of what he had consumed.

A comedic sketch by the duo Gert and Daisy in 1941 at Christmas included a recipe for “murkey” – a leg of mutton that was stuffed with sausage and breadcrumbs and prepared so as to resemble the traditional Christmas turkey. This turkey was created expressly for the husband; Gert informs Daisy that the scarcity of turkey “won’t make a lot of difference to me anyway, it was always Bert who ate the turkey and me what ate the joint.” Gert adds that her husband is not likely to notice the difference anyway, as he often did not know what he was eating, and did not seem to care so long as it was meat and tasted good. Men are depicted as not being involved in the procuring or cooking of foods, and as highly gullible (a trait that women ought to take advantage of and joke about with friends).

Using the imagination was of great importance in cooking mock meat dishes. Women should have been ingenious with what they cooked: “just because you can’t get a turkey doesn’t

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137 *The Kitchen Front*, Agnes Wilkes, 18 February 1941, BBC WAC T651.
138 Gert and Daisy were recruited by Lord Woolton as he wanted them to make “people see that food rationing —which was increasingly inevitable— was not necessarily a matter for perpetual gloom.” See Woolton, *Memoirs*, 251.
mean you’re not going to get a turkey.”140 Using one’s creativity would allow women not only to think of how to make mock meat meals, but would allow for women and their families to consume similar meals to what they had eaten before. The famous “Woolton pie” exemplifies this idea of using imagination in cooking and eating foods without meat.141 Mock dishes, like a meatless savory pie, could be better if they were presented well.

The message seems to be that if a woman is clever enough with what she cooks, she can create something that is delicious and can fool her husband into thinking he is consuming something with which he is already familiar (and something he already likes). The assumption is that men would not enjoy sheep hearts as much as they would enjoy goose; they would not accept a leg of mutton on Christmas, because turkey is the proper meat dish for the holiday. The ideal housewife is one who can be creative in what she makes with what she has, and who is skilled enough to dupe her husband into thinking a meal is something it is not. After all, other meats can be just as delicious “if you use your imagination” in creating the mock-version.142

As meat was in short supply, vegetables were emphasized as important due to their nutritive properties, but only a few times was a truly vegetarian diet discussed. In these cases, it was emphasized that this diet was still healthy – in one case, a woman described how her family had subsisted on an entirely vegetarian diet for years without any negative effects on their health whatsoever. In this case the husband’s health had been the reason for the change, which further reinforced the idea that men could subsist without meat.

In June 1940 Rena Bosanquet (the host of The Kitchen in Wartime) mentioned that housewives ought to be having more large salads, preferably one every day, and that these could...

140 Ibid.
141 The Woolton pie was a savory pie made without meat, and was named after Woolton because of his championing of the dish during his tenure as Minister of Food.
142 The Kitchen Front, Elsie and Doris Waters (as Gert and Daisy), 20 December 1941.
provide a “substantial meal with the main dish consisting only of salad.” An example of broadcasts that encourage vegetarian main dishes without referring to it as such, it notes that including food items such as cheese make dishes fulfill multiple food groups according to the MOF chart. It invokes the expert knowledge of the government ministry and justifies the regular consumption of non-meat meals. As the “building” food category included meat, cheese, and milk, supplementing a salad with cheese could be as healthy as any meat dish.

Two years later women would be reminded that they ought to get in the habit of using cheese and dried egg as replacements for meat in dinners as they were of “such excellent food value.” Here again the main focus is on nutrition and health, not on whether or not meat is being consumed. By having meat absent from the broadcast’s discussion of meals, it was possible to encourage the consumption of non-meat items without directly stating that women ought not prepare meat dishes. Reframing the issue in this way helps to make meat invisible, and thus avoid having to address the issue of its absence. Women were reminded that if they thought vegetables to be dull or flavorless, it was because they approached cooking in the wrong way. Thus, not only was the absence of meat hidden, but the responsibility for creating acceptable meatless dishes was placed squarely upon the housewife; any failure was not due to the ingredients themselves, but instead because the cooking was not approached or carried out in the proper way.

Frequently herbs are mentioned as ways to make sure that otherwise dull dishes are made more exciting. These “dull” dishes are almost always vegetable dishes, or dishes that are made without any fats or leftover drippings. Again, women are told that vegetables would be

146 *The Kitchen Front*, Agnes Wilkes, 21 February 1941, BBC WAC T651.
exciting and delicious if prepared in the proper way. A bit of thyme in the dumplings can “bolster” a meatless dish, and mint in the pea soup provides flavor in place of a ham bone. In short, herbs were a cook’s best friend because they prevented meatless meals from being “eat-less” meals. Again, women need to engage their cleverness in order to utilize herbs (grown in their own gardens, preferably) in making flavorful dishes. The idea that a vegetable dish without herbs to augment the flavor would be an “eat-less” dish indicates the degree to which women’s cooking was the determining factor in whether or not her family would eat enough and remain healthy.

Treating vegetables with care was important not only in the cooking phase but also in the purchase and storage. In general women were encouraged to grow their own vegetables, but most programmes aimed at housewives assumed that women would have only window boxes. While women were encouraged to grow herbs in their window boxes (emphasizing the important role herbs played in a flavorful meatless dish), information about growing a garden was generally restricted to shows specifically intended for that topic. The assumption then would have been that the majority of housewives purchased their produce from grocers. Vegetables were to be treated with care, as they were precious and full of vitamins (if cooked properly and if the important parts such as leaves and skins were left on). One broadcast chastised women for mistreating vegetables, and managed this by positioning the speaker as an outsider. The woman was Norwegian and questioned why grocers and women did not treat vegetables with the same care as they did fruit, and also why the entire vegetable was not used.

In May 1942 The Kitchen Front programme began a special Saturday morning series that discussed how to subsist on a vegetarian diet – or more exactly, how to eat healthily with limited

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147 “Window Boxes,” At Home Today, Marguerite James, 5 February 1941, BBC WAC T23.
148 “Herbs in Wartime,” At Home Today, Marguerite James, 10 April 1940, BBC WAC T23.
supplies of meat. The first broadcast argued that, due to the bulky nature of meat, it was expensive to import and used ships that ought to be released for serving the troops abroad. The language used in this series’ first broadcast is very revealing. The broadcaster states that housewives need not be “resigned to ordinary without the meat.” Instead, they should accept scarcity and proceed to make appealing dishes foods without meat, thus changing their approach to food and their attitudes toward vegetables. The term “resignation” implies that housewives ought to not accept something as inevitable but unpleasant, but instead embrace the situation and make the most of it with a positive attitude. Resignation seems to be placed in opposition to other identity characteristics such as ingenuity and willingness to try new things.

The broadcast mentioned above that detailed the experience of a woman who had tried vegetarianism for several years due to the illness of her husband contained messages of how a housewife ought to approach feeding her family. The importance was not to provide the family meat per se, but instead to prepare and serve foods that were nutritive and sustaining.

She states twice that she did not like this new diet as she “didn’t understand it and [she] was a bit afraid too,” fearing that she and the children would starve. Her husband was the reason for this change in diet, and she consented to changing the diet because she “wanted to please him.” She said it wasn’t much fun to begin with, but it provided her the opportunity to experiment with vegetable cooking and found it to be surprisingly interesting. Her conclusion was that if she and her family could be vegetarian and remain fit and healthy, the nation “needn’t worry” if they were to have one or two days a week without meat.

In 1938, nutritionists argued that a diet of “brown bread, milk, butter, cheese, fresh fruit, and salad” would provide all the essentials: There was no scientific evidence that meat was

\[\text{149} \text{ “Vegetarian Dishes,” The Kitchen Front, Rena Bosanquet, 9 May 1942, BBC WAC T48.}\]
\[\text{150} \text{ The Kitchen Front, Rena Bosanquet, 7 February 1941, BBC WAC T48.}\]
necessary. Nutritionists argued in favor of brown bread that had higher levels of vitamins and minerals, but the public and special interest groups (such as millers and bread producers) favored bleached white breads. In July 1940 the MOF introduced fortification of bread, adding vitamin B1 and calcium. When shipping space and the sinking of ships became more of a problem in early 1942, the production of white flour was ceased and 80 to 85 percent extraction rates for wholemeal bread became the norm. This wholemeal bread was supplemented with calcium, which was done based on limited scientific knowledge of human metabolism.

British nutritionists referenced Germany’s national health, arguing that a diet of high-extraction wholemeal bread, vegetables, potatoes, and some dairy – cheese or milk – provided all the required essentials for health.

The woman adjusting to a vegetarian diet at the behest of her husband reifies this understanding that meat is not irreplaceable and that vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, and oatmeal are “first class foods” that are healthy for the family, and ends the broadcast on the note of what a housewife ought to cook, not what she should not cook. This mirrors the message from a Minister at the MOF who, early in 1940, chastised the female speaker for focusing on the foods that would not be available instead of thinking of the foods that were available and how to prepare them in a healthy way.

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152 The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food, Boothby, formerly worked for a leading producer of artificial vitamins. See “Ministry of Food,” Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), col. 458 (Boothby).

153 Spiekermann, “Brown Bread,” 94


156 The Kitchen in Wartime, Mrs. Florence Ingillson, Lilian Edgell, and Mr. Harris from the MOF, 9 January 1940, BBC WAC T252.
While this story provided women information about how to properly cook the foods in season – potatoes and oatmeal were available in abundance at this point in the war – it also serves as an attempt to make the rationing of meat more palatable. Throughout the war radio programmes would frame the rationing and limited quantities of meat as something that was not harmful to the health of the nation. It was perfectly all right for the nation to do with less meat, and it would promote health. By framing the lack of meat in this way, it not only avoided or discredited complaints of ill health due to restricted food, but also created a reason for people to be more reliant upon homegrown vegetables without upsetting the general societal belief that meat was important to a person’s diet.

This broadcast also made clear that their change in diet was due to the needs of the husband, and that his needs were health-based. The husband was not choosing a non-meat diet, but was forced into this situation – as was the wife and their children – due to the onset of chronic illness. The wife and children also were not electing to eat a non-meat diet, but instead were forced into the situation by the husband’s wishes. Here, meat is for men, and when men stop eating it, the family does as well.

While her example is a rather extreme one, it does provide an example of an ideal housewife who provided for her family while fitting cooking within the confines of what was nutritionally good for it. According to the Radio Doctor, believing that a man needed more meat than others and feeding it to him was misguided. It is not the action of providing meat for her family that is wrong – it is the assumption that she needs meat in order to provide for her family that is wrong. In short, she cannot be relied upon to feed her family properly if she follows her family’s wishes that go against the messages broadcast both on the radio and in numerous recipe books and pamphlets. Women must follow the guidelines, but must be creative in how they do
so. Men’s desire for meat must be controlled and constrained, and women must focus attention on health and nutrition while still pleasing their families with delicious meals.

SUGAR AND JAM

From the beginning of the war women were accused of over-buying and over-using sugar, and were reminded of how to curb their use of sugar.\(^{157}\) Only a limited amount of sugar was available, as it had to be imported, resulting in near-constant messages about conservation. The government was so concerned with the issue of sugar availability that it put the Women’s Institute (WI) in charge of mass jam-making projects. If a woman wanted sugar for preserving her own homegrown fruits she would need to register with her local Food Control Office, which required her to report the amount of sugar she used the past year as well as the weight of the fruit she had to preserve at the time of registration.\(^ {158}\) Women could still be denied additional sugar, and homegrown fruit was frequently refused by factories, thus ensuring that women needed to donate fruit to the WI.\(^{159}\) If women took part in the WI jam-making scheme they were unable to obtain extra sugar for themselves for home preserving. A message addressing this issue turns the problem back on the housewives, making the problem not the shortage of sugar or the MOF’s unwillingness to provide more from its supply, but instead the selfishness of women who were asking for something that would be neither fair nor economical.\(^{160}\) Women ought to be happy that the government was organized enough to provide sugar for everyone instead of grumbling about “small annoyances.”

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\(^{158}\) See “Sugar for Jam,” *At Home Today*, 27 March 1940, BBC WAC T23.

\(^{159}\) The official reason for why factories would not take fruit was that soft and small fruits ripened at different times, and transportation would be difficult and expensive to arrange. Still, women were reminded that it was important to prevent waste by donating the fruit to women’s organizations.

If women failed to take advantage of the opportunity to obtain extra sugar rations for the purpose of making jams and preserves, they were described as lazy and inconsiderate. Broadcasts reinforced the importance for women to pay attention to newspapers, MOF pamphlets, and radio broadcasts so as to know how to obtain what they needed. A food official from the Food Control Office described women who were unaware of details concerning sugar rationing as annoying and causing trouble, and said that women who missed opportunities had not “take[n] the trouble” to pay attention.¹⁶¹

Women in general were content with the amounts of meat they received, instead wishing they had more sugar. A study by the British Institute of Public Opinion in January 1944 indicated that a significant majority of women wanted an increase in the sugar ration,¹⁶² and radio broadcasts reflected the dissatisfaction. Broadcasts indicated that women were displeased with their ration amount because it interfered with their ability to make jams and preserves, and to bottle up the fruits of their gardens. Making jams and preserves was described as a point of pleasure and accomplishment for women, and thus some broadcasts attempted to deal with the loss of an important character trait that threatened a housewife’s sense of wholeness.¹⁶³ The pleasure of making jam is described as the pride a squirrel experiences when he has successfully stored away enough food for the winter. Putting labels onto the jam and lining it up in the cupboard is a point of pride and a pleasant “tidy finish” to a job well done. Another describes a jam collection as giving a woman a feeling of being a “wise and thrifty housewife.”¹⁶⁴ She had

¹⁶¹ At Home Today, Alice Marshall, 25 September 1940, BBC WAC T23, and The Kitchen Front, Mrs. Ingillson, 26 March 1941, BBC WAC T252.
¹⁶² The question in full with percent responses: “If more sugar were available, which would you like to see increased: the sugar ration (67%); chocolates and sweets (17%); cakes and biscuits (7%); or jam (9%). See Mildred Strunk, Public Opinion, 1935-1946, edited by Hadley Cantril (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 835.
¹⁶³ “The Housewife in Wartime” Wise Housekeeping, Ruth Drew, 7 September 1943, BBC WAC T118.
become more proud of her skills in jam making every year, and generalizes that it was a “real hardship” for housewives to be asked not to make their own personal supplies, but instead to volunteer her time with the WI or donate her fruit.

Certain fruits were not eligible for extra sugar, leaving women with the problem of how to save the fruit they had. As opposed to the issue of enough sugar, at a point in the war the problem of making jam was reversed: women had saved sugar in order to make jam only to find that they were unable to get hold of any soft fruits. In this case, women were told that stone fruit such as plums would be available in large quantities instead.

Making use of what was available was hardly a novel concept during the war, but with sugar it was especially salient as certain demands were still placed upon women with regard to cooking cakes and puddings.

It would seem logical that a reduced availability of sugar and eggs would result in women being encouraged to reduce their preparation and consumption of cakes and puddings. However, women were instead encouraged to make these items with less sugar and dried fruits, and jam. Often puddings and other sweets were described as especially important for children, with sweets connected to their happiness. Women were informed that condensed milk could add sweetness to cakes, and that this could serve as a replacement for sugar. Figs, dates,

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165 Supplies were not available for making jam from apples, pears, marrow (certain varieties of summer squash), or rhubarb. See “Sugar from Jam,” *At Home Today*, 27 March 1940, BBC WAC T23.


167 See *The Kitchen Front*, Florence Ingillson, 29 July 1940, BBC WAC T252 and “Catering Suggestions for Children’s Parties,” *Wise Housekeeping*, Mrs. K.M. Norris, 16 December 1941, BBC WAC T379. The broadcast regarding children’s parties describes making blancmanges, custard, and biscuits. To better appeal to the audience, Norris begins by stating that she is changing her role to speak as a mother of children. This positions her to be more familiar with –or an unofficial expert on- cooking and caring for children.

rhubarb, and ground ginger\textsuperscript{169} were suggested for use in puddings as replacements for sugar. When there was a glut of certain fruits, women were encouraged to use these. The failure to use dried fruits was “most ungrateful” considering the effort of the government in bringing the foods to Britain via ships.\textsuperscript{170} Women were expected to do their best to help use up the dried fruits that were available, with the underlying message being that women who did not utilize these food items were wasting the materials that the government had gone to such lengths to obtain.

Alternatives to traditional puddings were potato scones or hard cakes with marmalade or jam (spread thinly, of course).\textsuperscript{171} Another woman experimented with making a parsnip pudding, cutting out the milk and sugar, and finding that it was just as sweet as if it had been made with both. She reiterates the theme of ingenuity as she states that cooks in centuries past had not been spoon-fed recipes and guidelines for cooking; thus it was important for women to spend time creating their own dishes.\textsuperscript{172}

At the point in the war porridge and oatmeal were promoted as an important (and abundant) food. With limited sugar, speakers suggested that housewives try using salt instead. One speaker, Agnes Wilkes, seems to have expected women to react negatively, as she told women to not dismiss something before giving it a try.\textsuperscript{173} While the suggestion of using salt sounds less appealing than suggestions that women substitute dried fruit or condensed milk for sugar, it followed the same theme of attempting to convince women to try different foods and flavors. This reinforces the ideal of ingenuity – it was ideal for a woman to be flexible and willing to try something new.

\textsuperscript{169} The Kitchen Front, Helen Burke, 22 April 1941, BBC WAC T63.  
\textsuperscript{170} “Dried Fruits,” At Home Today, Susan M. Rankin Hayes from the MOF, 10 January 1940, BBC WAC T23.  
\textsuperscript{172} “The Housewife in Wartime,” Wise Housekeeping, Ruth Drew, 22 December 1942, BBC WAC T118.  
\textsuperscript{173} The Kitchen Front, Agnes Wilkes, 21 February 1941, BBC WAC T651.
It seemed that women were expected to want to spend their “extra” points on sweets, and once in a while speakers would condone this by encouraging them to purchase chocolates if there were any available. At one point women were told that summer holiday was an occasion when it was acceptable to spend “sweet points” on chocolate as it was “a good old stop gap.” Just as certain points were dedicated to meats or clothing, so too were points dedicated to chocolates and sweets. The idea that there were certain appropriate times to indulge in sweets illustrates the common way that women were told what to do: when to get extra sugar, when to donate their fruit, and how to make puddings with the available materials. It illustrates the way women were to follow the instructions given to them while they were still encouraged to be creative and manage with the available materials on their own. The connection between women’s sense of pride and self and the creation of jams and preserves operates both to challenge women’s ingenuity and to reshape the way women experienced their involvement in providing for their families through the bottling and preserving of fruits.

174 “Sandwiches!” Away From the House, Ruth Drew, 6 Aug 1945. BBC WAC T118.
175 Knight, Spuds, 24.
CHAPTER III: CONCLUSION

Radio broadcasts aimed at the housewife population are rich material for analyzing idealized female identity during the war. Throughout these broadcasts women are regularly portrayed as ingenious which, within these broadcasts, is defined as the ability to be creative, experimental, flexible, and clever. This characteristic is complicated by restrictions and contradictory messages, indicating an additional aspect of identity: compliance and responsibility for following the frequently revised rules and guidelines set forth by the government, most particularly the Ministry of Food.

With a need to understand nutritional requirements, restrict men’s intake of meat (and appease their desires for unchanged meat consumption with “mock” replacement meats), and conserve sugar and preserves, ideal housewives were to strictly enforce the use of the proper foods in the proper quantities. The burden of restraint and responsibility informs the need for ingenuity, as women needed to be able to adapt to constantly changing available amounts of controlled foods. Housewives’ identities thus involved individual creativity that was constrained by strict confines of government guidelines presented by (male) experts.

Ingenuity was expressed through broadcasts that challenged women to make do with the varieties and amounts of foods that were available. They were called upon to use their wits, develop skills, and be willing to try odd or new things at least once. This flexibility was not only a realistic necessity, but created a platform from which restrictions could be displayed as fully within the abilities of housewives. As housewives were already (or were learning to be) ingenious, they would be adaptable and able to try new things when the situation required it. Women were told that they had become lazy in their cooking habits and had lost the adventurous
interest in trying new things during the interwar period, and it was in the context of war that women could reclaim (or fully develop) their ingenuity.\textsuperscript{176}

Gendered aspects of foodstuffs further complicated the representation of the ideal housewife’s identity. The association between meat and masculinity gave a different level to women’s responsibilities for preparing meals. Both comedic and serious broadcasts referenced the need for women to create “mock” meat meals. The responsibility to provide for a husband’s desires while also following guidelines and restrictions forced women to employ their creativity and new recipes (helpfully provided by broadcasts and the MOF). The need for particular recipes reinforced women’s responsibility to listen to the radio and read newspapers and MOF pamphlets (of which there were many). Failure to do these things violated the expected behavior and contradicted ideal housewife identity.

A perfect example of the violation of ideal housewife identity is a broadcast from 1941 in which a man describes taking care of his meals himself while his wife was away.\textsuperscript{177} He not only fails at cooking the simplest dishes, but he also cannot boil water and lets the dishes pile up in the sink. The man decides that steak and chips would do perfectly for his dinner, and blames the butcher for the lack of availability. He settles for tripe and wants onions to go with it, as “tripe without onions is like a duck without green peas,” and complains about the absence of onions at the grocery. In the end, the man settles for bread with margarine and marmalade, deciding that if he cannot have the meal he wants, it is not worth cooking at all.

This broadcast is humorous, but if analyzed it yields a detailed example of everything a housewife ought not to be.\textsuperscript{178} This story works by reinforcing stereotypes and presenting

\textsuperscript{176} See \textit{The Kitchen Front}, Agnes Wilkes, 18 February 1941 and 21 February 1941, BBC WAC T651.
\textsuperscript{177} “A Bachelor Week,” \textit{At Home Today}, Murray Leslie, 11 June 1941, BBC WAC T23.
\textsuperscript{178} Language and wording, as well as comments such as suggesting that he understands what his wife does and has decided she can stay in the kitchen while he stays in the office.
incongruities. It’s most important aspect is that a male is the central character: if it were from the perspective of a female, the actions would be too contradictory to have the same degree of hilarity, and would instead be censorious and harsh. The male’s activities fall in line with the cultural norm that men are out of place in the kitchen and do not know how to cook or provide for themselves, supporting the idea that women are fully responsible for all cooking. Also, a male can violate all the identity characteristics a housewife ought to have, and this opposition reinforces the expected role of women. Male roles and characteristics and female characteristics exist as dualities, and thus the male’s failures illustrate everything a female is not to be. The inflexibility of deciding not to cook simply because the desired items were unavailable was entirely contradictory to the expectations set for women. Furthermore, it would have been irresponsible and wasteful for a woman to use both margarine and marmalade on bread.

The speaker expects that foodstuffs will be available and is upset when they are not. A housewife who held this expectation would have been chastised for not only for focusing on the inconvenience of what was unavailable, but for the lack of awareness of what items were and were not acquirable. Women were chastised for not reading newspapers and listening to radio broadcasts, as they were expected to be up-to-date on what was available, how to obtain it, and the quantities allotted them. Wanting foodstuffs that were unavailable or focusing only on what could not be had was also negative; ideal housewives were to concentrate on what was available and create meals accordingly.179

Also, the male speaker’s ideas for meals center around meat, supporting the idea that meat is an irreplaceable and necessary part of the meal that cannot be omitted. This contradicts the identity of the ideal housewife, as she is responsible for not only limiting and controlling

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179 The Kitchen in Wartime, Mrs. Florence Ingillson, Lilian Edgell, and Mr. Harris from the MOF, 9 January 1940, BBC WAC T252.
male consumption of meat, but she is supposed to find ways to encourage her family to eat items with barely any meat for flavoring. If a housewife were to want a certain high-quality meat, it would be not only unreasonable but out of the acceptable character.

All of these expectations and ideal characteristics as expressed through language and topic come together to form a coherent identity with complex, often contradictory components. The shaping of identity through language and topic serves to emphasize the importance of a housewife’s role, and also united into a group that shared certain responsibilities. The depiction of this segment of society provides an important insight into women’s wartime identities and illustrates the way in which ideal behavior was consistently reinforced.

While these identity characteristics cannot be assumed to reflect identity as individual housewives experienced it, the detailed and repeated description of desirable characteristics, traits, and behaviors reflect a broadcast ideal housewife. Whether or not this described identity had a direct impact on women’s experience of self, the way in which broadcasts expressed identity is an important way of understanding the social norms for housewives during the war.


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