

1 **Contrasting approaches to ‘doing’ family meals: a qualitative** 2 **study of how parents frame children’s food preferences**

3 4 **Abstract**

5 Family meals, as acts of domestic food provisioning, are shaped by the competing influences
6 of household resources, food preferences, and broader cultural norms around dietary
7 practices. The place of children’s food tastes in family meal practices is particularly
8 complex. Food tastes stand in a reciprocal relationship with family food practices: being both
9 an influence on and a product of them. This paper explores how parents think about and
10 respond to their children’s food preferences in relation to family meal practices. A
11 qualitative study was conducted with residents of Sandwell, UK. The results presented here
12 are based on the responses of nine key participants and their families. Photo elicitation
13 methods generated participant food-photo diaries that were used to inform subsequent
14 interviews. A thematic analysis revealed two contrasting ways of incorporating children’s
15 tastes into family meal routines: 1) ‘what we fancy’ and 2) ‘regulated’. The former entails
16 repeatedly consulting and negotiating with children over what to cook for each meal. It is
17 supported by the practical strategies of multiple and individually modified meals. The latter
18 relies upon parents developing a repertoire of meals that ‘work’ for the family. This
19 repertoire is performed as a series of ‘set meals’ at which any requests for variation are
20 strongly resisted. Our findings add to the small body of literature on household food
21 provisioning and suggest that achieving the idealised ritual of the family meal is underpinned
22 by a range of values and strategies, some of which may run counter to health messages about
23 nutrition.

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25 **Key words:** family meals; parents; food provisioning; eating routines; qualitative.

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Introduction

A meal is a physical event that must be prepared for and one that is tightly bound by social rules and roles (Bell and Valentine 1997). A ‘proper’ family meal, in this context, can be understood as one for which *all* family members are present, sit down and take their time over a shared meal, prepared in the home and eaten together (Charles and Kerr 1988). Family meals, as acts of domestic food provisioning, are shaped by the competing influences of household resources, food preferences, and broader socio-cultural norms around dietary practices and rituals (Schubert 2008). Therefore, how meal times are performed is the result of a complex interplay of context, constraints, values, compromises, tastes, and identities. Understanding variations in the internalised logic which informs family meal practices is a useful way of exploring this interplay (Schubert 2008; Delormier, Frohlich, and Potvin 2009). This paper examines one particular aspect of these intersecting influences: specifically, how parents frame and respond to the food preferences and tastes of their children in the context of family mealtimes. Children’s food tastes can exert considerable influence on family food practices and yet, at the same time, these tastes are also situated in and shaped by the specific socio-cultural family context in which they are performed. Food tastes are embodied and emplaced practices (Beagan et al. 2015). Negotiation between parents and children over the content of meals can be an ongoing power struggle around the privileging of tastes. Women report prioritising their partners and children’s tastes over their own because it is seen as a way of both avoiding wasting food and expressing love. Routinely incorporating children’s preferences can become a strategy to ensure the participation of children in family meal rituals (Charles and Kerr 1988; Meah 2013). Mealtimes are then the site of potential conflict where the tensions between

1 socialisation and individual tastes are played out and negotiated by parents (Charles 1995).
2 They must navigate this intersection between aspiration and actuality; between the cultural
3 ideal of the family meal and its practical performance with children (Jackson, Olive, and
4 Smith 2009; Charles and Kerr 1988).

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6 The extent to which parents routinely engage in negotiation over meal content depends upon
7 how they frame their children's food preferences in relation to the domestic task of feeding
8 the family. While children can be treated as simply passive receivers of food, they can also
9 be facilitated as active participants in the process of determining what is eaten by the whole
10 family (Wills, Backett-Milburn, et al. 2008; Carrigan, Szmigin, and Leek 2006). Literature
11 on feeding the family has been critiqued for failing to address complex intra-familial
12 processes such as these, which in practice directly affect consumption (Campbell 1995).

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14 While the influence of children's food preferences on family meals is extensively addressed
15 in behavioural nutrition research on parental feeding styles (Patrick et al. 2005), there is an
16 absence of research that examines them in the context of food provisioning, the values that
17 underpin them and the process of arriving at a set of food practices (Schubert 2008). Equally,
18 there is little empirical research that adopts a micro-level perspective on patterns of thinking
19 and behaviour around food-work that contribute to the maintenance of the family and the
20 household (Moisio, Arnould, and Price 2004). This paper addresses these gaps by using
21 photo elicitation interview data from a qualitative study to explore how parents routinely
22 think about and respond to their children's food preferences in relation to family meal
23 practices.

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25 **Methods**

1 ***Recruitment and sampling***

2 A qualitative study of food behaviours was carried out over a six-month period in 2010 in
3 Sandwell, a metropolitan borough in the West Midlands. Sandwell has a population of
4 approximately 292,800 (Sandwell PCT 2010). It is the 12th most deprived local authority in
5 England and has comparatively high levels of unemployment, benefit claims, teenage
6 pregnancy, smoking, obesity, and limiting long-term illnesses (Sandwell PCT 2010; Black
7 Country Consortium 2011; NHS 2011). Participants were recruited from community settings
8 including community centres, primary schools and libraries through introductions made by
9 local gatekeepers. Where possible, participants were briefed and interviewed in these
10 community settings or in their homes. As part of informed consent it was explained that
11 participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and that all data would be
12 de-identified. Permission to record interviews was also sought, and digital cameras (with
13 instructions) were issued to each participant. At the end of the study, participants were
14 allowed to keep their camera. This proved to be an effective way of engaging and retaining
15 people.

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17 The findings presented here are based on the responses of a subset of participants from the
18 original study. This subset comprised nine key participants who were selected specifically
19 because they were parents of young and / or school age children. These participants were
20 invited to include their partners and children in the interview and data collection activities if
21 they felt comfortable doing so. In total, seven children and three partners attended interviews
22 at various points (which, along with the nine key participants, made a total of 19 overall). The
23 characteristics of the nine key participants and their families are described in table 1.

24

1 The first author conducted all the interviews and met with every key participant at least four
2 times, spending a total of around three or four hours with each of them.

3

4 *Photo elicitation data collection*

5 Empirically exploring everyday practices, like family meals, requires the use of methods that
6 can explore tacit aspects of household food provisioning and contextual factors such as
7 identity and socio-cultural background (Wills 2012). The flexible, taken-for-granted nature
8 of everyday realities means they are often carried out without reflection or fuss and are
9 therefore less accessible to researchers using traditional interview methods (O'Connell 2013).
10 Visual methods are well suited to investigating aspects of everyday life that are difficult to
11 otherwise put into words, and can represent knowledge more forcefully and richly (Power
12 2003). Participant-produced photographs, in particular, provide a far deeper sense of
13 experiences and world views than could be expressed simply in words; they can explore
14 habitus by uncovering the contingencies and improvisations that characterise everyday life
15 (Sweetman 2009; O'Connell 2013).

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17 The present study used photo elicitation methods to collect data and structure interviews.

18 Photo elicitation is based on the premise of inserting photographs into research interviews

19 (Olliffe and Bottorff 2007). The addition of participant-produced photographs allows the

20 researcher to access a more detailed account of participant practices and, in this case, explore

21 the nuances of family food decision-making. Over a four-day period participants were asked

22 to photograph everything they ate and drank, where this took place and with whom.

23 Participants were issued with digital cameras and supporting materials in order to undertake

24 this activity. The aim was to compile a detailed 'what, where and who with' representation

25 of eating habits; to elicit representations of their embedded family food practices (Sharma

1 and Chapman 2011) The photographs served as visual diaries that were then used to prompt
2 and inform subsequent interviews (Dennis et al. 2009). Keeping visual records served to
3 highlight contradictions and context specific behaviours. The interview schedule was
4 developed to elicit a narrative account of the four-day period by progressing through the
5 photographs in sequence, encouraging participants to tell the ‘story’ of their food practices
6 and generating descriptions of ‘typical’ routines. For example, the prompt ‘Is this what you
7 normally eat on this day / at this time / when at work etc.?’ was used repeatedly to establish
8 routine behaviours.

9

10 Interpretation and levels of engagement for the photo elicitation activity differed
11 significantly. The number of photographs per photo-diary ranged from 15 to 75. Some
12 participants took the time to clearly record the exact contents of the photographs and the
13 times they were taken, whereas others just took photographs of the meals they ate and did not
14 include contextual information. Decisions about what to photograph and what counts as
15 ‘relevant’ are interpretive decisions made by participants (Harper 2002).

16

17 *Data analysis*

18 All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The NVivo9 software package
19 was used to support a thematic analysis, a type of analysis that seeks to identify patterns of
20 experience, talk and behaviour (Aronson 1994). Open coding was used to identify and
21 categorise eating episodes, social context, accounts of food choices, and descriptions of
22 repetitive food practices. Selective coding was used to identify the values and motivations
23 that linked codes and informed ‘bundles’ of practices. Transcripts were then re-examined for
24 contradictions, dilemmas and omissions. Finally, a coding frame was developed and refined
25 to capture the main concepts. The coding frame helped to establish themes describing sets of

1 consistent practices around mealtimes that could be described as ‘routine’. Two distinct ways
2 of framing and responding to children’s food preferences emerged from the analysis and are
3 described below.

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5 **Results**

6 In this section we explore how the tastes and preferences of children were framed and
7 managed by parents and how this contributes to the negotiated accomplishment of family
8 meals. Our analysis suggests that there are two contrasting ways of incorporating children’s
9 tastes that parents adopted when providing family meals: ‘what we fancy’ and ‘regulated’.
10 The characterisation of these approaches is related to practices and performances of
11 household food provisioning tasks, rather than the qualities and characteristics of the
12 individuals who performed them (Halkier and Jensen 2011). In which case, the two
13 approaches are not intended to represent binary and static caricatures of the parents that
14 deployed them. Rather, they are ways of thinking and strategizing that parents draw upon in
15 order to ‘do’ family meals in different ways. Both approaches are described in relation to
16 two main criteria: the reported nature and extent of parents’ negotiation over what foods will
17 be consumed; and the specific strategies parents employed to ensure successful meals.

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19

20 ***‘What we fancy’: individually modified and multiple meals***

21 This approach is so named because the participants who employed it frequently explained
22 meal practices in terms of what family members ‘fancied’ eating at each sitting. This set of
23 practices revolved around continually negotiating with children as to the content and form of
24 family meals. Typically, participants reported consulting their children before preparing
25 most meals and attempting to reach an agreement that was acceptable to all members of the

1 family. In this sense, the achievement of family meals was constructed as a collaborative
2 process, with children positioned as active participants in the formulation and performance of
3 meal times. This feature is aptly illustrated by Collette, a mother of five, who recounts the
4 interactions that led up to the production and consumption of the family meal depicted in her
5 photographs (figures one to four: *'meatballs night'*).

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7 Collette: This was meatballs night (pointing at photograph). And it ended up with no
8 pasta, just the meatballs, a sauce which was a jar plus shopped tomatoes [pause] so I
9 did add some fresh to it, and garlic bread, which I suppose was OK but to me isn't
10 very filling. I mean I didn't have the meatballs, I just had the sauce but I didn't do
11 myself some pasta to go with it. But it ruined it for me cos I was looking forward to
12 something ... I even grated the cheese ready to put on top of the meatballs but it just
13 didn't happen.

14 Interviewer: Why didn't it happen?

15 Collette: Well, they had no enthusiasm for it. 'I'll do some pasta.' 'No.' 'I'll do
16 some meatballs.' 'No'. 'Well eat them now I've cooked them.' 'OK.'

17 Interviewer: So who ate that then?

18 Collette: Martin (son) didn't. Well actually he ate garlic bread and sauce and he had
19 grated cheese on his, he did have that. But Vince (son), Dawn (daughter) and Sara
20 (daughter) did have the meatballs and that so [pause] I had more or less the same as
21 Martin. Meatballs had to be eaten though, cos as I said they'd been in the freezer for
22 too long and they needed to be cooked cos I needed room for the next time I did the
23 shopping (laughs). But er ... it was an idea I'd had and I kept bringing it up every
24 night. 'Shall we do the meatballs tonight?' 'No.' 'Shall we do the meatballs
25 tonight?' 'No.' [pause] So [pause] but that failed ... and I do, I ask them for ideas.

26

1 Collette recounts a complex set of negotiations with her children, directly reporting the verbal
2 exchanges between them and her efforts to cater to everyone's individual tastes and muster
3 '*enthusiasm*' for the meal. She recalled being very disappointed that her children's tastes
4 prevented her from cooking the meal in a much more straight forward manner. Collette
5 reported regularly modifying family meals to suit her children's preferences at the expense of
6 her own. As can be seen above, she made a number of additions and compromises to ensure
7 that the meal suited everyone's tastes, such as cooking garlic bread instead of pasta. As a
8 result of consulting with her children as to their individual preferences she varied the meal
9 according to their tastes. Collette employed the practical strategy of individually modified
10 meals. She diffused tension over the choice and content of the meal by deferring to the tastes
11 of her children (DeVault 1991; Meah 2013; Charles and Kerr 1988). Interestingly, the
12 photographs she presented (figures one to four) depict the component parts of the meal as she
13 selected and prepared them, and only one photograph of the meal ready to serve (figure four).
14 This reflects the negotiated and malleable nature of meal formats in these practices. As
15 Collette states, she had repeatedly suggested the meatballs-meal to her children over the last
16 few weeks and regularly asked them for meal ideas. Facilitating children as active agents in
17 meal practices can mean ongoing disagreements and resistance (Charles 1995; Carrigan,
18 Szmigin, and Leek 2006). Family meals can be fraught with conflict, bickering, and power
19 struggles with children who may be unwilling to participate and rapidly asserting their own
20 tastes and practices (Wills et al. 2008; O'Connell 2014). Sue, a mother of twin girls, summed
21 up the rationale for this strategy neatly when she explained "I'd rather them eat something
22 they want cos if I do them something they don't want, they ain't going to eat it are they?"
23 Individually modified meals are a strategic compromise, a trade-off in food provisioning.
24

1 The other main strategy employed in this approach was that of providing multiple meals for
2 each sitting. If modifying aspects of the family meal, as described above, failed to meet
3 everyone's preferences adequately, parents also adopted the strategy of preparing separate
4 meals for each of their children. This tended to necessitate heavy reliance on frozen and/or
5 pre-prepared foods. By doing this, parents could both address diverse tastes and, at the same
6 time, ensure that all the family sat down together to enjoy a shared meal time (if not an actual
7 shared meal). This strategy was a practical means of off-setting their children's individual
8 preferences against the collective nature of the meal ritual. Caroline, a mother of two teenage
9 sons, reported routinely providing multiple meals:

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11 I even cook three or four different meals some nights ... because we're all so fussy I
12 think right we haven't had this for a while, we'll have this.' Well, you know cos it
13 can get very samey can't it. I mean they don't say anything but sometimes they can
14 be a bit 'oh'. I'll go 'right, I'm doing so and so.' 'Are we having that again?' 'OK'
15 then I'll do something different. But you run out of ideas, especially with... when
16 you've got to make not just one meal but you're doing two or three.

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18 As Caroline explains, multiple meals are a practical response to the 'fussiness' of her family.
19 The trend towards parents preparing multiple meals 'on demand' reflects the increasingly
20 flexible nature of contemporary family life and the individualistic tendencies that entails
21 (Wills et al. 2008). Progressively more fragmented and individualised social lives, coupled
22 with changes in the profile of the labour force has resulted in a greater diversity in family
23 relationships and routines. Tailoring foods to accommodate individual preferences is now a
24 common practice at family mealtimes (DeVault 1991). It is a way of showing love and
25 reproducing relationships within the family (Moisio, Arnould, and Price 2004).

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Both Caroline and Collette’s accounts feature substantial amounts of reported speech. They describe the back-and-forth between themselves and their children about the content of their meals. Their suggestions, reactions, and modifications are all described. This was a common narrative feature of the ‘what we fancy’ approach, and one that sometimes made accounts difficult to follow. Parents did not just speak for themselves, they also reported the utterances and influences of their partners and children. The consultative nature of this approach, in which children’s individual tastes are framed as an integral part of deciding what to eat at mealtimes, is reflected in the dialogic quality of the descriptions. This framing is reproduced by the practical strategies of individually modified meals and multiple meals.

2) ‘Regulated’: set meal repertoires and resisting variations

This approach entailed an alternative framing of children’s preferences and assigned them a less prominent role in ‘doing’ family meals. The achievement of shared family meals, in which the family all ate the same foods together, was described by parents as their overall aim. In which case, rather than negotiate with their children at each mealtime the parents deploying this approach developed a repertoire of set meals that could be shared by the whole family. To a degree, these meals incorporated the individual likes and dislikes of family members. However, in contrast to the ‘what we fancy’ approach, children’s tastes were by no means the primary consideration. There was very little negotiation *at* meal times. Instead, the collaborative aspects of this approach were located firmly in parents’ development of a range of acceptable meals that they thought ‘worked’ for the family. When preparing and performing these meals for the family, parents reported tolerating very little resistance from children and actively resisted requests for individual modifications.

1 Eating the same foods was crucially important to performing ‘proper’ meals. For example,
2 Lisa and Derek, a couple with three children, described the nightly family meal as a
3 fundamental part of bringing their children up ‘properly’. They performed this in a very
4 structured way. Lisa did all the food shopping and Derek did all the cooking. Over the years,
5 the couple had compiled their own home-made recipe book that they continually added to
6 with ‘things that work’, a repertoire of family meals that they felt to be sufficiently practical,
7 enjoyable and healthful and meant that the whole family could eat the same food. In the
8 mornings, Lisa would pick out a recipe and make sure the relevant ingredients were laid-out
9 in the kitchen by early evening. When Derek returned home from work, he would look to see
10 which recipe Lisa had selected and prepare the evening meal accordingly. Once they had
11 decided on a meal and prepared it they did not welcome disruptions or requests to modify the
12 meal for individuals. In the following extract, the couple explain how they dealt with the
13 disruption of the Derek’s brother coming over to dinner, as he had very particular tastes:

14

15 Lisa: But I hate doing that (cooking more than one meal). I [pause] I don’t allow my
16 children to do that. If we’re having beef that’s what we’re having. So if his (Derek’s)
17 brother comes over and we do separately for him then it’s a bad message for my kids
18 ...

19 Interviewer: Do you have him over for dinner a lot?

20 Lisa: No (laughs) ... Or if we do you know we won’t do beef we’ll do chicken or
21 something else.

22 Derek: We’ll do chicken or something so it doesn’t look like we’ve given in.

23

24 They disliked the ‘message’ that cooking multiple meals or catering to individual preferences
25 sent to their children. It might look as if they had ‘given in’ by allowing individual demands

1 to dictate what was cooked. The inclusion of Derek's brother in the family meal ritual made
2 it more difficult to adhere to the ideal of achieving a shared meal (as opposed to merely a
3 shared *mealtime*) and avoid openly negotiating meal content in front of their children.
4 Family food consumption through structured 'proper' meals, as Lisa and Derek describe,
5 socialises children into what are considered appropriate food practices, social behaviours and
6 identities (Charles and Kerr 1988). They valued their established meal rituals and repertoires.
7 They employed the practical strategies of set meals and resisting individual practices in order
8 to maintain them. In this approach, requests for variations at mealtimes were judged very
9 negatively and resisted, even to the point of avoiding certain guests. Mealtime rituals, in this
10 context, functioned as a kind of regulatory mechanism – as a way of maintaining a coherent
11 family ideology (Grieshaber 1997; Charles and Kerr 1988). These participants described
12 putting in a good deal of thought and effort into developing and planning their meals, like the
13 recipe book ritual described above.

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15 Hasan, a father of five young children, and his wife, Madiha, also used the strategy of
16 developing set meal repertoires. As in the previous example, they also routinely divided food
17 provisioning tasks between them to achieve this. Hasan did all the food shopping, bulk
18 buying once a week, while Madiha prepared all the meals. As he explains, the family
19 employed a '*timetabled*' method of food provisioning:

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21 [The] days are all set out when she (Madiha) knows what to do. It's all timetabled the
22 food because obviously, having a big family [pause] When you've got kids, mum,
23 mother-in-law at home, you have to make sure most of the food is prepared.... So,
24 yeah, she's really organised. Plus we get, like, relatives popping in as well.

25

1 This careful pre-planning contrasts with the reactivity of catering to what individuals ‘fancy’
2 eating in that it does not lend itself to consultation and negotiation at mealtimes. Children’s
3 input and influence is less direct and immediate compared with the previous approach.
4 Parents incorporate their children’s preferences and feedback into subsequent versions of the
5 meals and in the formats that become part of their household repertoire of ‘things that work’.
6 Unlike the ‘what we fancy’ approach, they do not invite their input when performing
7 mealtimes and they typically refused requests for individual modifications to meals.

8

9 The rationale for these strategies is both practical and ideological. On a practical level
10 parents explain that adhering to a set meal format from their family repertoire avoids waste,
11 saves times and money and means that they do not have to undertake what they consider to
12 be ‘too much’ cooking. Jayanti, a mother of three who kept to a rigid set of family meal
13 practices, was very clear about this when explaining how she delivered family meals:

14

15 Interviewer: And do you always eat the same things at meal times?

16 Jayanti: Yeah. Yeah. I make them... I’m not cooking different things

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18 She went on to elaborate:

19

20 When our oldest son [pause] he’s a bit picky. He’s the one that’s a bit, I told you
21 about [pause]. He likes... even though he’s like a match stick he prefers meat and I
22 say ‘no, you’re not having it all the time’.

23

24 Jayanti cooked meals with meat on four days of the week and vegetarian meals on the
25 remaining three days (see figures five and six). As she states, despite her oldest son’s
26 preference for meat she refused to deviate from this practice at his request. He was given

1 meat, but only on days when the whole family ate meat together as part of a shared family
2 meal. These strategies served to instil what parents considered to be ‘appropriate’ eating
3 habits by requiring that children eat the foods that parents chose. As Lisa put it, sometimes it
4 was necessary to exercise ‘*tough love*’ in this respect. Achieving a shared meal was valued
5 above catering to individual tastes and requests at meal times. As can be seen in her
6 photographs, the images Jayanti captured simply present the meals dished-up and ready to be
7 consumed – as finished products. Unlike Collette’s photo-diary, Jayanti’s did not include
8 photographs of ingredients or any preparation of food stuffs. Instead, it focused exclusively
9 on the finished meals, reflecting an emphasis on achieving shared meals rather than
10 responding to requests.

11

12 **Conclusion**

13 In this paper, we have contributed to the body of research on household food provisioning by
14 examining the specific ways in which parents think about and respond to their children’s food
15 preferences. The two approaches represent differing ways of routinely managing children’s
16 tastes and therefore result in differing performances of family meal rituals. ‘What we fancy’
17 represents a more reactive approach, for which parents tended to consult with their children at
18 mealtimes. The ‘regulated’ approach did attach value to children’s tastes, but to a lesser
19 extent and in a less immediate fashion. Parents incorporated their family’s preferences in the
20 development of their meal repertoires, but did not welcome input or negotiation *at* mealtimes.

21

22 The focal point of these findings are the perceptions and strategies of parents. As a result, we
23 have not addressed the views and opinions of children in their own words or actively
24 examined how negotiations with parents unfold in real time. Such an undertaking would be a
25 valuable addition to the work. These approaches certainly cannot be regarded as a

1 comprehensive or exhaustive examination of the myriad variations on family meal rituals.
2 They do, however, provide empirical data on social reproduction at the micro-level; they
3 explore patterns of thinking and behaviour that ensure the integration of family members
4 (particularly children) in to the wider macro-social order (Moisio, Arnould, and Price 2004).
5
6 Investigating these practices is critical to understanding dominant trends in the food system,
7 such as individualised consumption or a tendency to prepare meals ‘on demand’. The
8 emphasis of public health policy on discrete behaviours rather than embedded practices
9 underplays the material and social limitations on ‘healthy eating’ (Attree 2006). Public
10 health nutrition policy and intervention needs to recognise the way eating habits are defined
11 by and reproduce social and cultural capital (Schubert 2008). Halkier and Jensen (2011)
12 argue for a focus on sets of practices, rather than on individual actors. One way of addressing
13 this is to extend the relatively small body of research of food provisioning by further
14 investigating routine food practices. While routine practices are a useful way to characterise
15 whole diets, they remain relatively unused in public health research and health promotion
16 (Jastran et al. 2009). Further research into the nutritional differences associated with varying
17 mealtime routines is needed in order to identify the implications for dietary health.

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20 **Acknowledgements**

21

22 This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ES/G029954/1) and
23 Sandwell PCT.

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1 **Table 1: Key participant characteristics**

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Pseudonym	Social characteristics	Reported household composition and food practices
Melissa	Female, African-Caribbean 47 years Employed	Lived with her secondary school-age daughter. Her adult son visited several times a week and cooked most of the meals. Erratic eating patterns due to her shift work. Very accommodating of individualised practices.
Sue*	Female White British 49 years Not in paid employment	Lived with her twin secondary school age daughters^^. Her partner stayed with them regularly and his son (12 years old) visited at weekends. Often cooked multiple meals per sitting with the exception of a ‘proper Sunday dinner’.
Collette*	Female White British 44 years Not in paid employed	Lived with her five children; three of whom were at secondary school, one in college and one at work. Reported a great deal of flexibility and reactivity. Food shopping was particularly complex and sometimes fraught
Jayanti*	Female British Indian 45 years Employed	Lived with her husband+, who worked full-time, and two of their children^^ (both at secondary school). Her eldest daughter was at university and sometimes came home at weekends. Observed some Hindu dietary practices depending on context. Husband reported ‘breaking’ with them, especially when at work.
Hasan*	Male Bangladeshi	Lived with his wife (Mahida), who stayed at home with their five children, all under the age of seven. His mother, a

	34 years Employed	vegetarian, also lived with them. Regulated approach with provisioning tasks divided clearly. Observed Halal at home.
Lisa*	Female White British 38 years Employed	Lived with her husband (Derek*+), who worked full-time, and their three children. One child was nursery-aged^ and two were at primary school. Highly organised. Lisa often worked from home.
Catherine	Female White British 37 years Employed	Lived with her husband, who worked full-time, and their nursery age daughter^. Mostly flexible but with some regulated elements. Self-identified as a 'healthy eater' and vegetarian
Poppy	Female White British 43 years Not in paid employment	Lived with her husband+, who worked full-time, and their nursery-age daughter^. She cooked all meals and described her husband as 'easy going'. Regulated with some elements of individual catering. Self-identified as an 'ethical consumer' and vegetarian.
Caroline*	Female White British 52 years Employed	Lived with her husband, who worked full-time, and their two sons, one of whom had just started work. The other was at secondary school. Very individualised. Mother and both sons self-identified as 'picky eaters'
<p>* quoted in the paper</p> <p>+ partner who was also present at interview (3 in total)</p> <p>^ child who was also present at interview (7 in total)</p>		

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1 **Figures**

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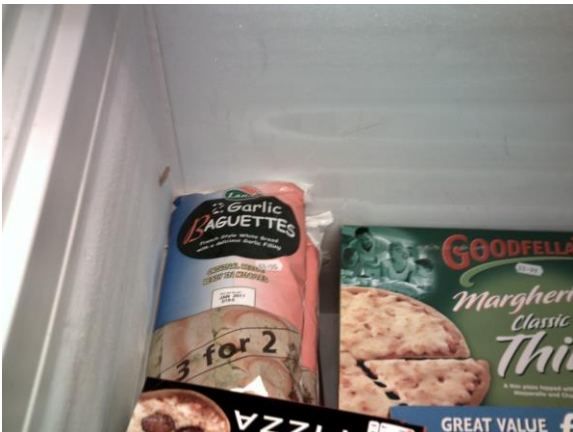
3 1) Collette's photograph of 'meatballs night' a) 'meatballs'



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6 2) Collette's photograph of 'meatballs night' b) 'garlic bread'



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9 3) Collette's photograph of 'meatballs night' c) 'sauce and garlic bread'



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3 4) Collette's photograph of 'meatballs night' d) 'meatballs and garlic bread'



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6 5) Jayanti's photograph of a vegetarian family meal: 'lentil curry and bits'



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1 6) Jayanti's photograph of a meat-based family meal: 'chicken and chips'



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