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**Title:**

***'OURFOODSTORIES@E-MAIL.COM':***

**AN AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOOD**

By

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the

degree of

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'Ourfoodstories@e-mail.com': An Auto/Biographical Study of Relationships with Food.

## **Abstract**

Popular discourses and current government policy focus on the need for individuals and families to make healthy food choices, without acknowledging the social and cultural milieu in which these are embedded. A neo-liberal focus on responsible individualism is part of a middle class habitus that ensures foodwork and foodplay are located within distinct heteronormative cultural fields. In my thesis I explore narratives from seventy-five mainly middle class respondents who engaged in a series of asynchronous online interviews over nine months beginning in November 2010.

The themes that emerged aligned with public policy debates on the family, healthy eating, eating disorders, 'fat' bodies and elite foodways. Hence, feeding the family 'healthy' meals 'prepared from scratch' was considered a means of acquiring social, symbolic and cultural capital. 'Fat' talk and 'lipoliteracy' or learning to read the body were ways of performing femininity, whilst elite foodways were utilised as forms of hegemonic masculinities. Hence, in a challenge to the individualisation thesis my research demonstrates the complexity of food relationships beyond individual consumer choice.

Throughout I adopt an auto/biographical approach that stresses the interconnectedness of biography and autobiography, focuses on researcher reflexivity and is sensitive to respondent subjectivities. Respondents used a

common vocabulary of individuality, whilst simultaneously embedding themselves in family and kinship relations. Indeed, family, gender, and class, were the means of anchorage in a sea of remembering that engendered a sense of ontological security.

Foodways are, thus, part of a habitus that is gendered, classed, temporal and historical. Women in the study conformed to cultural scripts of heteronormative femininity, whilst men resorted to hegemonic masculinities to distance themselves from feminised foodways and care work. These identities were not part of a negotiated family model, but located in cultural fields that reinforced and naturalised gendered divisions, they were bound by gender and class.

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**Author's Declaration:**

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy have I been registered for any other University award.

Relevant conferences were attended at which my work was presented:

Made in Plymouth Event, University of Plymouth, April 2011

Methodological Innovations Conference, University of Plymouth, May 2011

BSA Medical Sociology Conference, University of Chester, September 2011

BSA Auto/Biography Xmas Conference, London, December 2011

A Taste of Home, Brussels, February 2012

New Connections in Food Research, Cardiff University, April 2012

BSA Medical Sociology Conference, University of Leicester, September 2012

BSA Annual Conference, London, April 2013.

Weight and Stigma Conference, University of Birmingham, May 2013.

BSA Auto/Biography Conference, Barcelona, July 2013.

BSA Medical Sociology Conference, York University, September 2013.

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## *Chapter 1: Un apéritif, 'food is love' (Jake)*

### **1:1. Chapter Outline**

In adopting an auto/biographical approach to exploring relationships with food and foodways, I acknowledge the interconnectedness of biography and autobiography, the other and the self. This enables an exploration of the individual and the social or the private troubles and public issues concerning food and foodways (Mills, 1959). My relationship with food during my adolescence for example, was influenced by a desire to conform to normative scripts of femininity, as I engaged in talk about food and bodies as a means of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987). In setting out the aims and objectives of my research I was looking to examine the sameness and difference across 'our food stories' (Appendices 10:1). How these 'stories' may have changed over the life course, whether they were influenced by gender or health discourses or weight management practices. I use the term foodways throughout which means the beliefs and behaviours surrounding the production, distribution and consumption of food both on an individual and collective level (Counihan, 1999). I interweave elements of 'my' food story with those of respondents, as well as reflections upon my research journey. In this introductory chapter I make a case for the utility of my auto/biographical focus. I include a word cloud here and for each chapter throughout the thesis. I consider them a useful means of representation of the textual content of each chapter and indicative of the significance of certain words within that text.



Richardson (1997:2) notes we are 'restrained and limited by the kinds of cultural stories available to us'. In academic writing we are encouraged to 'adhere to the canons of writing practices' from the nineteenth century that we should not be present in our texts and that the 'I' should be suppressed (1997:2-3). In taking an auto/biographical approach I state that 'I' am present, however this has not been an easy path or a piece of cake! Again, as Richardson (1997:2) inquires, 'how do we write ourselves into our texts with intellectual and spiritual integrity?' The writing up of this thesis therefore is about finding a voice, a way of presenting and positioning the self that pleases the reflexive feminist and ethical researcher in me. I take great comfort from those who have forged an auto/biographical path before me, such as Erben (1998), Inckle (2007, 210), Letherby (1993, 1994), Morgan (1998), Sikes (2006), Sparkes (2002, 2007), Stanley (1992), to name a few that I have met in text and in person along the way. However, it is still difficult to do, for as Pelias (2004:1) argues, 'the desire to write from the heart' means that the researcher:

...instead of hiding behind the illusion of objectivity, [the researcher] brings himself (sic) forward in the belief that an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative and sensually poetic voice can place us closer to the subjects we wish to study.

Hence, the researcher is vulnerable and exposed. Whilst, I am not sure if my voice can bring me 'closer' to my respondents, it is still my voice that has the responsibility of representing their stories/selves as well as my own. This has been and continues to be emotion(al) work (Hochschild, 1979).

In this work, the presentation of the self in everyday life, one's narrative, is a performance with front and backstage processes at work/play (Goffman, 1963). It is mutable, temporal and in a continual process of becoming (Deleuze and

Guattari, 1998). And I have a sense of the audience on a number of temporal planes. In the process of writing the first critic of my work is myself. Beyond this I am writing for the near future and my supervisors to pass judgement, the external examiners who will appraise my work in the not so distant future, the respondents who have expressed an interest in reading the completed thesis and of course for those who have not. Once, and if, it or parts of it are published I am writing for a wider faceless unknown audience who may or may not read it on a potentially different temporal plane. Again, a concern with pleasing an audience can make writing difficult and as with the whole of this thesis, I am keen to explore the extent to which writing and doing academic work, (like any work/play) is an embodied corporeal endeavour. It is not just a mindful rationally structured experience; it is a situated, temporal, affective practice. Therefore, the statement 'a piece of cake' suggests that something is easy to do. I include it here with a strong sense of irony, as foodwork, emotion work and academic work are all affective practices that can be both simultaneously routinized, instrumental, emotionally embodied activities and hard work.

I therefore use the first person throughout. I reflect upon the affective practice of research and incorporate my research journey. I consider food as a relationship and an affective practice. I assumed from my training as a sociologist following the individualisation thesis from Beck, (1992, 2002) and Giddens, (1991) that the social, political and economic changes of late modernity had weakened the structural constraints of class and gender. Hence, as Adkins (2004:192) argues 'the axes of (socially organised) difference, such as class, gender and sexuality are more a matter of individual decision making in the act of creating the self as an individual'. It was with this in mind that I set out to explore 'individual' food

histories from a convenience sample of women and men, rather than interviewing couples and/or families (Charles and Kerr, 1988, Murcott, 1983, Lupton, 1996, 2000, 2005). By asking respondents to consider their individualised autobiographies in relation to food I was expecting reflections on changes in attitudes towards food and foodways over the life course, a blurring of the boundaries between the genders in relation to both family foodways and body regimes (weight management) and perhaps an acknowledgement of the influence of health discourses. I assumed that if changes in the workplace had been matched in the private sphere, there would be more equality regarding domestic work and family foodways<sup>3</sup>. I anticipated due to public and media discourses on the health risks associated with obesity that men would be engaged in body regulation, self-care and 'fat talk' (Ambjörnsson, 2005). I had not considered the extent to which respondents would be keen to assert their class positions in relation to their foodways, nor how gendered these practices would continue to be. Nor, despite the medicalization of everyday life, that healthy eating would still be considered as part of a cultural script of normative femininity. In addition to this neo-liberal politics have emphasized individual responsibility, active citizenship and economic independence and these are constructed as particularly white middle class values. In hindsight it seems unreasonable to assume that my respondents would not be engaged with these values, particularly when family foodways are represented as part of the problem of childhood obesity<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to suggest there has been total equality in the workplace, just a significant shift of women into the public sphere, which is strongly encouraged in neo-liberal politics.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2013) have been engaged in disseminating information regarding the 'treatment' of obesity in children and young people. The most recent press release (23/10/2013) was issued under the banner; 'families need more help to tackle obesity in youngsters'.



### 1:3. Beginnings – ‘let them eat cake’<sup>5</sup>

In the heading for this chapter I have used ‘food is love’, which is a quote from Jake<sup>6</sup>, a respondent. I use it to illustrate the extent to which food is embedded in affective practices, as Eagleton (1998:204) claims ‘food looks like an object but is actually a relationship’, it is ‘endlessly interpretable, as gift, threat, poison, recompense, barter, seduction, solidarity, suffocation’. In writing up my research, foodways are considered affective practices and a means of performing or displaying or practicing love or care. This is usually both self-love/care and/or the love/care of others. I imagined that in an era of heightened neo-liberal individualism, ‘healthy’ foodways are used to represent self-care; a regulated diet equals a regulated self/body. However, whilst this was the case, foodways were relational. They were used to display the love/care of others, family, partners and friends. And like all matters of the heart, this relationship with food was complicated, it had the potential to stir up strong corporeal, highly charged reactions; extremes of love, hate, disgust and distaste could be aroused by the mere mention of certain foodstuffs chocolate, bread, offal, rotten eggs for example, so much so that they were never eaten again. Negative past experiences around food events, the ‘ordeal’ of Sunday lunch (Ophelia) or the ‘dreaded Sunday tea’ (Ellen) for example. Or the recollection of seemingly ordinary inconsequential domestic arrangements, such as leaving ‘sausage rolls and vol-au-vents’ in the fridge (Zoe) elicited strong, embodied and emotional reactions. Hence, Zoe writes ‘the thought of all that pastry is making me feel sick’ and Ophelia, ‘just writing about it gives me indigestion’.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘This is a saying that shows insensitivity to or incomprehension of the realities of life for the unfortunate. Rousseau, in his *Confessions* (1782), tells of a great princess who, on being informed that the country people had no bread, replied, ‘Let them eat cake’. This statement is often, and incorrectly, attributed to Marie Antoinette’ (American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, 2005)

<sup>6</sup> This is a pseudonym, as are all respondents’ names used throughout the thesis. Respondent demographics are listed in Table. 1.1 in Chapter Three.

Other respondents said that they loved food, or bread, or chocolate, or chips. For some, this love was not reciprocated, as Bryony claims, 'I love bread but it doesn't love me'. In Jake's statement in the chapter heading, food is symbolic of giving love or an expression of love. This relationship with food is further complicated by its associated with significant others. It is not simply a matter of disliking tomato ketchup, but the act of having it 'daubed all over your dinner by your Dad' as Larry writes for example. Hence, despite being able to reflect on and explain this past event: 'Dad was trying to be efficient in distributing the condiment to all and sundry at the table while the bottle was in his hand', it has consequences for Larry, who 'hates tomato ketchup in any form – even as the base to another sauce', forty plus years later.

Yet, for Larry, as with all respondents, these reflections are represented through a modern day lens. An emphasis on individualism and the rights and responsibilities of children are fairly recent concerns. Here, Larry identifies a lack of care over his individualism. Fischler (1980, 2011) questions the rise of individualism and its impact on commensality, or 'eating together'. He identifies a kind of gastro-anomy, whereby individuals experience a kind of Durkheimian anomie (Durkheim, [1933] 1984), or normlessness around eating, because of the shift away from social forms of eating together. It is interesting that in supervisory sessions we shared food around a table. We discussed the option of presenting my thesis as something to eat or serving food with it; it is for consumption after all. Indeed, cake symbolises food as a 'gift relationship' (Mauss, [1922] 1990), it is not just the cake but also the act of preparing and baking it specifically for someone else which is significant. Indeed giving a cake

in modern Westernised and Christian cultures is usually associated with love, caring, special occasions, birthdays, christenings, weddings as well as religious ceremonies such as Christmas and Easter. In my research journal in June 2011, I wrote:

What is it about convenience food that elicits such loathing in some of the food narratives? How much does it represent a 'lack of care'? Somehow only home cooked or home produced food is good enough or demonstrates love, baking a cake equals love, whereas buying one does not.

Considered another way, the question could be what is it about the baking of a cake that elicits such strong emotional attachments? Yet, food as gift or as a means of expressing affection is complex and not necessarily a piece of cake. Indeed, this tension between care and convenience is one of Warde's (1997) four antinomies of taste<sup>7</sup> that are used by advertisers in the marketing of food and foodways.

The notion of food as a 'storehouse of meaning' (Lupton, 1996:49) is well documented amongst sociologists. The meanings that respondents' attach to food and their food (his/her) stories are the focus of this thesis. It is notable that the route to exploring relationships with food is through memory, what Arendt ([1929] 1996:15) refers to as 'the storehouse of time'. So food memories represent storehouses stuffed with meaning relating to a specific time, whilst the memories are conjured from the past they are retold in the now, the present defining the telling of the past. A 'now' that is equally fleeting and temporal. However, because food is imbued with meaning, even if these meanings belong to the past the continued consumption or avoidance of certain foods or foodways, rituals, practices and/or performances means that food memories

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<sup>7</sup> The four antinomies are 'novelty and tradition', 'health and indulgence', 'economy and extravagance' and 'convenience and care' (Warde, 1997:174).

remain near to the surface of the present. It is these food memories and relationships that I explore.

#### **1:4. Beginnings – ‘our food stories’**

On November 25<sup>th</sup> 2010 I sent my first ten e-mail invitations to five men and five women from my social network asking them if they would be interested in participating in a research study for my PhD on the role of food in their lives. By the end of June 2011 through a process of opportunity and snowball sampling I had narratives from seventy-five respondents. I purposely chose to conduct the research through computer-mediated communication (CMC) because I wanted to give the respondents time to reflect upon and construct their narratives. The original working title of my PhD was Food Choice and Identity: Beyond a Gender Binary, exploring the role of food in everyday life histories. The primary aim of the research was to investigate the relationship between individuals and their food choice<sup>8</sup> using an auto/biographical research approach. In the application to the ethics committee (Appendices 10:1) I set out four overall objectives of the study: -

1. To explore how an individual’s relationship with food may have changed over time.
2. To consider how useful is it to see food choice as a gendered experience.
3. To contribute to current sociological understanding of ‘food culture(s)’ and the impact of health discourse(s) upon food choice.
4. To consider the extent to which individual food histories are related to issues of weight management if at all.

I therefore proposed to carry out in-depth asynchronous online interviews with men and women, ten people at a time.

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that the concept of ‘food choice’ is contested. It implies that individuals make conscious rational decisions about food, as knowing consumers.

The title of my thesis has since become, 'ourfoodstories@e-mail.com, an auto/biographical study of relationships with food'. The shift in focus away from notions of choice and identity is not accidental. This represents my desire to distance myself from the neo-liberal assertion that all individuals are free to choose their identities outside of social, cultural and/or financial constraints. My previous focus on food choice implied a wholly conscious engagement with highly individualised consumer identities and identity politics. When food consumption can be unconscious or mindless and constrained by more structural factors, such as class, gender, ethnicity, age. Indeed, Warde (1997:182) contends that 'people are not generally known to their friends for their eccentric eating habits'<sup>9</sup>, and that there is little evidence of individualised diets or eating patterns (other than in medical discourses), as 'diet is a relatively weak emblem of personal self-identity'. The concept of 'choice' is politically and morally loaded, especially when choices are made from a limited set of options that are constrained by economics, and/or cultural norms and values. It fits into a notion of food choice as part of a Foucauldian (1979) disciplinary regime, the means by which individuals can control or regulate their bodies in the process of creating themselves. In modern Western societies a high value is attached to individualism and the ability to make rational self-reflexive choices for one's self.

What Foucault (1988:18) refers to as technologies of the self that:

...permit individuals to effect their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conducts and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality.

---

<sup>9</sup> By friends we can assume Warde is referring to social groups who engage in similar foodways, hence vegetarians, vegans or those who only eat halal food for example would eat similar food together. It also depends on what is meant by eccentric!

This is not to suggest that individuals are never active agents when deciding what to eat, it is just that an emphasis on individualism belies the role of social ties, interaction cues, 'relationality' and the embeddedness of individuals in family and/or kin relations (Jallinoja and Widmer, 2011:5). Brillat-Savarin's declaration ([1825]: 1970:13) 'tell me what you eat and I'll tell you what you are' is indicative of the extent to which food is embedded within the cultural norms and values of an epoch. Hence, food and foodways are both individual and social. The individual is the carrier of these practices through routinized ways of knowing and understanding, but these conventionalised mental activities are not qualities of the individual (Reckowitz, 2002:249) but culturally specific. Food and foodways are about doing and knowing, they are embedded and embodied habits and procedures that are learned and sediment over time. Hence the focus on an auto/biographical approach is significant as it underlines the extent to which the individual and the social, the autobiographical and the biographical are interconnected (Morgan, 1998).

'Our food stories' are therefore simultaneously individual and collective. They demonstrate 'social network affects' (Christakis and Fowler, 2007) or how people are embedded in social webs of behaviour that spread across a range of social ties. It is a kind of social contagion or mimesis, for example the significance of our relationships with others in the spread of 'obesity' in a population (Christakis and Fowler, 2007), or the take up of a particular diet or exercise fad (Kolata, 2007), reveals how social connections matter. These practices or routinized types of behaviour consist of several elements, things and their uses, as well as background knowledge. There is a relationship between these things and the body; food and foodways are about embodiment

and the senses. It is how respondents understand these relationships that I consider, how these developed over time and the impact they have on everyday lives. It is worth adding that although my interest in gender is no longer explicit in this new title, it is a theme that still permeates the whole thesis. I acknowledge that there are difficulties in moving away from dichotomous thinking, that gender has become a tool or way of knowing and understanding the world, part of my own cultural habitus. Indeed, gender, class and family have been considered 'zombie' categories 'that no longer capture the contemporary milieu' (Beck, interviewed by Slater and Ritzer, 2001:262). Yet, following this perspective makes no allowance for the fact that some individuals have always been able to act outside of structural constraints, (especially white, middle class men) whilst others are wholly constrained by them, even now.

The gendering of this work means it is not just about food, but bodies, relationships and emotions because these are traditionally conceptualised as feminised concerns (Oakley, 1992). In terms of wider public discourses regarding 'healthy' eating and weight management, these are often expressed as gendered or feminised (Bordo 2003, Lupton 1996, Howson 2004). When setting out on my research journey I envisaged that respondents would use foodways as a vehicle for memories that might parallel mine. This suggests I only have one story or that it is fixed or even fully knowable. Instead, through others telling of their lives, I have been able to recreate my own partial and highly mutable 'assemblage' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1998) of events, which shift and change even now. My memories intervene and intensify in response to respondent's memories. I was constantly pondering the 'why' and 'how'

questions. Why did a particular respondent's memories elicit this or that response? How were their narratives the same/different to mine?

I utilise a sociological imagination, with its emphasis on the interrelationship between private troubles and public issues, and a common vocabulary of motives (Mills, 1959). Public discourses form a repertoire of available stories that respondents can draw upon in the telling of themselves. At the time of the research on which this thesis is based the UK government announced that most of the major food manufacturers had agreed to comply with standardised food labelling on their products by the summer of 2013. The Minister for Public Health, Anna Soubry said that this development 'will help us all choose healthier options' (Hickman, 2012: unpaginated). The Chairman of the British Dietetic Association (BDA), Helen Davidson, claimed 'consumers need a quick understanding of the relative healthiness of a product' (*ibid*). These claims make significant assumptions about individual agency, notably that individuals make conscious rational decisions about food as all knowing social actors. They ignore the social context in which foodways are performed and practiced and the extent to which these decisions are related to routinized, habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) and emotional responses or affective practices (Wetherell, 2012). They assume that 'healthier' and 'healthiness' are objective standards of measurement, again ignoring the social and emotional context in which these terms are embedded. Also, that 'healthiness' is achievable and/or a desirable universal goal in everyday life.

The purpose of my study is an attempt to understand myself through, what Lawler (2008:8) identifies as the 'sameness and difference' of other narratives.



An auto/biographical approach stresses the interrelatedness of the self and the other. The use of asynchronous online interviews is part of a repertoire of computer mediated communication (CMC), similar to correspondence techniques (Letherby and Zdrodowski, 1995), in which the respondent is given time and space to write their narrative account around a particular theme. Although the asynchronous e-mail interview has the potential to be spontaneous, quick and fleeting and has some of the temporal qualities of traditional letter writing, the frustration of waiting for the postman to deliver a letter is not dissimilar to waiting for correspondence to be e-mailed into an inbox. Similarly, there are traces of past epistolary traditions in some of the narratives, as well as more modern touches, emoticons for example. In the reading of these narratives I am, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1998:154), searching for a 'plane of consistency' or what Tamboukou (2010a:8) describes as:

...rich heterogeneities, narrative forms of becoming [and] a musical repetition that draws circles within the chaos of correspondence [that] is soothing for both the researcher and the reader.

In the writing up of the research I am unable to use all of the narratives (in terms of their complete narratives and all of the responses), and indeed am only be able to provide glimpses of my own, because the 'selection of some letters entails the de-selection of many more' (Stanley 2004:205). I am looking to create a 'biographical assemblage that remains open and incomplete, as a constant reminder of the forced coherences and closures of the biographical discourse' (Tamboukou, 2010a: 10). I present something of 'an endless moving in between' (Massey 2002:645) as I position myself as researcher and researched, in light of my autobiographical contributions. This demonstrates the inter-textuality of auto/biographical accounts and the extent to which written

texts are social products, not unproblematic reflections of reality and how individuals are still constrained by structural influences beyond their own free will (Stanley and Morgan, 1995). Hence, categories of gender and class may still prove significant for individuals in providing them with a sense of 'ontological security' (Dawson, 2012:311).

### 1:5. Beginnings – 'my food stories'

Letherby (2003:5) defines 'research as an endeavour characterised by politics, power and emotion'. It is perhaps only in the context of preparing this chapter that I have had to consider my position as a feminist, academic and fat activist. Orbach's (1982) book title *Fat is a Feminist Issue* articulates perfectly the two issues that have motivated and informed my doctoral study. 'Feminism' and 'fat' are both highly political and contested (marginalized) arenas. In the opening paragraph to my chapter in the *BSA Auto/Biography Yearbook*, I claim:

The origins of my own interest in feminism can be traced back to a bookshop in Liverpool at the age of 18, where I saw a copy of Susie Orbach's book '*Fat is a Feminist Issue*'. However, it lay dormant and unarticulated until the 1990s, when in another book shop, a women's bookshop in Bristol (long since closed) I bought a series of post cards with Rebecca West's (1892 – 1983) assertion that she did not know what feminism was, only that she was called a feminist when she expressed sentiments that differentiated her 'from a doormat or a prostitute' (Parsons, 2011:53)

I would add, I did not buy, nor read Orbach's book until fairly recently. Certainly at 18, although I applauded the title of the book, (it spoke to me about my own body issues at that time); I did not have the confidence to assume that it was written for someone like me, nor that I should or even could buy it. As far as I was concerned at that time it belonged to a section of society from which I was excluded; an academic, liberal, educated and elite class of women whose lives I believed were very different to mine at that time. Feminism was then for me an alien concept and one that I associated with all of the myths of the feminist as

'man-hating, unfeminine and lesbian' (Letherby 2003, Hinds and Stacey 2001, Sharpe 2001 and Scharff 2010). Today, whilst I acknowledge that there are tensions within 'feminism' as a political movement and that it may be possible to follow feminist research principles without accepting the political underpinnings of feminism, I have a commitment to the Fawcett Society's mission statement 'a vision of society in which women and men enjoy equality at work, at home and in public life'. For me, being, doing or becoming a feminist is a political act. It signifies an alignment with egalitarian values.

'Fat' is also political. Moran (2011:106) in her memoir declares, 'fat is 'a swearword. It's a weapon. It's sociological sub-species. It's an accusation, dismissal and rejection'. The first academic conference I attended in September 2007 was 'Bodies of Evidence: Fat Across the Disciplines' and it introduced me to Hacking's view that the Body Mass Index (BMI) was an over rated epidemiological tool. He highlights how the BMI or Quetelet Index or the calculation  $w/h^2$  developed in France on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1832 in order to measure the spread of weight in the male population. This was intended to identify underweight populations, as a means of targeting improvements in order to build up weak armies. Hence, the risk of dying follows a bell shaped curve with increased mortality risks at either end of the BMI spectrum. Thus, Hacking (2006) argues a BMI of between 25-29 (the overweight category) carries an increased but trivial mortality risk. This is rarely acknowledged in obesity discourses.

My politicisation in the area of 'fat studies' continued via my attendance at an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2010) funded 'Fat Studies and

Health at Every Size (HAES)' seminar series. These two factions, according to Cooper (1998) align with the fat acceptance movement and other embodied human rights campaigns from the 1960s, which focus on gender, sexuality, race and disability. I therefore no longer consider 'obesity' an uncontested scientific discourse and have become politicized in the use of the terms 'fat' and 'fatness' instead. Indeed, I now find it difficult to use the term 'obesity' at all. I assume everyone is aware of 'fat studies' as a political movement and its underlying principles, when in fact they are not. For example, in preparing my staff interests for the department I work for, I was asked to explain 'fat', did I mean fat in terms of animal fats for example or did I mean obesity? I wanted to reply in capital letters that of course I did not mean 'obesity'! I consider this a highly contested and political domain. I prefer to align myself to 'fat studies' as this has an element of empowering those stigmatized and marginalized by the medicalization of fatness. I did not of course reply in this way. I just requested that 'fat studies' be included instead. Although, even this can be misunderstood as using inverted commas draws attention to it as potentially different to other perhaps more serious or at least uncontested areas of academic study. These two areas of interest, feminism and fat activism have therefore informed the background to my study.

'Food' for me is a highly gendered arena, in terms of its relation to the 'fat' body, which has been problematized for women in particular (Bordo, 2003 and Lupton, 1996). Academically 'food' has not been considered a serious topic and 'food and food making have long been marginalized in social research' (Brady, 2011:323). This is partly a result of the 'gender politics of academia' (Deutsch and Miller, 2007:393) and the long-standing Cartesian dualism that persists in

demarcating and privileging masculine endeavours over more 'feminized' scholarly enquiries. This habit of thinking in dichotomies (Oakley, 1992) or binary oppositions (Levi-Strauss, 1969) ensures that feminized practices relating to domestic or bodily functions tend to be overlooked as a site of knowledge production (Brady, 2011:323). However, it is through these embodied practices that identities are formed and the performativity of gender and class for example are re-articulated.

The origins of my own particular interest in food can be traced back to my childhood and is partly about sweets or the type of confectionary that James (1979) refers to as 'kets'. She discusses the notion of kets as belonging to a specific domain that marks a clear distinction between childhood and adulthood. The sweets I recall from my own childhood are representative of a time of freedom and carefree abandon. This was a time when three pence in 'old money' would buy a Mars bar, one that my mother 'helpfully' cut in half one evening because she was convinced that I could not eat a whole one (I was sure that I could). At other times I would join a mob of children as they piled into the tiny sweetshop next to my primary school. Here the older children would say to the shopkeeper 'as the black jacks and fruit salad chews are two for a half penny could we have one for nothing'? Then on Saturday mornings I would embark on what seemed like a great excursion to the shops on our housing estate with my sister and the girl next door. We would continue our escape from home and share a curly wurly, or a bag of chocolate buttons perched up a tree, swinging our legs in the branches, or on the swings and roundabouts in the rec.

On other Saturdays we would go to our Nana's house in Liverpool; where I would race my sister to the shop at the end of the road, our sticky hands clutching the pocket money Nana had given us. Once inside the shop we seemed to spend an age perusing the jars of sherbet lemons, pineapple chunks, strawberry bon-bons and honeycomb bars. This was a time when it really did not matter whether these sweets were healthy or fattening or free from preservatives or e-numbers. We had only ever had lemon juice squeezed from a plastic lemon onto our pancakes, had never eaten or even seen a pineapple, and fresh strawberries were only ever available (if we were lucky) in June. And the sticky honeycomb bars that we liked to eat had less to do with honeybees and more to do with a chemical alchemy of sugar and bicarbonate of soda. These sweets or 'kets' were a treat and strictly for children. Adults had their own sweets at Christmas, Turkish delight, dark chocolate liqueurs, sugared almonds, jellied fruits and soft syrupy dates that could only be carefully eased out of their coffin shaped container with a sharp stick that came in the box. I recall commiserating with my mum as I assumed that she did not like sweets and that this was something that people grew out of, like shoes. I had no concept then that my mother was actually engaged in a body regime or restricting her food intake or purging, in order to be 'attractive for her husband by being slim and fashionably dressed' (Charles and Kerr, 1988:33) and this was long before representations of 'yummy mummies' (Allen and Osgood, 2009) and 'Chav Mums' (Tyler, 2008).

I do not know what sparked James's (1979) interest in sweets, whether she participated in the delights of a sherbet dib dab or sherbet fountain, when the liquorice straw would become so sticky the paper holding it collapsed in on

itself. James *et al* (2009:248) argue that 'kets' are associated with lower socio-economic class and at a BSA Food Conference; James (2010) claimed that junk food meant a junk childhood. Indeed, in a climate of moral approbation around food and foodways, government discourses present middle class parenting strategies as the norm and pathologise alternatives (Deans, 2013). Indeed, Jackson (2009:248), notes that it 'may be perfectly rational for working-class mothers to feed 'junk-food' to their children as a cheap way of providing sufficient calories to fill them up, especially if they know that healthier food will go to waste'. The middle class children I babysat for in the 1980s had cupboards full of 'healthy' sweets or raisins packaged in little boxes reminiscent of the less healthy Toffee Poppets. It did not occur to me then that I would give these raisins in little boxes to my daughter whose hands would carefully pick them out of the box, one by one. Or by doing so that I was embracing a means of demonstrating a middle class habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). So that when I became a parent in the 1990s, my children only ever received sweets from me at Easter and Christmas in the form of chocolate advent calendars and chocolate Easter eggs. Suffice to say by means of an introduction, our relationships with food are far more complex than they may first appear. They belong to a particular habitus, one that is gendered, classed, temporal and historical.

### **1:6. Outline of thesis**

In the following chapters I present a review of the key literature, my methodological approach, four data chapters and a reflections chapter. I 'play' with the chapter headings of all of the chapters and for the data chapters use the structure of a meal in a French restaurant, beginning with *une entrée, le plat*

*principal, le dessert* and rounding off the meal with *un digestif*<sup>10</sup>. The final reflections chapter is *les petits fours*<sup>11</sup>. In Chapter Two, *A la carte, time and a taste of reflection*, I weave together the rationale and background to my study with a review of some key literature. I need to position my work in the relevant field(s) so that it may be judged in terms of its contribution. However, rather than present a tidied up literature review I include some of the emotional dilemmas that presented themselves to me when reading and reviewing the texts in preparation for the writing up of the thesis. I am committed to what Pelias (2004:11) refers to as ‘genres of the heart’, specifically what he has termed an ‘autobiographical genre’ or a methodological call in which the self writes work that shows:

...a self struggling to understand, a self constructing an identity. Turn the page and find another self. Turn the page and find a contradiction. Turn the page and find the self, slip away. They see the self as a springboard, as a witness.

I therefore demonstrate that like all academic work, the reviewing of literature is an affective practice, the affects of reading and rereading collects or sediments in the body and this has had an impact on how and what I write.

In Chapter Three, *La spécialité du chef, an auto/biographical methodological journey*, I incorporate issues of theorised subjectivity (Letherby 2013) as well as my training as a sociologist with a strong interest in reflexivity and the ethics of research.

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<sup>10</sup> ‘digestif’, noun, something, especially a drink, taken as an aid to digestion, either before or after a meal, Collins English Dictionary, (2009) Complete and Unabridged (10<sup>th</sup> ed). Retrieved August 01, 2013, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/digestif>

<sup>11</sup> A small French fancy biscuit or cake often served at the end of a meal. Strictly speaking they are oven-baked little cakes (‘four’ is French for oven) and were classically made with choux pastry or flan pastry. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/petit\\_fours](http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/petit_fours), accessed 08/09/2013



I examine the four themes that I have identified within the data, family/maternal identities, health, the body and the foodie, in chapters four to seven. I capture an essence of each of these themes through the chapter headings that include a key quote from a respondent associated with that theme. Indeed, I use some respondents' narratives as representatives of these themes because it has not been possible to include all of the respondents or their narratives. I am also present in the chapters, though less so in chapter seven, because in this chapter I consider a foodie identity and elite foodways as exclusory and predominantly male. The four themes flow into each other and the boundaries between them are fluid. In the first two chapters for example, the 'care and convenience' and 'health and indulgent' antinomies (Warde, 1997) are significant threads. Although, all four of Wardes' (1997) antinomies can be associated with cultural capital and these along with gender are interwoven into all four of the data chapters.

Chapter Four, *Une entrée, 'everything I cook is cooked with love' (Faye)* centres on family practices (Morgan, 1996, 2011), foodways and maternal identities, whereby feeding the family 'healthy' food is a means of demonstrating social, symbolic and cultural capital. It is part of a particular middle class habitus that favours intensive mothering (Hays, 1996).

The flavour of Chapter Five I capture in its title; *Le plat principal: 'food is no longer the innocent pleasure that it was' (Kelly)*. Following on from feeding the family 'healthy' food, this centres on a 'health as capital' model (Bendelow, 2009). I highlight the tensions inherent in presenting healthy foodways as a means of performing responsible individualism and self-care. I make a

distinction between 'healthy' food and food used to treat conditions in the form of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM). The use of food as CAM has implications for maternal identity and this is examined.

At the heart of Chapter Six, *Le dessert, 'I try not to eat sweet things' (Ophelia)*, is control of the female body. Respondents demonstrated how they had learned to read and talk about fat on bodies, their own and others, as part of a cultural script of heteronormative femininity. Hence 'fat talk' (Ambjörnsson, 2005) and 'lipoliteracy' (Graham, 2005) are conceptualised as a means of doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Generally, women wrote about their intensely difficult relationships with food, in which they struggled to practice self-care whilst simultaneously committed to notions of caring for others through foodwork.

On the other hand the body was usually missing from the data explored in Chapter Seven, *Un digestif, 'generally speaking it was mostly a diet of beer' (Sam)*. Here, the focal point is a foodie identity and hegemonic masculinities. This is about developing an epicurean taste, fine dining and culinary skills as a means of demonstrating elite cultural capital. 'Economy and extravagance' and 'novelty and tradition' antinomies were at play within a culinary field that values cultural omnivorousness (Peterson and Kern, 1996).

Finally, in Chapter Eight, *Les petits fours, 'a must, a pinch of salt' (Linda)*, I reflect upon the benefits of an auto/biographical approach to research. Overall, what I hope to achieve, in line with Letherby's (2003) feminist approach to research, is a relatively undisturbed research field, as well as an honest

representation of the research process. Before this meal can begin however it is usual to select from the menu, which is 'a la carte', so that items can be selected individually. The dish of the day however or the focus of the next chapter is 'time', as this is significant in terms of the accumulation of cultural capital.

## *Chapter 2: A la carte - Time and a taste of reflection*

### **2:1. Chapter Outline**

This is not a traditional literature review chapter, although it is not wholly unconventional either. I weave elements of autobiography with the background, rationale and review of the literature. The reviewing of the literature is not just confined to or completed by the end of this chapter either; literature is used to contextualise each of the four data chapters as well. I do not map each section of this chapter directly on to the data chapters; instead I present a journey, which incorporates the themes I develop, the family or maternal identities, health, the body and the foodie (though not in this order).

I begin briefly with how my methodological approach distinguishes my work from others in the field of food studies with its focus on auto/biography, computer mediated communication (CMC) and theorised subjectivity (Letherby 2013). I locate my personal troubles (Mills, 1959) in the context of tensions between maternal (family) and foodie identities or issues of gender and class. I identify recent demographic changes and the implications of these on family foodways and maternal identity as a potential source of social, symbolic and cultural capital. In terms of health and the body I discuss public discourses on 'obesity' and media representations of appropriate mothering in terms of the governance of 'healthy' foodways and 'healthy' bodies. These are considered within a context of social, symbolic and cultural capital that draws on feminism after Bourdieu (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004).



writing. I do however incorporate these reflections. All work, including academic work is an affective practice; following Wetherell (2012:96) this is a socially constructed emotional, embodied, situated and practical activity infused with sedimented social and personal history. This sedimentation is like lime scale fixing itself to the inside a kettle, it becomes part of the material body of the kettle, naturalised.

Academic convention holds that thorough literature reviews of the field be undertaken before, throughout and/or once the research has been completed depending on the extent to which it is wholly iterative or not. I have therefore been engaged in the reading and re-reading of academic texts on gender, food, families, health, body, emotion and culture. Usually this reading is reviewed and presented as part of an overall rationale for the project that enables it to be measured or judged against everything that has gone before. In this sense the literature review is presented as a rational and purely cognitive process. Why is it that the affective practice of research is only explored within the methodology or the findings or the discussion? In Tamboukou's work (2010a, 2010b) on epistolary traditions there are glimpses into her embodied, corporeal senses and these are interwoven or folded into the narratives of the other. It is the revealing of her embodied self in the research process that enlivens these biographical accounts. This does not detract from the rigour of her work but adds richness, texture and authenticity. I use the first person in my account of 'reviewing' the literature, because reading and reviewing the literature is a deeply affective endeavour and affect is a thread that runs through the project.

An auto/biographical research approach is unusual amongst scholars engaged in cultural food studies. There has been research conducted on food memories from Lupton (1996) for example, but these have tended to use short snapshots from the past, rather than an auto/biographical assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1998). Lupton's (1996:156) food memories research was conducted in the early 1990s and her analysis of her student's written food memories revealed the ways in which memories of everyday 'life [are] socially constructed and patterned [and the extent to which] memories are part of a shared socio-cultural experience'. Lupton does not include her self in this analysis. There is no hint of her own food memories or how these may have influenced her or her analysis of her students' memories. Her focus is on food occasions, rather than everyday food memories.

It is worth noting that the positioning of the researcher has been more common in embodiment research, but less so in food studies. Indeed, both Saguy (2013) and Lupton (2013) position their own bodies in relation to their work on fat, whilst Murcott (1983, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2011), Warde (1997) and Lupton (1996) for example, do not disclose their subjective positions regarding food consumption, food preferences or what it is about food that interests them as individuals. This is despite Murcott's 'personal view' (2011) explaining her role in the 1980s and 1990s along with Charles and Kerr (1988) as significant contributors to the development of a distinct sociology of food and the establishment of a BSA Food Study Group in 1992. However, in this 'personal view' there is actually no discussion of anything personal, instead it is an academic account of her role and a commentary on the direction of the discipline past and future.

The use of CMC or correspondence techniques (Letherby and Zdrowski, 1995) to gather data also marks my study as distinctive. Although the Mass Observation Archive (MOA) based at Sussex University (1939-1955) and the Mass Observation Project (MOP) make use of written communications on specific topics or 'directives' such as food (amongst other things), this is not CMC or a correspondence technique, there is no dialogic exchange or relationship developed between researcher and respondent. The on-going MOP collects and archives written answers (via post and e-mail) from a number of self-selecting individuals in the UK and has done so since 1981. Directives have included 'the price of veg' Summer 1981, 'BSE and beef' Summer 1996, and 'eating animals' Summer 2009, for example (MOP, 2013). The purpose of the directives differs from my research in that the MOP respondents are not being invited to write their life histories around food, or to engage in a correspondence relationship with a researcher. This is not to suggest that these archives are not useful repositories of data, rather they represent a similar but different approach to collecting information about food (see Nettleton and Uprichard, 2011).

Ethically, because of my commitment to feminist approaches to research, I wanted to conduct my study from a position of theorised subjectivity (Letherby 2013). I did not want to objectify or treat respondents as research objects. This is considered and reflected upon in more detail in Chapter Three. Suffice to say, there are other types of food data available, such as that collected by the Department of Health (DOH) and Food Standards Agency (FSA), whose researchers have carried out a rolling programme of National Diet and Nutrition Surveys (NDNS) (Bates *et al*, 2011), which have consisted of computer assisted



personal interviews, dietary data (a four day food diary) and measurements taken by a nurse, including blood and urine, presumably to check the accuracy of the participants' diaries. Indeed, social scientists committed to quantitative methods have tended to make use of large-scale surveys, such as those conducted by the FSA or time-use surveys Warde *et al* (2007b) or content analysis of magazines (Warde, 1997, Burridge and Barker, 2009).

The 'changing families, changing food' project (2005-2008) is the most recent study on family foodways in the UK (Jackson *et al*, 2009 and James *et al*, 2010). The rationale was the increase in diverse family forms and the potential impact of these changes on 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991). There are two points worth noting here, firstly that I do not consider the family a fixed theoretical entity, a 'zombie category' or a 'negotiated family' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, xxi). Instead, following Morgan (1996, 2011) families are what families do. Secondly, I argue that informal care carried out within the domestic sphere is highly gendered and this has not significantly changed. Hence, there is a consistency over time regarding who is responsible for informal care or feeding the family (DeVault, 1991), mostly women and mothers. It is notable that recent research on gender seems to focus on food and foodways as leisure or lifestyle activities for men. Hence, men engage in foodie practices or 'choose' to become involved in the domestic sphere (Szabo, 2013, Johnston and Baumann, 2012, Meah and Jackson, 2013). Neither of these lifestyle/leisure options is considered possible for mothers/women engaged in the invisible work of feeding the family (DeVault, 1991). Indeed, in terms of the individualisation thesis, 'motherhood' severely restricts everyday movement and

future possibilities for women (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:70). Hence, individualisation is masculine (Lewis, 2007).

Jackson (2009:248) oversaw fifteen separate projects, organised into three strands, dealing with pregnancy and (early) motherhood, childhood and family life and families and the wider community. This included, quantitative analysis of long-run data sets from the late-1950s onwards, plus a range of social surveys. They also used qualitative life histories from the early twentieth century, the 1930s-50s, and 2000, plus archival, documentary and textual analysis, cohort studies, in-depth interviews and focus groups, ethnography and participatory research. This represents the most comprehensive research undertaken in the field of family food studies since the ESRC funded *'Nations Diet'* in 1992 (Murcott, 1998). However, I consider the rationale for collecting written auto/biographical data on food for my study distinctive in that it starts from the premise that individuals are able to construct their own biographies and examine their own agency in relation to their food histories. I argue that respondents and myself were engaged in a continuous reflexive project of the self (Giddens, 1992). This links to feminist approaches to research that stress the significance of the researcher's reflexivity. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

### **2:3. 'Personal troubles' - locating the field/self**

I have struggled to decide which path to take through the literature. This was especially pertinent when locating my work within an academic field, which one? Whilst this could be considered a consequence of academic Cartesianism, academic interests and 'turns' have contributed to the muddying of potential fields of study. The original rationale for my study was my desire to

escape a Cartesian mind-body dualism or what Oakley (1992) refers to as the habit of thinking in dichotomies. I wanted to avoid these binary oppositions and the tensions between structural and post-structural approaches. My effort to escape however has instead highlighted further the extent to which our everyday lived experiences are gendered and relational. For me, it is difficult not to consider gender and class as significant. Power relationships and hierarchies continue to influence who can work and play. My gender marks my choice of methodology, as qualitative research and auto/biography are often viewed as soft, woolly feminised approaches to research. And I am anxious about documenting my path through the literature, as it is not linear or Cartesian, but messy and emotional. Of course a focus on emotion as an embodied affective practice is useful as it attempts to emphasise the corporeal aspects of thinking. And a focus on theorized subjectivity (Letherby 2013) ensures a reflexive practice and approach, which highlights these concerns as significant. Indeed, it is acknowledged that emotion plays an important role in habitus and contemporary class politics (Adkins, 2004:13).

There are two interrelated purposes of my study, firstly to explore the food memories of others, and secondly to critically examine the social and cultural milieu in which these are articulated. In keeping with Mills' (1959) argument in favour of the 'sociological imagination' personal troubles and public issues are interconnected. In the former, memory is considered a creative process with emotions as markers of the construction of the self and agency (Crawford *et al*, 1992:126). In the latter, as Lupton claims 'memories are sociocultural, individual and collective and contain the conditions for self-development, [so that] people grow into their emotions' (1998: 168). To reiterate, emotion 'makes a unique

contribution to action and agency, without it persons are lost in time with the past a remote and future inaccessible' (Turner and Stets, 2005:417). And, as Barbalet (2001:08) demonstrates an interest in emotion is due to increased individualism, hence an:

autopoietic aggrandisement or development of the self without regards for other selves (a result of market and political individuation isolating self in contained universe) [means the] self [has become] a centre of emotional feeling.

In light of this I explain my position in auto/biographical extracts from the preface written for my PhD transfer process in the summer of 2012:

I trained as a sociologist in the early 1990s, within a 'post-modern', academic climate that appeared to reject notions of objectivity and value-freedom in social science research as potentially unrealistic, if not impossible goals.... I found myself working within a scientific paradigm that valued reflexivity and interpretative approaches to research... sociologists, such as Giddens (1992) and Beck (1992) challenged the idea of a fixed and stable identity. They emphasized notions of reflexivity and the negotiation of the 'self' within a context of shifting boundaries in which the 'meta-narratives' of modernity and the founding fathers of sociology; Mark, Weber and Durkheim were being dissolved...

...All of these notions fed in to a general milieu of relativity; there were no fixed, dogmatic rules of engagement in (or with) the social world. The self was merely a free-floating product of consumption and the ontological insecurity that was bound up with this, seemed fine to me. It was against this background that I began my doctoral study, therefore there will be, a representation of the self as researcher in relation to the respondents, interplay between biography and autobiography, an exploration of the lives of the researched and the researcher and an inter-textual analysis of the whole process. For me the research process has and should always be a reflexive endeavour, it is about an honest and open account of the process, warts and all. Of course as an undergraduate this may have been a lot easier and less risky than it is for me now.

However, on another level it could be argued that the seeds of this study were sown in response to the public and medical discourses surrounding the 'obesity epidemic' (Gard, 2011) or 'moral panic' (Cohen, [1972] 2011) concerning obesity. Here food is only one part of the 'obesity panic' story. There are many

other elements to it, the over consumption of food, an obesogenic environment and a decline in levels of physical activity means that an emphasis on individualised foodways can only ever partially explain the perceived rise in rates of obesity. Thus, existing structural inequalities in society around gender, class and ethnicity for example impact upon not only who is likely to become obese, but also how they are treated when they are (Rothblum and Solovay, 2009). In my search for a route through the literature I have realised, that my attachment to the individualisation thesis suggested by Beck (1992) and Giddens (1992) is misplaced. I was too eager to dismiss notions of patriarchal oppression as belonging to a past epoch and to accept the idea of 'feminist success' (McRobbie, 2009:14). I had, as a child like Bradley (2007:12) and Elizabeth I, 'clearly wanted to be a boy'. Both my sister and I wanted to be boys, this is what we were told by our mother was what father wanted (and society preferred). I recall informing my sister with mixed emotions, that she would not grow up to be a boy and that she would always be a girl. I therefore consider the concept of individualism to be masculine, particularly with its focus on the autonomous worker (player) (Lewis 2007).

So why study food? This is a question I have been asked (by men, not women I would add) at several conferences. Partly it is about embodiment and a feminised subjectivity that considers foodways and fat talk as part of an affective practice of a gendered, self-surveillance and bodily mastery that has been instilled since childhood. A protestant ethic that considered eating too much as sinful (from my father), whilst simultaneously having to contemplate the Biblical contention that one should 'eat, drink and be merry' (Luke [1611] 2013, 12:19) (from my mother). Hence, I wanted to explore the cultural capital

associated with the 'thin ideal' (Germov and Williams, 2004) or the tyranny of slenderness (Chernin 1981; LeBesco 2001) as an enduring cultural symbol of contemporary femininity. What Bourdieu (1984:175) refers to as an 'ethic of sobriety for the sake of slimness'.

My interest in food and foodways is also a response to the legitimization of particular forms of maternal and foodie identities. I consider intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) and foodie practices to be about elitism, status, power and exclusion. I started university in the autumn of 1991 when my son was almost a year old. It was there that I learned within the context of exploring second wave feminism that 'motherhood was a socially constructed patriarchal institution' (O'Brien Hallstein, 2010:132) and distinct from the act of mothering (Rich, 1977). I considered that if it was the rigidity of gender roles that were keeping women confined to the domestic sphere then a dis-identification with the institution of motherhood might ensure equality. However, I encountered a kind of 'matrophobia', a fear of becoming like one's own mother that Lawler (2000) takes from Rich (1997) and identifies as being embedded in classed processes of social mobility. Lawler (2000) pitches her argument against the individualisation thesis espoused by Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991, 1992) to highlight how upwardly mobile women as autonomous, individualised selves, secure middle class positions and then dis-identify with their working class mothers. I would add that my maternal identity at that time positioned me as deviant. I was a single<sup>12</sup> mother and this was not considered desirable, particularly in the aftermath of Murray's (1990) exploration of the British 'underclass' and his connections between crime, unemployment and

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<sup>12</sup> I use the term 'single' as I was not married. I was not a 'lone' mother as my son's father was living with me. I could of course use the term 'unmarried' but this assumes that being 'married' is preferable. I use quotation marks to acknowledge the power in these prefixes to mother.

illegitimacy. Hence, at that time, I found myself on the boundaries of what might be considered appropriate motherhood.

Similarly, when considering a foodie identity, although I have a very clear recollection of my first 'fine dining' experience, which was with my father at a French Restaurant in Little Clarendon Street in Oxford in 1982 (I had frogs legs and snails) and a long standing interest in the culinary arts, the emotional capital required in feeding the family, is as Reay (2004) identifies more about investing in others rather than the self. This is in direct opposition to a foodie identity and I am therefore excluded from this position as well. Indeed, in acquiring a foodie identity it is noted that:

...to be a foodie requires self-absorption, self-love, self-delusion, self confidence; in other words selfishness to a degree unsurpassed in modern times (Simmonds 1990:130-1, cited by Ashley et al 2004:149).

Hays (1996:8) definition of 'intensive mothering' on the other hand is 'child centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive and financially expensive'. Hays (1996: 9, 86) claims it has become the 'proper ideology of contemporary mothering for women, across race and class lines, even if not all women actually practice it' (*ibid*). And O'Brien Hallstein (2010:108) contends that as a result women now have to negotiate a 'split subjectivity between old and new gender expectations'. There is an added expectation that women need to be both 'successful at work and successful as mothers' (Douglas and Michaels, 2004:12).

Indeed, after a thorough exploration of the literature on food culture, I found an over-estimation of the extent to which gender (as well as class, ethnicity and

other structural inequalities) has become unimportant for identity formation. These stratifications determine inequalities on many levels (Marmot and Bell, 2012). Women are still excluded from elite cultural positions and identities (Adkins and Lury, 1999, Adkins and Jokinen, 2008). Is it by disavowing the motherhood role that women have any possibility of getting a 'feel for the game' in the cultural field (Bourdieu, 1984:4)? Is it even possible to be a 'foodie' or a 'chowhound' whilst engaged in 'intensive mothering' practices? The rigidity of these gendered and classed positions has implications for men who cook and women who do not. I realised that my search for *'the'* literature to explain all of this did not exist. I was disappointed that there was no contemporary food and feminism text and it was still mainly middle class men who were able to play in the field of food culture.

Throughout this chapter I make a contribution to the field of cultural food studies through a focus on feminism, cultural capital and foodways. I contend that specific middle class strategies of 'feeding the family' (DeVault 1991), have become a way of establishing an elite status (Bourdieu, 1984). I acknowledge that a 'foodie' identity is usually the means of accruing cultural capital in the field of food and foodways. This centres on a leisurely pursuit and acquisition of skills and embodied foodways that sediment over time. In the field of culinary arts, the 'foodie' inhabits a particular gendered habitus. My study is distinct because I argue that this form of cultural capital both excludes and valorises those involved in 'feeding the family' on a number of levels. It excludes, firstly because 'feeding the family' is located within a feminised domestic sphere in which men are rewarded for developing affective caring skills. This is similar to the feminisation of economic work in the public sphere, where Adkins and



Jokinen (2008) note, men are rewarded for skills that are naturalised and considered part of a feminine habitus. Femininity on the other hand rarely carries status or capital. This reinforces the doxic order that caring is part of a natural feminine habitus.

Secondly, when naturalised as women's work, 'feeding the family' (DeVault 1991) is conceptualised as hurried, low skilled, mundane and routinized. Hence, within a context of moral approbation regarding bodies out of control 'feeding the family' has become a means of acquiring social, symbolic and cultural capital, with mothers in particular positioned as responsible for both the health and size of their own and other bodies. A focus on maternal identity does not exclude women who are not mothers as it has implications for contemporary conceptualisations of femininity and class that reach beyond the actual activity of mothering. I draw heavily on the work of Bourdieu and materialist feminist scholars such as Adkins and Skeggs (2004), Lawler (2008), McRobbie (2008) Reay (2004) and Skeggs (2004b). I position my study within a contemporary foodscape that considers gendered and classed aspects of the foodie and intensive mothering identity significant. A central aspect of understanding how cultural capital works relates to notions of time and this is conceptualised further.

#### **2:4. Public Issues – changing times**

There have been considerable demographic changes in the UK since the pioneering work on family foodways in the UK from Murcott (1982, 1983) and Charles and Kerr (1988). For example, data from the ONS suggest that there has been an overall decline in family size since 1971, from an average of 2.0 children to 1.7 in 2012. This trend has seen an increase in one children families

and a decline in families with three or more children (Gask, 2013). There has also been an increase in the proportion of dual-earner couples, both with and without dependant children over the last ten years (Walling, 2005).

The employment rate for women in the UK according to the Labour Force Survey (2013) was 53.3 per cent for women and 64 per cent for men<sup>13</sup>. The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2013) uses Labour Force Survey data and shows that the employment rate of women as a proportion of the female working age population (15-64) in the UK has remained fairly static from 2005-2012 at around 65 per cent. However, according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2013), the vast majority of men in employment work full-time (86-87 per cent) compared to just over half of all women in employment (56-57 per cent). Significantly more women in employment work part-time (43 per cent) compared to men (13 per cent). For mothers in couple families, where there are increased opportunities to share childcare responsibilities, employment rates were higher (72 per cent in 2010) than for mothers in single-parent families (55 per cent) (EHRC, 2013).

McDowell (2008:156) identifies how UK labour market participation has become a moral obligation for women and that this also relates to a new model of appropriate motherhood/mothering. A 'good' mother is employed and this radically reworks the connections between domesticity, femininity and mothering (Adkins and Jokinen, 2008: 146).

In the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) data collected in 2012 demonstrates the persistence of inequality in the division of labour in the home

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<sup>13</sup> All women and men of working age.

despite women's (ONS, 2011a) and mothers (ONS, 2011b) increased participation in the labour market. Hence, women are still assumed to be responsible for childcare and domestic tasks. Indeed Scott and Clery (2013:115) argue following Esping-Anderson (2009) and Hochschild and Machung (2003) for an 'incomplete' or 'stalled' revolution in gender equality. Women report spending an average of 13 hours on housework and 23 hours on caring for family members each week; the equivalent figures for men are 8 hours and 10 hours respectively. Both sexes view their relative contributions as unfair; 60 per cent of women report doing more than their fair share (compared with just 15 per cent of men), while 37 per cent of men report doing less than their fair share (compared with just 6 per cent of women). Scott and Clery (2013:120) identify ambivalence in attitudes towards the earner and carer roles for women. On the one hand there 'should' be equality in the domestic sphere, whilst on the other '41 per cent agree being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay'.

The Great British Class Survey (GBCS) uses categories of social, cultural and economic capital. Savage et al (2013:226) argue that elite culture in the UK has become more omnivorous, liberal, with individuals keen to partake in both highbrow and popular forms of culture. There is therefore potentially more pressure on the middle classes to differentiate themselves from the masses. In their study they used 27 cultural variables, including eating, leisure, musical and holiday preferences. They identify highbrow culture as classical music, attending stately homes, museums, art galleries, jazz, theatre and eating at French restaurants. Emerging cultural capital is associated with video games, social networking sites, the use of the internet, playing and watching sport,

spending time with friends, the gym, gigs, rap music and rock. Economic capital is measured in terms of household income, savings, and house price and is based on household assets not individuals. They use these cultural markers as a means of mapping seven classes. None of these categorisations include what might be considered traditionally feminised practices, which suggests that cultural capital is still located within a masculine field.

In an era of late modernity, there has been a blurring of boundaries between home/work, work/none work, shopping as leisure/work, as well as what might be considered traditional gender roles within the family (Morgan, 2011). As Adkins (2003) claims there has been a restructuring of gender regimes in the economic field of action, with women entering the labour market in increasing numbers and taking up high status occupations. However, despite women's entry into the labour market, certain conventional arrangements of gender have not been dismantled but have become more entrenched. Hence, Adkins (2003:29) argues the process of individualisation is more complex for women who have to negotiate the demands of 'living one's own life' with the conventional expectation of 'being there for others'. There is unevenness in the transformation of gender due to class positions and Adkins (2003) argues that there has not been a feminisation of the public sphere; instead individuals in the economic sphere adopt masculine and/or feminine characteristics as work performances and to accrue workplace capital.

Adkins and Jokinen (2008) identify four shifts in work/life practices that have implications for gender roles and identity. Firstly the development of the division of labour between the private and public sphere, with women confined to the

home and the sphere of reproduction. The second shift has the dual earner family as the socio-political ideal and is associated with the second shift of women's unpaid labour in the home (Hochschild, [1989] 2003). In the third shift Hochschild's 1997 study *When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* is identified as influential in highlighting the ideological and affective reversal of home and work (Adkins and Jokinen, 2008:143). Hence middle class women tend to feel more at home in the workplace where they experience, respect, joy and self fulfilment (*ibid*), as opposed to the unappreciated and tedious work in the home (reminiscent of Oakley's, 1979 *Housewife*).

The fourth shift is when the boundaries between home and work have become obscure and dissolved. Adkins and Jokinen (2008) highlight that these are not chronological or sequential shifts and may all exist simultaneously. What is significant is that in the fourth shift, what might be considered the work/life balance model assumes a particular type of labour capital, as something that can be accrued over time and this has implications for women who are in and out of the labour market because of child rearing responsibilities. This blurring of the boundaries between work/home may help to explain a commitment to intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) or feeding the family healthy meals from scratch as a means of securing cultural capital. The question should not be how men cook in the domestic sphere, but why women are still dominant in this field. Why have women not relinquished the responsibility of feeding the family despite competing demands and the negative associations between housework and domestic labour? Why has there not been a full-scale negotiation of domestic roles as promised by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002)?

Feminism and Bourdieu (1984:2) inform my approach, because I am interested in consumption rather than production and 'consumption is considered a process of communication'. Food can be considered an art and has aesthetic qualities and is used as a means of establishing taste and distinction. It has cultural codes that can be read and understood. My focus is on the use of food as an indicator of lifestyles, or a commitment to a certain marker of social and cultural identity, because the costs of basic food have declined. In Bourdieu's (1984) conceptualisation of habitus, he was interested in embodiment in terms of the ease and cultivation and naturalness of practices. He was also interested in struggles over temporal and spatial power within fields. Individual and collective histories and biographies are therefore important. Reay (2004) argues that emotional capital disrupts neat links between capital investment in others rather than the self. Adkins and Skeggs (2004:22) claim that it is possible to work against and through Bourdieu and to put his theories to different uses, particularly in the field of the family, hence:

...the family can function as a field in which normalcy can be both a kind of capital within the field of the family and a form of symbolic capital that represents accumulated privilege in other fields.

Adkins and Skeggs (2004), claim that Bourdieu recognises the centrality of the mother because of the cultural capital that is effectively transmitted in the family. Adkins and Lury (1999) have shown how men can turn the use of feminine dispositions such as caring or domestic cooking or feeding the family to their advantage or as a source of cultural capital in a way that women can not, because these attributes are considered naturally occurring female dispositions. Similarly, Bennett *et al* (2009:258) highlight how employees may be recruited for emotional rather than technical skills and that emotional capital is considered 'natural' for women. They identify, 'technical, affective, national

and subcultural capital', with emotional capital acquired in domestic/private interactions, as a means of personal/familial and social reproduction.

Indeed, Adkins (2005) and Adkins and Jokinen (2008), explore the feminization of the public sphere in which men utilise traditionally gendered aspects of work, such as empathy or caring. Others identify how food and foodways as leisure or lifestyle activities have become fields of play in which men may choose to transcend the boundaries between work and play when feeding the family (Szabo, 2013, Johnston and Baumann, 2012, Meah and Jackson, 2013), again by appropriating gendered aspects of foodwork such as accommodating dietary preferences or caring about this. Hence, in both of these fields, whether foodwork or foodplay, it is assumed that women do not engage in the acquisition of cultural capital for themselves. Indeed the model of individualisation assumes an 'ideal type', someone free from responsibility for others, though paradoxically engaged in self-care.

### **2:5. Feeding the family – cultural capital and maternal identities**

An example of the significance of foodways in securing social, symbolic and cultural capital and demonstrating appropriate mothering can be illustrated by reference to the media furore around Jamie Oliver's comments in a *Radio Times* interview (that coincided with a TV series and book launch) in which he said:

You might remember that scene in [a previous series] of *Ministry of Food*, with the mum and the kid eating chips and cheese out of Styrofoam containers, and behind them is a massive f\*\*\*\*\* TV.  
(Deans, 2013)

It is notable that it is the mum (not dad) that is implicated here. Oliver uses cultural markers of class status to highlight how 'mum' was breaking the rules

and conventions associated with appropriate or aspirational class based foodways and intensive mothering (Hays 1996). We can assume that they were using their fingers and not a knife and fork and that the meal was not on a plate around a table but instead eaten in front of a 'massive f\*\*\*\*\* TV'. Oliver uses these cultural markers to commit acts of symbolic violence, defined by Bourdieu and Wacquant (2002:167), as 'the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity', to confer judgement and moral approbation regarding appropriate family foodways and mothering practices. On the one hand this assumes that appropriate mothering is reducible to this one act. On the other, it highlights the extent to which status is embedded in everyday family practices (Morgan, 1996, 2011). Food is 'saturated with class connotations' (Seymour, 2013: unpaginated) and becomes part of a politics of aspiration (Andreou, 2013) or dis-identification. Indeed, I concur with Bennett *et al* (2009:259), who argue that 'good taste' continues to create, mark and consolidate social divisions' in the UK. They argue that 'culture' is not a matter of indifference for the powerful and for some sections of the middle class it remains critical and a source of ontological security. Hence, I need to re-evaluate Bourdieu's theoretical framework in the context of analysing my data and as Huppertz (2009:45) notes, many 'feminists have appropriated [his framework] in order to examine the relationship between gender and class'.

I had considered weaving some of Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) concepts into this thesis, but had been wary of continuing with this after a negative reaction to a paper given at the BSA auto/biography study group conference in December 2011 on Celebrity, entitled '*Jamie became famous and food and cooking became trendy' an exploration of the role of celebrity chefs in food*



*auto/biographical accounts*. I presented some of the foodie narratives within the context of cultural capital, attachments, hostility and cultural omnivorousness (Peterson and Kern, 1996). The contention from the audience was that distinctions between '*haute cuisine*' and peasant food were specific to French culture and therefore Bourdieu's extensive body of work could not be considered useful outside of France. This experience discouraged me from further exploring Bourdieu's (1984) contribution to the field of food studies for some time. In *Distinction* (1984: 95-8) food is relegated to the sphere of arbitrary taste in a hierarchy of legitimacies with music, painting, sculpture, literature and theatre at the top. There are hierarchies at work within each field, but what is surprising is that as Jenkins (1992:132) notes there is a 'world of difference between *haute cuisine* and a peasant *cassoulet*'. However, because of shifts in the contemporary foodscape a 'peasant *cassoulet*' now has symbolic status and cultural capital, due to its reconceptualization within a 'foodie' field that values artisan food. Hence, the deconstruction of a formerly low status food like 'scouse' in the UK for example can now be considered a fine dining experience (Kierns and Haeney, 2010) because it has acquired the symbolic capital associated with authentic and historical time. Indeed, the art of gastronomy, or fine dining continues to be a legitimate means of accruing cultural capital and social status within a contemporary foodscape.

However, whilst Jenkins (1992:148) argues that Bourdieu's (1984) use of French data in *Distinction* undermines the generalizability of his argument, in the decades following its' publication there has been as Meuleman and Savage (2013:231) claim an erosion of national cultural boundaries and an increased mobility in symbols and cultural forms. Hence it is possible to eat cheese and

chips out of a Styrofoam container or a McDonalds across many countries in the world, or indeed experience a meal at a French restaurant, due to the 'decline of national cultural fields and the globalisation of culture' (*ibid*, 233). Indeed, cultural capital may involve 'familiarity with cultural reference points from a wider variety of geographical areas and is not just about national or European boundaries' (*ibid*). It is notable that in large-scale surveys that measure cultural capital, particularly in the UK, 'culinary capital' (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012) is considered in terms of 'eating at a French Restaurant' as opposed to 'going to a pub' (Purhonen and Wright, 2013:260). This is despite a shift in tastes from 'fine' dining to 'casual' dining amongst foodies and that several pubs in the UK have been recognised for culinary excellence and awarded stars in the *Michelin Guide* (2014).

However, for Bourdieu (1984:77) the taste of the ruling class is always the legitimate taste of a society, it is not a genuine good taste, but a legitimate taste that 'pretends to be universally valid, whereas in reality it is nothing more than the taste of one particular class, the ruling class'. A shift towards 'casual dining' could represent change within the elite class, who are now more likely to have 'MacJobs' as 'portfolio [mobile] workers engaged in high-profile [high-tech] projects' (Adkins and Joniken, 2008:147). Thus, good taste, is not an objective or fixed measure but dependent on an interplay of power and desire. Indeed, as Naccarato and LeBesco (2012:2) argue via their conceptualisation of 'culinary capital', following Bourdieu (1984), food and foodways play a significant role in distinction and as markers of social status. These are not fixed values, but are continuously assigned and re-assigned through time and space.

It is no accident that I have incorporated French words into the titles of my thesis as a means of acknowledging the influence of, French cuisine as a marker of taste and the influence of Bourdieu. In the heading to this chapter, my reference to 'time' relates to directly to Bourdieu (1984:6) regarding the significance of time in accruing cultural capital, which he uses to argue against the Kantian distinctions between a 'taste of sense' and a 'taste of reflection'. In Bourdieu's thesis there is no innate aesthetic or pure taste only that inculcated over time. This is also about a disposition for considering the future rather than living in the present that acknowledges a 'temporal power' (*ibid*: 315) or what Adkins (2011:349) refers to as 'trading the future'. Hence, as Bourdieu (1986: 214-258) claims the best measure of cultural capital is the amount of time devoted to acquiring it, because the 'transformation of economic capital into cultural [social and symbolic] capital presupposes an expenditure of time that is made possible by possession of economic capital'. Cultural capital is therefore an investment of time in the present involving labour and the future, the initial accumulation of which begins 'at the outset, without delay, without wasted time' (*ibid*), a 'total, early, imperceptible learning performed in the family from the earliest days of life' (Bourdieu, 1984:59). In Bourdieu's (*ibid*) explanation of forms of capital, the cultural capital of families' influences the age at which the transmission and accumulation of said capital begins. In intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) this can even potentially begin before birth with prenatal education in the womb. On the other hand, in the 'Styrofoam container' example, instant gratification and the 'lack' of investment in the future adds to its symbolic power. Bourdieu (1984:176) identifies hedonism and being in the present as a quality associated with a working class habitus and investing in the future and therefore abstaining from having a good time with the petit bourgeoisie. Again,

middle class parenting practices are thus presented as the norm and others pathologised.

## **2:6. Feeding time – foodie and intensive mothering identities**

Time is significant in the accumulation of 'culinary capital', although this is not developed or acknowledged by Naccarato and LeBesco (2012). They argue that elite foodways and cultural omnivorousness are both means of achieving 'culinary capital' in contemporary America and beyond. Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) explain how cultural and economic capital is required to achieve 'culinary capital', whereby foodways are considered within a culinary field of elite practices. In their work, sustainability, health and dietary restraint<sup>14</sup> are identified as the key markers of status and these aspects of 'culinary capital' have eroded national cultural boundaries and are indicative of a decline in national cultural fields and a globalisation of mass culture. Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) further define white middle class American markers of 'culinary capital' to include sourcing, artisanality, taste, sustainability, healthiness and mindfulness. All of which need an investment of time to pursue. What they do not do, as promised, is fully examine the class and gender dimensions to 'culinary capital'. Theirs is an exclusory, elite field of practice that is almost exclusively white, male and upper middle class.

The problem for their analysis and others such as Szabo's (2013) is that when men cook it is assumed to be for leisure, as part of an investment in identity politics, or as professionals working in the public sphere. Szabo (2013:625) identifies 'leisurely cooking' when investigating men's cooking practices within the domestic sphere and argues that men engaged in cooking for the family are

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<sup>14</sup> It is not clear how or why they have chosen these markers and not others.

transgressing boundaries between work and leisure. When they are engaged in having to cook for the family, cooking becomes more like work rather than leisure because they have to care about the family. However, when exploring men's cooking a judgement is being made as to whether they are expressing their cultural status, carrying out a leisure pursuit as a means of distinction or becoming a domestic cook, who is forced to care for the family. The ability to choose between foodwork and foodplay is therefore mainly possible for those free from family or kinship obligations (Finch and Mason, 1993). Men's foodwork and foodplay is positioned outside of a feminised, domestic habitus that incorporates aspects of care work or emotional labour (Hochschild 1979) in order to 'feed the family' (DeVault, 1991). Positioning men as having to develop forms of 'feminine capital' (Huppatz 2009:45) in order to become skilled in domestic cooking contributes to the doxic order that considers feminine practices as innate or natural rather than learned. And it contributes to the 'pervasive trivialisation' of the invisible work and effort involved in the management of family meals (DeVault, 1991:57).

Notions of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) involve an investment of 'time' in child rearing and I argue that it is the conceptualisation of domestic labour that needs to be re-appropriated. I concur with DeVault (1991:57) that there are, even today, 'few words that exist for the kind of [invisible] work and effort involved in feeding the family'. The foodways that I examine occur primarily within the domestic sphere and as such I draw on Morgan's (1996, 2011) work on family practices. However, my focus has shifted towards aspects of foodwork as integral to maternal identity and intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). I consider 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991) an aspect of child rearing that is

not equivalent to other domestic activities. Following (Sandford, 2011: unpaginated) I argue that there is not a plane of equivalence across domestic tasks:

...rearing children involves caring for the sick (sometimes), cleaning and cooking (a lot of the time), but it is not identical with these tasks and involves, in particular, an affective, invested, inter-subjective and ethical dimension that, say cleaning does not.

This perspective has implications in the field of domestic foodways, as it contributes to the reproduction of class divisions and the redrawing of boundaries within and between individuals and mothers in particular. Domestic family foodways or 'feeding the family' (DeVault 1991) has not been considered as a field of elite or legitimate cultural capital. However, I argue that cooking from scratch for example has become a means of demonstrating a particular form of upper middle class habitus; in the child-rearing field, 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) becomes a means of acquiring cultural capital for the self as well as for the child, because it takes time.

Indeed, the manner of presenting, serving and eating food fulfils the social function of legitimising social difference (Bourdieu, 1984:6). These practices are also gendered and as Skeggs (1997:98) notes, 'the sign of femininity is always classed'. In Bourdieu's work (1986:105) mothers are considered significant as the convertors of economic capital into symbolic and cultural capital for their children; they are 'sign bearing' carriers of taste (Skeggs, 2004b: 22). In taking time to prepare meals from scratch, sourcing organic and/or local ingredients, accommodating each individual household members food preferences or individual health needs, being able to afford to waste food, to take time over the preparation and eating of a meal around the table together, are all aspects of an

aspirational model of feeding the family. This type of intensive effort around feeding becomes a legitimate means of demonstrating social, symbolic and cultural capital; it is a field of organised striving (Martin, 2011). It is where forms of 'organised striving can be detected that it is possible to identify the existence of fields' (Savage and Silva, 2013:118). Agents in this field share fundamental interests, though this is not to assume agreement as Savage and Silva (2013:119) demonstrate, even 'a fight presupposes agreement about what it is worth fighting about'. Hence, within an aspirational model of 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991) there is a construction of boundaries and a distancing between sets of practices. In order to engage in intensive mothering around feeding requires work and time and a commitment to a particular set of cultural values. These serve a function in the symbolic vilification of the 'mum and kid eating cheese and chips out of a Styrofoam container' and the reification and valorisation of the 'yummy mummy' (Allen and Osgood 2009) preparing a home cooked family meal from scratch.

As Savage and Silva (2013:5) argue, 'to get in the field one has to share in the recognition of the value of the game and in the knowledge of the principles of the functioning of the game'. The field concept does not depend on fixed national boundaries, this ensures that food and foodways reproduce divisions and redraw boundaries within and between fields. The field of gastronomy and mothering for example are fields in which foodways play a significant role in marking status. Food therefore is important in the production of subjective identities and social practices. Individuals from different social classes draw strong symbolic boundaries on the basis of food taste. The types of 'culinary capital' that Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) refer to can only be accrued by

women who are not wholly responsible for feeding their families or who have time or the economic capital to use others time. It is impossible to be a 'foodie' or a 'chowhound' whilst engaged in intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) or aspirational foodways. However, within the gendered division of labour, it is still women who are more likely than men to have primary responsibility for childcare (Kan *et al*, 2011) and therefore 'feeding the family' (DeVault 1991). I am disappointed that Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) do not problematize these types of gendered contradictions and that it is still mainly men who play in the field of (food) culture in the same way as individualism can be conceptualised as masculine.

I therefore follow other feminists such as Adkins and Skeggs (2004) who have appropriated Bourdieu's theoretical framework, in order to examine the relationship between gender, class and food. I would add that in a moment of epiphany I realised that this was, after all, a gap in the literature. There are no recent, contemporary food and feminism texts that focus on women, food, foodways and cultural capital. Instead the focus is on children and/or men. There is almost a conspiratorial silence, has it all been said already? In looking for a new angle on the same problem are we not missing a thorough re-examination of the original one, the continued valoration and trivialisation of women's roles in feeding the family? All of the food studies literature assumes a particular model of cultural capital that tends to exclude domestic practice or focuses on how men have negotiated the leisure/work boundary in order to feed the family (Szabo 2013, Johnston and Baumann 2010). This is mainly because, according to Skeggs (2004b: 24), 'cultural capital is always associated with high cultural practices and classifications, though upper middle class femininity



would work'. I argue therefore that intensive mothering (Hays 1996) can be recognised as a form of social, symbolic and cultural capital, due to its associations with upper middle class femininity and the cultural representation of the 'yummy mummy' in opposition to depictions of the 'Chav Mum' (Allen and Osgood 2009).

My focus is on food and foodways within a domestic sphere that includes the potential for accruing cultural capital rather than examining wider forces of industrial food production. It is worth noting; that the percentage of household income spent on food has been in steady decline over the last 100 years. Indeed, in the UK according to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on average 11.3 per cent of household income was spent on food in 2011 (DEFRA, 2012), compared to around 60 per cent or more of household income in the nineteenth century (Coveney, 2014:23). We are, as Naccarato and LeBesco (2012:13) note, living in a 'relatively food secure' era. This is not to suggest that everyone living in advanced Industrialised nations is 'food secure', but that in these societies (some) individuals are more able to engage in forms of culinary elitism and/or play in the field of culinary capital (Naccarato and LeBesco 2012).

## **2:7. Healthy food/healthy bodies – governance and control**

In terms of the interplay between public issues and private troubles (Mills, 1959), the background to the thesis centres on the perceived need to control the body (and bodies) of the population in the midst of an obesity epidemic and the implications of this on everyday family foodways. Government policy documents locate the solution to this public health crisis in the education of individuals and families to make appropriate 'healthy' food choices. In practice

this focus increases the pressure on women and mothers in particular to engage in the monitoring, regulation and governance of their bodies and those of other family members through food. This ensures that family foodways fall outside the conceptualisation of cooking as a leisure activity and even potentially eating as pleasurable (for mothers). Therefore 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991) is emotional work (Hochschild 1979), illustrative of a commitment to 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) and represents a source of social, symbolic and cultural capital.

Previously I explained how I changed the title of my thesis in an attempt to distance myself from the notion of choice. It is notable that current government policies are concerned to enable individuals to make the right choice with regards to food. Hence, in a recent government white paper from the Department of Health (DOH, 2010) 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People', 'families will be supported to make informed choices about their diet and levels of physical exercise' (2010:35) and to make 'healthy food choices easier' (2010:39). In the introduction to a follow up paper, 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People, a call to action on obesity (DOH, 2011:4), the Rt Hon Andrew Lansley CBE MP, Secretary of State for Health, has written:

Each of us is ultimately responsible for our health. It's right that we should be free to make choices about diet and physical activity for ourselves and for our families... we need to make healthier choices to prevent weight gain...

Therefore, my study has been conducted against a background of continued government rhetoric about a public health crisis caused by high levels of obesity in the population, as the DOH (2011:5) claims, 'Overweight and obesity represent probably the most widespread threat to health and well being in this

country'. It is worth pointing out the inclusion of the overweight category here, so this is not just about 'obesity' but being 'overweight' as well. As previously noted the Body Mass Index (BMI) is an over rated epidemiological tool (Hacking, 2008) and body measurement categories are discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. I flag it up here because the inclusion of the overweight category inflates the figures and fuels further anxiety amongst those who are on the borders of the 'normal' body weight category.

The conflating of obese and overweight means that the figures are high. Even the obese category (a BMI over 30) disguises the much smaller group who are most at risk of potential co-morbidities (or obesity related health problems); such as type two diabetes, sleep apnoea, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure etc., and tend to have a BMI at the higher end of this measurement scale with a BMI of 40 or over (NHS UK, 2013). Despite the levelling off of obesity rates amongst children and younger adults, the government paper still concludes that in order 'to tackle overweight and obesity effectively we need to adopt a life course approach – from pre-conception through pregnancy, infancy, early years, childhood, adolescence and teenage years, and through to adulthood and preparing for older age' (DOH, 2011:6). This focus on individual responsibility and the governance of (female) bodies masks its regulatory and disciplinary function and runs counter to arguments regarding the significant impact of socio-economic inequalities on health. Indeed as Singh-Manoux and Marmot (2005:2130) argue, 'Health-related and psychosocial behaviours are never truly 'voluntary'; they are a product of, and embedded in structures of society'. An individualist perspective ignores the social determinants of health, which 'include the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and

age, and the fundamental drivers of these conditions: the distribution of power, money and resources' (Marmot and Bell, 2012:2). It is notable that it is the governance regulation and control of the female body, at the heart of this approach. Indeed, the focus on 'pre-conception' in the 'life course approach' has implications for all women, as this kind of rhetoric, places the problem of obesity on women and women's bodies especially.

Therefore, in a secular age, at a time of heightened neo-liberalism self-love/care or technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988) are ways of practicing responsible individualism. These techniques of care, consumption and leisure are forms of cultural capital. Indeed, as Bourdieu (1984:190) notes:

The idea each class has of the body and of the effects of food on the body, that is, on its strength, health and beauty may be important to one class and ignored by another and different classes may rank [these] in very different ways.

Hence, a concern with individual responsibility and technologies of the self are associated with a particular middle class habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). Government policy initiatives assume that it is a matter of (re) education regarding 'appropriate' food choice and fail to acknowledge the extent to which food is socially embedded and not reducible to individual consumer choice (Jackson, 2009). And as already noted, what might appear, as an irrational unhealthy eating choice may be rational from a different perspective (Jackson, 2009). Again, the use of the word family, disguises the gendering of this work, whilst 'food flexibility' (Tannahill, 1973: 393) reinforces a culinary elitism as it is assumed that 'only the well-fed can afford to try something new, because only they can afford to leave it on the plate if they dislike it'.

It is worth reconsidering who is responsible for family foodways in relation to 'healthy' food provision. Whilst, the government identifies that 'each of us' is responsible for our health, the reality is that it is women and especially mothers who are assumed to be the 'moral guardians and practical managers of what the family eats' (James *et al*, 2009:8) and therefore the family's health. Hence, as James *et al* (2009a: 30) identify, 'proper family dinners' equates to 'proper families' and 'proper children'. Indeed, Murcott (1982), Charles and Kerr (1988) and DeVault (1991) all demonstrate that the proper dinner constitutes the cement of family life. According to James *et al* (2009a: 40) 'what still matters is that the proper meal is cooked almost exclusively by Mum', whether she is working full time, part time or not at all. The shift has been that in middle class families 'children's food preferences are taken into account by their parents in acknowledgment of their equal rights as family members (James *et al*, 2009a: 42) and as part of a middle class habitus that encourages responsible individualism. Indeed, 'assigning a high priority to health promoting practices is thought to be a particularly middle class concern' (Wills *et al*, 2009). Hence, choosing food in order to promote good health, signifies a particularly middle-class outlook on consumption. The practices, which promote good health, require economic, cultural and social capital (Crawford, 2006; Fisher 2008). The displaying or performing of a health conscious outlook delivers symbolic capital thereby (re) creating further social distinctiveness at the same time as stigmatising those who fail to achieve good health through the food they eat (Crawford, 2006). Hence, as Wills *et al* (2009:55) argue 'middle class parents must feel they have to try hard to instil publicly recognised 'authentic' dietary practices into and onto their children to avoid their own embarrassment and failure as parents'.

Skeggs (2004b: 28) claims that it is the role of women to convert economic capital into symbolic capital for their families through the display of tastes.

Jackson (2009:10) uses the lens of food as a means of examining change in family life. He identifies how the 'making and eating of a proper family meal remains an important symbol of family life' and that 'mothers retained a commitment to cooking proper family meals from scratch, and accommodate food preferences and tastes of different family members'. He claims that the political rhetoric about the decline of the family meal runs ahead of the evidence and that the discourse regarding the decline of the family meal serves a normative agenda. Eating together as a family is a persistent widely held middle class aspiration, even though it was never a universal practice (Gillis, 1997).

Meah and Watson (2011) state how concern about the impoverished state of domestic cooking has become a common part of public discourse. The suggested contributing factors include the breakdown of traditional domestic divisions of labour associated with increased labour participation by women, the wider availability of convenience foods, and the effects of technologies. Whilst Fox and Smith (2011) explain how public angst regarding childhood obesity and the decline in cooking skills for example is fuelled by class disgust and this masks wider issues of gender, class and power. The moral crusade of Jamie Oliver for example, to change the eating habits of a working class community in Rotherham (*Jamie's Ministry of Food*) is part of a neo-liberal policy discourse that promotes individual responsibility, active citizenship and economic independence (Fox and Smith, 2011). Again, the problem of obesity and the decline in cooking skills is conceptualised as the outcome of individual failing

and ignorance and not a consequence of wider social inequalities or an obesogenic environment.

### **2:8. Invisible bodies – fat talk and foodies**

It is notable that the body is missing from cultural food studies literature. The body is written about in terms of its associations with practicing restraint or healthy eating, but the embodiment of those engaged in writing these texts is missing. Similarly, the 'foodie' is seen only in terms of 'his' elite culinary status, 'he' is a food expert without a visceral, corporeal presence. Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) make distinctions between 'chowhounds' and 'foodies', but there is no sense of the corporeality of either of these identities, other than highlighting how an adherence to these leisured consumer identities requires an investment of time and effort. This serves to further reinforce the notion of these concepts as belonging to a leisured class, or a masculine identity outside of the routinized, mundane practices of cooking for the family. The time needed to fully engage in the practices required to identify as a chowhound or foodie are such that these identities are unattainable in the context of intensive mothering.

When considering cultural scripts of femininity I learned to read my own body and others from an early age. The term 'lipoliteracy' therefore has some resonance, although Graham (2005) uses the term in a different context. He conducts anthropological research on men with Lipodystrophy, which is a side effect of combination therapy used to combat HIV. The men he interviews had lost fat from the face and/or buttocks for example, which gave them a particular 'look', others with knowledge of the condition could then read this. Hence, men in the community that Graham studied could instantly judge whether someone was suffering with lipodystrophy and therefore conclude that they had HIV. This

has repercussions for those with a condition that could previously have been hidden, especially in terms of negotiating and managing a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963). The shift from a discreditable to a discredited identity raises potential problems for those previously managing information about the self to having to manage stigma in everyday interactions amongst a knowledgeable community. Kulik and Meneley (2005) suggest that the reading of fat on bodies feeds directly into beliefs about moral character and health. 'Fat' is an attribute using Goffman's (1963:14) terminology that is deeply discrediting and an 'abomination of the body'. In Murray's (2008) work learning to read bodies is part of an everyday affective practice and affective sedimentation. Baarts and Kryger Pedersen (2009:728) highlight the growth of 'lipoliterates' in contemporary Western society, so that we have all become experts in 'reading fat bodies' and a means of doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987)

I contend that we have become 'lipoliterates' regarding all bodies, not just 'fat' ones and recall four presentations I have been to since my first BSA food studies group conference in the summer of 2010, on the topic of 'anorexia'. Women whose own bodies appeared slight, small and fragile presented these papers. Their bodies had no discernable fat on them at all. Two of these papers were about the use of 'pro-anorexia' websites, another was about the hidden acceptance of anorexia amongst professional ballet dancers and the fourth focussed on the strategies employed by recovering anorexic women in hospital<sup>15</sup>. When these paper sessions were opened to the floor for questions, on two occasions a (female) member of the audience asked the women giving the papers, why they had chosen to research anorexia. I cannot recall the precise answers given in each case, but they were not about the presenter's

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<sup>15</sup> I know the precise details of all four of these papers and their authors, but am purposely leaving these out in the interest of anonymity.



own bodies or histories, anorexic or otherwise. On one of these occasions the audience member (A) was not satisfied with the presenter's (P) response and challenged her further. A claimed that P was not revealing her true self to the audience or being honest about her own body. However, P would not accept A's contention that the respondents in her study saw her as one of them and were therefore more revealing of them selves in the interviews. A (now hostile) was suggesting indirectly that P had experience of being anorexic (which it would appear is often used as a term of abuse), and that in not admitting this, A claimed that P was missing a central facet of her own research. A throughout this dialogue drew attention to her own body, which she claimed was fat. P on the other hand made no reference to her own body at all. This highly charged emotional dialogic exchange raises questions with regards to the impact of emotional embodiment in research. It links with auto/biographical practice in terms of who decides what the researcher should reveal of her self. It was a gendered exchange as the academics involved were women. Would this exchange have occurred if they were men? It demonstrates, following Wetherell (2012:111) how 'affect follows, regulates and composes social relations and social values'. How 'thinking and feeling are social acts' (*ibid*: 73), so 'that bodies and sense making are two sides of the same coin (*ibid*: 53).

Hence, the obesity story is about gendered 'fat' bodies within a socio-cultural climate that values what Germov and Williams (2004) refer to as the thin ideal or the tyranny of slenderness LeBesco (2001). These affective values may be transmitted across cultural boundaries as Venn (2010: 130) claims:

...collective patterns, like social trends, or the moods that build up into an affective unit, or in reference to Zeitgeist or even to moral panics, that is behaviour, which in conventional discourse appears to proceed by imitation or a contagion of sorts: is a collective mind at

work... operating at the non-conscious level of body-to-body communion.

Indeed, Becker *et al* (2002, 2007) identify a contagion of the 'thin ideal' amongst adolescent women in Fiji. They conducted a longitudinal study of adolescent women's attitudes to their bodies. They argue that Western values of beauty that equate thinness with success, personal autonomy and agency had less value or cultural capital in less developed societies, such as Fiji. A rounded female body represented a socially responsible community and was therefore considered more desirable. However, in the follow up study conducted in 2007, feeling fat and wanting to be thin had become well-established norms. Becker *et al* (2007) claim that this was a direct result of the introduction of the television onto the Island in 1995 and the incorporation of Western (American) norms and values into Fijian culture. Yet, when the women purged their bodies they tended to use traditional herbs and remedies recommended by their mothers. Hence they were engaged in practices that had been going on before the influx of televisions to the Island. Although Becker *et al* (2002, 2007) demonstrate the power of affective practices of gender in influencing a particular peer group's notion of what is a desirable body, I contend that it was less about the television and more about a desire to adopt the cultural tastes of an elite class. I agree with Bray (1996:421) who argues:

...to privilege the mass media as the most effective means of moulding minds is to ignore the multiplicity of social contexts operating in the everyday... which inform and constitute women's subjectivities.

Indeed, blaming the media is limited 'and ignores the extent to which other factors are deeply embedded in our cultural heritage and contribute to individuals conceptions of themselves' (*ibid*: 18). Alternatively, it could indicate

a spread of legitimate taste and a type of mimesis of cultural capital extending beyond national boundaries. Thinness is an enduring symbol of elite status (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012); it is aspirational and the consumption of these cultural markers is a form of communication (Bourdieu, 1984:2). A desire for thinness could be bound up with an increased focus on appearance as a means of performing femininity or accruing capital. The working class women in Skeggs' (1997) study invested in their appearance in order to put a floor on their disadvantaged social position. Becker *et al* (2002, 2007) makes no mention of the role of socialisation or 'fat talk' (Ambjörnsson, 2004) between the women in her study and therefore overestimates the extent to which they passively adopt these values from the television.

'Fat talk' is part of a process of socialisation, a means of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and can be considered a gendered and affective practice. Ambjörnsson (2005) studied adolescent women in Sweden and found that they were preoccupied with talk about their bodies. However, she claims that those engaged in this talk could only do so if they were not actually fat. Being fat or having a fat body excluded them from talking about their bodies to others. The adolescents who were able to talk about their bodies discussed an invisible fatness, with the aim of gaining reassurance from the group; as in 'you are not fat', whilst those who had visible fat on their bodies were rendered invisible or unable to participate in the discussion, because they could not be reassured that they were not fat. Hence, the only socially acceptable corporeal fat in this example would be an invisible or imagined one. This talk then was usually a talk about not being fat, or not being thin enough, or the 'absent present' as Ambjörnsson, (2005) notes.

## 2:9. Summary

To summarise, in the field of food studies, elite cultural capital is acquired through an investment of time. This works as a cultural symbol that indicates the bearer has the time to invest in these practices and therefore also has economic capital. A foodie identity has symbolic capital as expressed through cultural competence and is the product of an investment of time. The work of this acquisition is the work on the self and an effort that presupposes a personal cost. The measure of cultural capital is undoubtedly the amount of time devoted to acquiring it (Bourdieu, 1986).

I contend that individuals have relationships with food that are emotional and embodied and not always consciously known. Following Bourdieu (1984) these relationships are part of an individual habitus, a disposition of mind and body that accumulates and sediments over time. This includes desires, tastes, preference and ways of perceiving which are informed by the specific history of movement through social space, a personal history. This is a corporeal habitus that develops through a struggle for advantage or capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) with the past acting within a contemporary social space. Different food and foodways act as cultural artefacts that shape the dynamics of cultural reproduction, so that food can become part of the means of subjective identity and social practice. Bourdieu and contemporary feminists of difference according to Lovell (2000:12) share a common focus on the body, habitus and corporeal sedimentation.

This chapter represents an epiphany of sorts and a re-working of my focus and a reappraisal of some key texts; most notably DeVault's (1991) *Feeding the*

*Family.* Suffice to say that at the start of the project I assumed a fluidity of gender roles and identities partly as a result of the individualisation thesis proposed by Giddens (1991, 1992) and Beck (1992). It was from this perspective that I had, as identified earlier, wanted to explore individual auto/biographical food narratives. I did not anticipate the extent to which these would be so entrenched in gendered practices and normative cultural scripts of masculinity and femininity. Nor the extent to which mothers engaged in intensive mothering as a means of displaying cultural capital, or performing a particular middle class habitus. Hence, whilst men used their foodie identities as a means of differentiating their foodways from the 'masses' who do not care about food, and whilst men and women were practicing forms of self care, the women who were mothers were using care for others as part of accumulating cultural capital for themselves. Hence, it has become necessary to consider both gender and class issues, or power and desire.

In summary, my study is distinctive on two levels. Firstly it incorporates issues of gender and class and problematizes debates on cultural capital. It re-examines and incorporates DeVault's (1991) materialist feminist approach to 'feeding the family' and considers care as cultural capital. Secondly, my study makes a significant contribution in terms of its methodology and the collection of written auto/biographical accounts of individual food histories. The respondents were invited to tell of themselves and the transitions in their lives around the topic of food, so that food becomes a 'prism, which absorbs and reflects a host of cultural phenomena' (Counihan 1999: 6). The positioning of the researcher within the study at every stage is not practiced within the sociology of food. My auto/biographical narrative, the use of a range of non-academic texts and

embodied experiences to inform my study adds a richness to it, but similarly marks it out as different. The act of writing and producing the thesis is an affective practice and these elements have been included in the text in an effort to exemplify this. My methodological approach is considered and explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

## *Chapter 3. La spécialité du chef - An Auto/Biographical Methodological Journey*

### **3:1 Chapter Outline**

In this chapter I outline some epistemological and methodological concerns regarding my auto/biographical research approach. I reflect on the significance of ethics, reflexivity and feminism. These issues form the basis of my interest and epistemological orientation. I explicitly position myself in terms of a 'theorised subjectivity' (Letherby 2013:80) and engage in a 'constant, critical interrogation of [my] personhood – both intellectual and personal – within the knowledge production process'. I apply a critical lens to all aspects of the research process from its design to data collection, analysis and dissemination. Having trained as a sociologist I am conscious of the tension between the demands of traditional positivist approaches and a desire to present the realities of research (Hallowell *et al* 2005). I therefore present an honest and open account of the research process that gives voice to respondents. The chapter is divided into two sections; in the first I consider the background to the study in terms of the benefits of CMC. After the demographic tables of the seventy-five respondents I present a reflexive account of the research process from the data collection to analysis, including ethical and personal issues. I interweave my own reflections with respondents and include examples of word clouds and an i-poem drawn from respondents' narratives.





sense of the lives of others' (Letherby, 2003:96). Thus, an auto/biographical approach highlights the interdependence of the two enterprises of autobiography and biography. Certainly, in wanting to understand the role of food in the life histories of others, I wanted to gain an insight into the role of food in my own life story<sup>18</sup>. For me it is the potential of food memories to say something about identity that is of interest. Sutton (2001:102) claims food not only symbolizes social bonds and divisions but also creates and re-creates these bonds and divisions. It is these that maintain a lasting memory. How might respondents use food and foodways to express their identity? How might these memories be understood in relation to individual and collective identities? What role does food have as a cultural symbol in these narratives? Like Lawler (2008:13), I consider that life history narratives 'give a means to understand identity in its sociality, since narrative identity places us within a complex web of relationships and, ultimately confounds the notion of the atomized individual'. Respondents draw on wider cultural narratives and symbols in the telling of their stories, it is these I explore.

Indeed, as Morgan (1996:166) explains 'food represents a particularly strong form of anchorage in the past [it] serves as one of the links between historical time, individual time and household time'. These foodways are, as Scott (2009:106) claims, so embedded in the domestic cultures of everyday life that they come to be regarded as natural'. There is a persistent tension between 'knowing' oneself and the creation of memory. For Deleuze and Guattari (1998) memory is the membrane that allows for the correspondence between the 'sheets of the past and the layers of reality', it is a block of becoming, as Clough

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<sup>18</sup> For a school project I recall writing a detailed autobiography at the age of 10. I asked my parents and grandparents to tell me anecdotes about my childhood; pouring smarties down my sister's throat when she was crying was an example.

(2007:29) notes 'we write not with childhood memories but through blocs of childhood that are [always part of] becoming the child of the present'. We move backwards and forwards to locate a 'self', one that is 'an autobiographical-techno-ontological writing block' (*ibid*: 15).

In terms of reflexivity within the research process, 'the self is always present and inseparable from the work we produce' (Letherby, 2003:83). Hence, I incorporate a reflexivity that is 'respectful [of] respondents and acknowledges the subjective involvement of the researcher' (*ibid*). I take on the position of a 'key informer' in the context of the research project, acknowledging the role of my own auto/biography throughout, whilst not making this the focus of the research, but using it to 'bridge the gap between lived experience and academic knowledge production' (Inckle, 2007:32). There are risks inherent in this approach, as the process of becoming a 'research subject as well as author, risks exposure and vulnerability' for the researcher<sup>19</sup> (Inckle, 2007:31, Liamputtong, 2007). Some of the emotional risks of 'exposure and vulnerability' are well documented amongst academics engaged in auto/biographical approaches (Cotterill and Letherby 1993, Inckle 2005, 2010, Letherby, 2003, Letherby 2013, Sparkes, 2004, 2007). Of course, as Letherby claims it is important not to over-pacify respondents by always defining them as vulnerable; the power balance in the respondent/researcher relationship is not static; it is fluid and dynamic (Cotterill and Letherby 1993, Letherby 2003, Letherby 2013).

In adopting an auto/biographical approach, I was surprised that there was not more interest in protecting the 'researcher as respondent' from harm within the

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<sup>19</sup> There are potential risks to the researcher as author and respondent on lots of different levels, not least of which is the possible exposure of the researcher perhaps as not a 'good' researcher.

more formalized ethical processes. The focus, perhaps rightly is on the respondent, but there was no attempt to explore what provisions might have been put in place for the 'researcher as respondent' engaged in auto/biographical research, or for the researcher herself. Part of the motivation for adopting this approach can be summed up in this quote:

...whether the stories we use are our own, or those of our informants... we need to produce 'accountable knowledge' and that we owe them (our readers and the larger community) an honesty about ourselves; who we are as characters in our own stories and as actors in our own research...(Katz Rothman 2007: unpaginated)

This was what I was aiming for. It was therefore important in the context of conducting an auto/biographical project to keep a research journal throughout the time of the study.

I began my auto/biographical reflections by writing a piece, entitled 'flan' based on a trip to Loret Del Mar in 1974 and the consumption of the Spanish equivalent of crème caramel. This was an exploration of cultural differences in the early seventies between food eaten in the UK and that eaten in Spain. Yet, embedded in that story were the beginnings of another story and a future relationship with my best friend, who five years later would share my interest in 'crème caramel' and egg custard tarts, as well as fostering a mutual desire for Suchard chocolate eggs, Baklava **and** dieting. This becomes part of an on-going 'performance of femininity through learned emotional responses' to food, to eating and to not eating (Lupton, 1998:168). Indeed, these memories and narratives are co-created, not only through the relationship with the researcher, but also by respondents themselves. It was through the telling and/or re-telling of life histories that respondents gave insights into the lives of many, as they wove their own stories with those of significant others (Letherby, 2003:90). This

meant that the methodological approach to the research question(s) was iterative and that the thematic analysis of the data developed and was not set out precisely from the beginning.

In terms of analysis I make some use of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) following Charmaz (2006) who develops the more traditional grounded theory methods advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) into a more reflexive practice. In CGT the researcher is more actively located within the text, according to Charmaz, (2006:184) this means 'you try and make everyone's vantage point explicit, the researchers as well as respondents'. This, Charmaz (2006:184) claims, makes the process of how the theory was generated from the data clearer in order to 'establish the boundaries of its usefulness and to ascertain how and where to modify it'. The defining components of grounded theory practice from Glaser (1967, 1978) and Strauss (1987) according to Charmaz (2006:05) incorporate seven principles<sup>20</sup>. Those of most interest to me are the researchers' simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis, conducting the literature review after developing the analysis, and sampling in line with theory, rather than for representativeness.

### **3:3. Sampling, Social Networks and CMC**

In the original proposal for the study as noted before I align my study with the individualization thesis (Appendices 10:1), hence:

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<sup>20</sup> 1. A simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis. 2. Constructing analytic codes and categories from data and not from pre conceived logically deduced hypotheses. 3. Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis. 4. Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis. 5. Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories and identify gaps. 6. Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness. 7. Conducting the literature review *after* developing an independent analysis.

More recently, within a discourse of individualization food choice is no longer fixed by the meta-narratives of modernity, nor constrained by price or availability, but instead men and women have complete freedom, regardless of traditional social structures, such as gender and class to eat whatever and whenever they want.

As noted previously I set out to interview individuals, men and women about their foodways. I had relinquished my own cooking responsibilities and considered this a significant aspect of an individualization thesis in which 'everything can be negotiated (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: xxi). Would there be evidence of a sharing of domestic roles in respondents' narratives? Indeed, what narrative constructs would respondents use when writing about themselves now that the 'zombie categories' of gender, class and/or family had lost their substance? Given my background as a middle aged, middle class, white woman and that I was drawing in part from my social network, I anticipated respondents would not be representative of the general population. However, my concern was to widen participation in the research as much as possible, particularly from those considered a hard to reach group, such as men willing to discuss their foodways, rather than to generate generalizable results. Therefore I used a non-probability and opportunity sample.

Indeed, I had accumulated a large number of e-mail addresses from a wide variety of contexts over the years and this alphabetical list formed the basis of the social network from which I drew potential respondents. I had not used CMC as a research method before and was unsure how many people would engage with the research, or how much detail each respondent would provide. I decided on a target of sixty respondents to cover the possibility of fleeting or short communications. However, because of the inevitable time lapses in communication, I actually ended up with seventy-five completed interviews.

The extent to which this represented contacting my friends is debatable and raises questions of definition. What is a social network and what does it mean to draw respondents for a study from it? Lupton's researchers for example when studying couples food habits in Australia (2000, 2005) recruited from their own social networks. In CMC, it is common for researchers to recruit, initially at least from their own personal connections (Garcia *et al*, 2009: 68). Yet, it is never really clear what this means exactly. In my doctoral study, the social network was wide ranging and drew on friends, relations and acquaintances. A few of these respondents then recruited others for the study, again reflecting snowballing techniques used by Lupton (1996, 2000, 2005) and her researchers, again, a common practice when using an opportunity sample. Thus, explaining that respondents were recruited from my 'social network' does not adequately tell the whole story.

Morgan (2009) defines friendship in terms of intimacy and reciprocity on a continuum from friend to acquaintance to stranger (or vice versa). And these distinctions are based on the accumulation of knowledge of the 'other'. Morgan (2009:9) contends that Goffman (1959) reminds us that 'relationships have a career and that over time; acquaintances sometimes become intimates', so that the boundaries between acquaintances and others become blurred. Morgan (2009:102) highlights the extent to which the Internet has encouraged the growth of a form of acquaintanceship that is relatively disembodied but often reciprocal. Hence, an e-mail exchange can become part of an 'ongoing acquaintanceship that may be maintained by other means', so that although the 'communication is disembodied the relationship as a whole is not'.

Indeed, Morgan (2009) claims, what is significant is the balance between intimacy and distance in defining relationships between acquaintances. In terms of the seventy-five respondents who participated in the study, fifty-nine were acquaintances. That is, I had some knowledge of them, with low levels of intimacy and reciprocity. Of course, this is not to assume that this is how they thought of me, or that this was a fixed relationship. From the remaining respondents, eight were family members (I cannot identify their exact relationship to me in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality), three were friends and five were strangers.

In my proposal I identify in-depth online asynchronous interviews as my method of data collection. This represents an emancipatory, non-hierarchical approach to research that enables respondents to participate on their own terms in line with early feminist critiques of positivist approaches to research (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984). Respondents can exercise control and revise their narratives before sending them, which is an important consideration. For me, as Letherby (2003:93) highlights, the act of writing itself can be a political and enabling act, as respondents decide what they do and do not wish to disclose. As Illingworth (2006:08) argues, the life-story interview is an interactional process in which stories are negotiated, 'in an asynchronous CMC, this allows time for both distance and reflection and critically time to talk and time not to talk'. In her research, Illingworth (2006:13) claims that she 'became a commentator, participator and contributor to these stories' and not just a listener. Kozinets (2010:113) notes that the in-depth e-mail interview 'can combine pen pal-like sociality with on-going mentor-newbie tutelage' and that this can provide

‘interesting disclosure and enlightenment’. It was these kinds of ‘considered’ responses that I was hoping for (Coomber 2011).

In-depth online asynchronous interviews Meho (2006:1284) claims, are ‘unlike e-mail surveys’ in that they are ‘semi-structured in nature and involve multiple e-mail exchanges between the interviewer and interviewee over an extended period of time and can convey a sense of intimacy (Kozinets, 2010). Indeed there is ‘a greater degree of confidentiality; [as] the research subjects feel less exposed as people if they write rather than speak to a researcher’ (Letherby and Zdrodowski, 1995:576). The ‘virtual’ medium is arguably an ‘anonymous, safe and non-threatening environment’ (O’Connor and Madge, 2001:11.2). Garcia, (2009:67) contends that ‘online interview responses may be more candid than those obtained offline’, whilst others argue that spontaneity is limited because respondents put more thought into their replies. Indeed, Meho (2006:1285) notes that:

Participants interviewed via e-mail remained more focused on the interview questions and provided more reflexively dense accounts than face-to-face counterparts.

However, I decided against face-to-face interviews partly due to previous experiences<sup>21</sup> in which I was hyper-aware of Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model and the backstage processes of social interaction. I thought if the face-to-face element was missing then this would go some way to eliminate the hidden cues and ‘background noise’ of the in-depth interview. Ryan-Flood and Gill (2010:190) state that the in-depth face-to-face interview is ‘the’ inherently ‘feminist’ method of ‘achieving egalitarian relationships in research’. Certainly,

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<sup>21</sup> As an undergraduate sociology student I conducted a series of life-history interviews with an Afro-Caribbean woman from my local community. This approach ‘tell me about your life’ assumes a chronology and a certain pre-preparedness.



qualitative interviewing techniques can elicit rich and detailed data or ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). They can enable respondents to set their own agenda and allow issues to emerge that are important to them (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). There is also the possibility of manipulation on the part of the researcher. As Stacey (1991) suggests, respondents ‘are in fact more vulnerable to exploitation in this kind of qualitative research’ (cited in Ryan-Flood and Gill 2010:190). E-mailing respondents and engaging in a mutual exchange in which they write their narratives on their own terms and in their own time represents an egalitarian solution.

The use of online asynchronous in-depth interviews is part of a repertoire of CMC that posits it on the margins of qualitative methods. For example, despite the availability of online interviewing as a suitable method for marginal groups such as drug users, Coomber (1997: 2911) argues that even after fourteen years this method has not been widely adopted in the field. The face-to-face in-depth interview remains ‘the’ qualitative research method of choice. CMC is secondary to this. It is, as if enabling respondents time and space to construct their replies invalidates them and that only face-to-face interviews elicit the ‘truth’. This is part of what Silverman (2011:25) refers to as the ‘interview society’, ‘in which interviewing has become a fundamental activity, and crucial for people to make sense of their lives’. Writing one’s replies in a more measured way sits outside of this. For me, the assumption that conducting face-to-face interviews about foodways might eliminate *a priori* preparation and therefore represent a ‘truth’ misses the point. My interest is in the possible motivations and intentions that lie behind the construction of a life story and not whether these represent a lived reality.

### 3:4. Respondent Demographics

The seventy-five respondent demographics are presented in the following tables. I have listed their pseudonyms in alphabetical order, along with their ages, job titles, qualifications, living arrangements and nationalities. I requested this information at the end of the correspondence, which then became a useful means of closure. All respondents officially gave informed consent to participate in the study; they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity was confirmed and assured. Two respondents chose their own pseudonyms, Magenta and Ophelia. The other respondents were allocated pseudonyms roughly based on the order in which the correspondence was entered into. For example, Drew (Andrew) and Alison were the first to respond. I tried to ensure that the chosen pseudonym roughly corresponded to the kind of names that might have been popular when they were born and if possible a name that meant something to me, something that reflected the character of that person or their personality. For example Willow was a confirmed vegan born in the 1960s and Queenie a retired hairdresser born in the 1940s. In one case I changed the pseudonym halfway through the research because the original pseudonym, which began with B, was the name of a respondent. Heterosexual respondents dominated the study, although there was one male and two females who were not. The overwhelming majority of respondents were white, although I had one respondent from Zimbabwe and another from Bermuda.

<b>Table. 1:1. Respondent Demographics</b>						
<b>FEMALE RESPONDENTS</b>						
<b>No</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Quals</b>	<b>Living Arrangements</b>	<b>N</b>
1	Alison	49	Teacher	Degree	Co-habiting	GB
2	Annie	50	Life Coach	A' level	Divorced +2 +3 grown up child	GB
3	Beth	57	Housewife	PG Dip	Married +2 children	GB
4	Bryony	33	PhD Student	P/G	Co-habiting	BM
5	Carly	46	Consultant	Degree	Co-habiting	GB
6	Celia	85	Retired farmers wife	SRN	Married +4 grown up children	GB
7	Chloe	46	Occ. Health Advisor	Degree	Co-habiting +2 +1 grown child	GB
8	Daisy	73	Social Worker	Degree	Married +3 grown up children	GB
9	Dalia	50	Painter	Degree	Co-habiting	GB
10	Edith	54	Arts Coordinator	Degree	Divorced +1 child + 2 grown	GB
11	Ellen	61	Dance Teacher	A 'level	Divorced	GB
12	Faith	30	TA	P/G	Married +2 children	ZB
13	Faye	46	Secretary	GCSE*	Married +1 child	GB
14	Gaby	51	Architect Designer	Degree	Married +2 grown up children	GB
15	Harriet	64	Housewife	Life/SR N	Married +3 grown up children	GB
16	Hannah	43	Secretary	GCSE*	Married +2 grown up children	GB
17	Helen	54	Publisher	Diploma	Married +2 + 1 grown up child	GB
18	Ida	54	Midwife	Degree	Married +2 grown up children	GB
19	Imogen	36	Part Time Housekeeper	NVQ	Married + 4 children	GB
20	Jade	37	Architect	P/G	Single	NL
21	Jocelyn	44	Shop Manager	GCSE*	Married +3 children	GB
22	Katrina	43	Pre-School teacher	Degree	Married +2 + 1 grown up child	GB
23	Kelly	30	PhD Student	P/G	Single	BG
24	Laura	35	Teaching Assistant	A 'level	Married +2 children	GB
25	Linda	67	Housewife	Diploma	Divorced +3 grown up child	GB
26	Lola	40	PhD Student	P/G	Married +3 children	GB
27	Magenta	38	Academic	PhD	Single	GB
28	Melissa	46	Viola Player	GCSE*	Married +2 children	GB
29	Molly	45	Housewife	GCSE*	Co-habiting +4 children	GB
30	Nadia	40	Artist	Degree	Co-habiting +1 child	AU
31	Noreen	40	Housewife	GCSE*	Co-Habiting +2 children	GB
31	Olivia	37	PR Manager	Degree	Co-habiting	GB

33	Ophelia	53	Author	GCSE*	Married + 2 children	GB
34	Otaline	32	PhD Student	P/G	Co-habiting +1 child	GB
35	Me	47	Lecturer	P/G	Married +1 child + 1 grown up	GB
36	Paula	55	Food /Web Writer	Degree	Married +2 grown up children	GB
37	Queenie	62	Retired Hairdresser	GCSE*	Married	GB
38	Regan	48	Housewife	GCSE*	Married +2 children	GB
39	Ruth	47	MD	Degree	Married +2 children	GB
40	Sasha	50	Academic	PhD	Single	US
41	Steph	39	Housewife	Degree	Co-habiting +2 children	GB
42	Tammy	63	Guest House Owner	GCSE*	Married	GB
43	Tilda	53	Nurse	Degree	Single	GB
44	Ulrika	46	Property Developer	Degree	Single	GB
45	Ursula	52	Housewife	A' level	Married +2 children + 1 grown	GB
46	Valerie	46	Website Manager	A' level	Single +1 child	GB
47	Vera	59	Shop Assistant	Degree	Divorced +2 grown up child	GB
48	Willow	55	Senior Lecturer	Degree	Single +1 grown up child	GB
49	Zoe	44	Recruiter	Degree	Married +2 children	GB
<b>MALE RESPONDENTS</b>						
50	Charlie	49	Consultant	GCSE*	Co-habiting	GB
51	Connor	27	Musician	BTEC	Single	GB
52	Dave	59	Consultant	GCSE*	Co-habiting	GB
53	Drew	42	Senior Manager	P/G	Married +1 child	GB
54	Ed	55	Carpenter	GCSE*	Co-habiting +1 step-child	GB
55	Fred	39	Solicitor	P/G	Single	GB
56	Gerry	47	Solicitor	P/G	Co-habiting	GB
57	Henry	42	Director	GCSE*	Married +2 step-children	GB
58	Ian	64	Business Management Trainer	GCSE*	Married +3 children	GB
59	Jake	48	M.D.	P/G	Married +1 child +1 grown	GB
60	James	68	PLC Director	Degree	Married +3 grown up child	GB
61	Kevin	47	Consultant	Degree	Co-habiting + 2 children	GB
62	Larry	48	MD	GCSE*	Married +2 children	GB
63	Lex	42	MD	GCSE*	Married +4 children	GB
64	Mark	45	Consultant	Degree	Married +3 children	GB
65	Nick	51	Consultant	Degree	Married +2 children	GB
66	Ollie	44	Teacher	Degree	Married +2 children	GB

67	Paul	67	Guest House Owner	GCSE*	Married +3 grown up children	GB
68	Quentin	60	Sales Rep	A' level	Married	GB
69	Richard	76	Retired Academic	P/G	Married +3 grown up children	GB
70	Roger	55	Writer	HND	Single	GB
71	Sam	50	Yachtsman	HND	Married +1 child	GB
72	Simon	55	Private Cook	GCSE*	Married +1 child	GB
73	Stephen	53	General Practitioner	Degree	Married +2 grown up children	GB
74	Tom	37	Occupational Therapist	Degree	Married +1 child	GB
75	Walt	57	Management	Diploma	Married +3 grown up children	IT

Key:

A = Age

TA = Teaching Assistant

SRN = State Registered Nurse

Quals = Highest Qualification

GCSE\* = GCSE Equivalent

N = Nationality

Respondents' ages ranged from 27 to 85 years of age, though most were born in the 1950s and 1960s. The scope of the food memories spans the 1930s to the present day. Respondents were predominantly born in the UK, apart from one of the men and five of the women. Only one of these five women was not resident in the UK at the time of the study. Four respondents lived outside of the UK during their childhood and one as a young adult. Six of the UK born respondents were currently living abroad full time, mainly as a result of their work commitments, although two of the men had married women from countries outside of the EU.

In terms of socio-economic status some respondents inferred a particular class background within the context of their narratives, such as Nick:

...both my Mum and my Dad were brought up in houses with cooks so it was only really after WW2 that this kind of life ended and they had to start cooking for themselves.

And Simon writes:

I was fortunate that my family lived in places like Hong Kong and Malaysia where our senses were constantly open to new sights, smells and flavours, where the Army tradition of curry lunches was still practiced and pineapples grew at the end of our garden.

Some said immediately what their jobs were, such as Dave:

...Current occupation, Financial Adviser, previously senior executive in fashion industry. Raised in small town north of [Northern Town], although born in London. Eldest child of six. Modest council house background, although attended boarding grammar school.

Or what their parent's occupations had been when they were children, like

Alison:

4 of us at home – mum, dad, my brother (4 years older than me) and me. Lived in [Northern City] council estate – dad school caretaker, mum welfare assistant in primary school (sort of TA)

And Paula:

Coming from a very working class background in small mining village in NE [I] was brought up on simple home cooking, meat and two veg, stews, etc.

Others discussed the lack of money in their households when they were young

such as Otaline, who writes 'when we were children my mother worked

nightshift in a factory – a thread mill' and:

...I was a school dinners kid and I hated that when I grew old enough to know what that meant. I was the only one in my group. When I was younger it was fine, but later in my teens when my mum's partner left and we were really poor we'd get like 50p to go to school so it was our only meal of the day and I was always starving.

All of the male respondents were employed in, or retired from, occupations

found in the NS-SES classes 1-4. Of the male respondents eleven were in or

last employed in Higher Managerial positions (NS-SES class 1). The majority of

the female respondents had been employed, or retired from, occupations in the NS-SES classes 1-4, although two of the women were from NS-SES classes 5-7. Only five of the women were in Higher Managerial occupations (NS-SES class 1), the majority of the women (twenty-nine) were or had been in Lower Managerial occupations (NS-SES class 2). At the time of the study, five of the men and five of the women were retired. Many respondents had degrees, which is much higher than in the general population. This is indicative of my own position and those likely to be in the social network from where I was drawing the sample. It is notable that the women in the study were on the whole more highly qualified than the men. Interestingly, some men had achieved their occupational status without qualifications higher than GCSE equivalent.

The majority of respondents were married or co-habiting, with only two of the men and nine of the women living alone. Overall, two-thirds of respondents were parents; nineteen of the men and thirty five of the women had been or were currently living with children. I had not considered this significant prior to starting the research; particularly the impact becoming a parent might have on foodways. Katrina for example writes:

Being a parent did change my feelings about what I put in my body and what I bought to feed my children so this has probably been the most significant influence on my food choices in adulthood. We have been quite strict with our children's diets especially when they were little, and this has obviously impacted on my own. I wonder if I would still be having late night chips and curry sauce if I was childless now?

Hence, this transition was clearly articulated by some, as feeding children meant a re-evaluation of their foodways and a distancing from or a celebration of their parent's foodways and childhood experiences in this context.

### 3:5. Feminism, ethics and researcher-respondent relations

It is important for me that research should be guided by feminist principles of ‘collaboration, reciprocity and disclosure’ (Kralik *et al*, 2000:909). This is because these principles are essential elements in an auto/biographical approach to research, as the researcher is inseparable from the data. This is not to assume that there is only one feminist perspective. I position myself as a political feminist and not just a theoretical one. Thus, feminism is a commitment to equality between the sexes whilst acknowledging the power of gender to structure and shape lives differently. The ethics of research on human beings is significant and a feminist approach to research is ‘respectful of respondents’ whilst acknowledging the subjective involvement of the researcher (Letherby, 2003:5). It is usual to consider the power relationships implicit in the research process and attempt to redress this power imbalance. It is about being sensitive to the needs of those being researched. As Letherby (2003:06) argues, ‘we need to be sensitive to respondents and the relevance of our own presence in their lives and the research process’.

The British Sociological Association’s statement of Ethical Practice (2003, updated 2004) provides clear guidelines on the responsibilities of the researcher in terms of protecting respondents from harm. I am committed to these when conducting research. The CMC life-history approach as previously documented gives respondents an active part in the research process; they are not ‘objectified or placed in a passive role’ (Letherby, 2003:83). This allows respondents to ‘tell the story’ in whichever way they choose, and importantly it validates individual experience and provides a vehicle through which experience can be expressed’ (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993:74). This gives the



respondent the opportunity to represent their past and re-evaluate it, in light of the present. Hence:

I wanted to hear each woman's [and man's] experiences from [their] own perspective: the issues that were important to [them]; the themes [they] wished to focus on; and the connections [they] made for [themselves] (Inckle, 2007:10).

The proposal for my research received full ethical approval from the University Faculty Ethics Committee in November 2010, after two months of negotiation.

The original ethical approval documents were submitted to the University Faculty Ethics Committee on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010 and the approval was eventually granted on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2010. The main issue was related to the perception amongst committee members that the research was about eating disorders and particularly that I would be targeting vulnerable individuals. They stipulated that I should include on the information for participants form, as well as within the approval documents themselves that, 'if you have an eating disorder you are advised not to participate in this research'. I complied with these conditions. My diary entry on November 24<sup>th</sup> read:

It is interesting that the focus on 'eating disorders' has been so strongly contested by the ethics committee. There is no acknowledgement or questioning of what an eating disorder might be, as if there is some empirical fact that is an eating disorder. Nor, how one might be diagnosed or recognized as such. For me, this raises questions about the nature of eating and food choice as well as what exactly constitutes an 'eating disorder'.

In the ethics proposal for the study a focus on gendered responses to food choice was expressed in the context of how this might be related to weight management issues (Bordo, 2003, Lupton, 1996). Yet, this was meant within a much wider context and was an attempt to highlight some of the powerful and normalizing gendered discourses surrounding eating and the body. This was because a concern about one's weight and diet as a woman are part of what

might be considered heteronormative-feminized practices. The response from the ethics committee demonstrates how women's' eating patterns and relationships to food are understood as pathological. So that even when referring to weight management, it is assumed that women<sup>22</sup> will disclose 'eating disorders' and that they need protecting from this. Of course, this was not the main aim of the research and I did not mention eating disorders in my proposal at all. Bendelow (2009:136) highlights how eating and body disorders are continually considered to be exclusively female, despite being refuted by researchers of male disorders (Philips and Castle, 2001). Malson (2009) in her research on anorexic behaviour, argues that anorexia is a distinct form of highly successful weight management and perhaps the most ordered of so called eating disorders.

It is difficult to measure the impact of including this exclusion criterion. Two female respondents reported having anorexia when they were young; they were Helen and Gaby. It was Helen, who chose to ignore the notes to participant's criteria regarding eating disorders completely. I only discovered this when she dropped it into her food story:

I, too, had anorexia – but it wasn't serious. A bit of an attention-seeking venture I think. I was desperately unhappy at boarding school and the anorexia was a way of attracting attention when I suppose I hoped someone would send me home to 'get better'. I would often eat during meal times knowing I was being watched and would then make myself sick later. During the holidays I did the same at home. My mum took me to our GP who advised her to get 'Complan' (I think) to sprinkle on the little food that I was eating. I lost a lot of weight and remember feeling tired and depressed a lot of the time (the only positive thing about the anorexia was that I was able to blame it for my appallingly bad A level results!)

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<sup>22</sup> Given that the weight management issue was raised in relation to women and their bodies that the concern of the Ethics committee was about women's eating disorders.

Gaby on the other hand replied to my invitation to participate with:

Yes ...sounds interesting and so yes I'll take part. Will mention to [husband] and get back to you. I did have anorexia as a teenager but I am over it now, although maybe the vestiges stay around for good...

And then:

Yes I read the note about eating disorders... that's why I mentioned that I had experienced the condition. I feel however that it no longer impacts on my life in any negative fashion and so if anything that goes into the study might at some time prove beneficial in supporting those who are suffering, then it's a good thing. The process of remembering would be a positive one and so I am totally at ease with continuing... as long as this doesn't cause you any difficulties!

It is interesting that Gaby articulates a concern with my position as a researcher, in accepting her participation, rather than as a concern for her own welfare.

And then this response from Magenta:

I also have a question, but this is just me being curious/ provocative, why do you discourage people with eating disorders from participating? And what constitutes an eating disorder?

I replied that I thought that the ethics committee were referring to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, but agreed that this implied that an 'eating disorder' was an uncontested condition. And, that it was somehow therefore conversely possible to quantify 'ordered' eating. I consequently spent some time looking for statistics and data on 'eating disorders' in order to challenge the ethics committee. I argued that at most 'eating disorders' affected 1 per cent of the adolescent female population (b-eat, 2010), and therefore only a small minority respondents in my study might be affected. However, I acquiesced to their conditions, thus it was not only the contested notion of ordered and dis-ordered eating, but the nature of ethics that needed to be negotiated.

Throughout the research I was conscious of my identity as a woman with a certain authority in terms of presenting myself as an academic researcher to respondents. I introduced my research and myself in terms of the research having been sanctioned by the Plymouth University, Faculty of Health, Education and Society, Ethics Committee,<sup>23</sup> as I was keen to demonstrate that the project was serious research. I tried to be open and friendly in my communication, or as much as it is possible to do so within the 'rules' of online engagement. In terms of internal validity and the standardization of the research process, these initial encounters were the same, it was only once the research began that the encounters varied. I tried as much as possible to keep to a rigid structured and regular pattern, but once respondents sent their stories, invested of their time, I felt it necessary to react to each individually. I needed to prove to them that I had read their work, that I 'heard' them. I therefore reacted to them, as much as possible, as I might have done in a face-to-face situation, picking up on possible cues within the text, checking and replicating how they signed off their correspondence, with their name or initial, with a 'kind regards', a 'best wishes', 'much love' or an 'x'. Some respondents found the process of participation therapeutic and/or enjoyable and thanked me for letting them participate or revisit elements of their past, to have given them a reason to take time to reflect and articulate their lives, as Laura wrote:

Am I right to presume that this is almost the end of our correspondence? What a shame! It has been most thought provoking for me, a bit of therapy too actually. If you need any other details or information don't hesitate to get in touch. Bye for now. (Laura)

And Ellen:

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<sup>23</sup> The University and the Faculty Ethics Committee have been subject to a rebranding exercise and restructuring, since my application. At the time of the research it was the University of Plymouth, Faculty of Health Ethics Committee. It has now changed again.

I have enjoyed thinking and feeling my way through the answers to your questions and it has given me food for thought! Thank you. I hope the research has been useful and interesting to you.

And Mark:

It was a pleasure; I think I learned something about myself from doing it. I have definitely changed my attitude to food as I have got older – I used to look down on anyone eating salad or eating sensibly – maybe a cultural thing, or just a defence mechanism...

Others indicated that they had not replied, not because they didn't want to, but because it was somehow a self-indulgence to take time to reflect upon their past and themselves, Dalia for example wrote: 'I'll set to those questions. It's not a chore by the way... just a self-indulgence!' Willow wrote:

Sorry - things have been a bit frantic at work and I've been waiting for a chance to do this 'properly'. Will do it quickly instead, as I can't see things calming down soon. Hope the research goes well,

And Kelly:

I've written something now but will write a bit more before sending you some. Now I need to go home because writing about food has made me hungry! :-D

I wrote my own food narrative in one six hour sitting on a Sunday in February 2011. I had already received twenty-three narrative food journeys from respondents by this stage and mine was partly written in response to these. I began with a memory of watching milk coming to the boil for my breakfast 'Ready Brek' around the age of six. I recalled memories of my grandparents; take away meals and the only occasion when my father cooked for my sister and I. The absence of my mother from the narrative was intentional.

I did send my narrative account to two of the respondents, Quentin and Magenta. Indeed, Quentin had asked to see it as he was having difficulties writing his due to:

...the very surprising emotional stuff that the subject brings up, especially relating to early memories, my relationship with my mother and father and the fact that as a child I suddenly remember refusing to eat for long periods of time. My mother used to try all sorts of tactics and I know now that there were such shortages after the war.

So I sent him my account. I was then taken aback by the comments from his wife Queenie, who was also participating in the study. She expressed shock that it was my husband who was preparing the evening meal for my family, now that I was working full time. Her husband had never cooked and had never shown any inclination to do so. The notion that a man would take on this domestic activity was an alien concept.

### **3:6. Reflexivity in Action – negotiating a researcher identity**

Bowker and Tuffin (2004:02) argue that 'e-mail interviewing is empowering because it allows respondents to be in control of the flow of the interview, [it] enables them to answer at their convenience and in any manner they feel suitable'. Indeed, in terms of the power balance inherent in traditional interviews, the online interview does posit the power to respond very definitely with the respondent. They are fully in control in terms of whether they respond or not and when. This means that developing a relationship with the respondent is even more important. There was the potential risk that it could take time to establish rapport with respondents (Kozinets, 2010:112) and by which time they may have lost interest in participating in the research, or have moved on to something else. However, this was not the case and once respondents committed to participating, they engaged with the process.

I tried to be as consistent as possible with my questions and instructions to respondents. It is argued that a consistency of approach in terms of rigour or trustworthiness refers to notions of credibility, transferability, authenticity and dependability of the data (Koch 2006, Lincoln 1995). In order for respondents to easily identify correspondence from me in their in-box I created a specific, e-mail address for the duration of the study [ourfoodstories@gmail.com](mailto:ourfoodstories@gmail.com)<sup>24</sup>. The consent form was pasted within the content of each of the e-mail invitations I sent out and was not sent as an attachment. Research on CMC has demonstrated that respondents are unlikely to open attachments sent with e-mails (Illingworth, 2006; Garcia *et al*, 2009). The in-depth online asynchronous interviews would be carried out in stages at roughly ten respondents at a time. This was to ensure that there were not too many e-mail exchanges going on at once and that I would not be overwhelmed with respondents' stories. This enabled me to keep track of the e-mail exchanges. I worked methodically through my e-mail list and sent out e-mails to the first five men and women.

I was not sending out a questionnaire, or asking for quick responses, but requesting that respondents reflect upon the role of food throughout their lives. It was difficult to know exactly how much time this correspondence would take. Or how much time it would take me to craft an individual response to each and every respondent? A response, that indicated that I had read and understood their narratives. They had, after all, spent time creating them; it only seemed fitting that I should spend time reading and reflecting this back to them. Hence, in many ways the extent to which this would impinge upon my time was unknown, so I felt it best to take a step-by-step approach.

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<sup>24</sup> This was the actual e-mail address I used. In presenting my work and in the title of the thesis I use 'e-mail' instead as this is generic and removes any commercial affiliations.

For Kozinets (2010), asynchronous online interviews were deemed to have ended once the respondent has stopped replying. Indeed, this could be considered one of the benefits of CMC for the respondent, their participation is always considered voluntary and not replying indicates that the interview is finished. I anticipated that respondents would provide three or four e-mail exchanges and in the majority of cases this is what happened.

Illingworth (2006) conducted nine asynchronous online e-mail life story interviews consecutively. This took between twelve days and five weeks for her to complete. In my study, respondents tended to reply quickly to the initial invitation to participate. It soon became apparent though that I could not guarantee that they would actually respond nor when this might be. This was highlighted as an issue in Meho's (2006) appraisal of the benefits of e-mail interviewing, she reported that there could be a delay of several months before data collection was completed, as it could take days or weeks for respondents to reply.

Hence, it was almost three weeks before I received my first reply and this was after a gentle reminder. It became evident as the research progressed that asynchronous online in-depth interviews could not be rushed. This was a time of intense anxiety as I waited to see if the research was going to progress at all and is indicative of the type of researcher vulnerability that has been documented by other researchers reflecting on their roles in the field (Hallowell *et al*, 2005, Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000). It was therefore a great relief



when I received my first reply from Drew (Andrew), on December 16<sup>th</sup> 2010, who opened with:

Food as you may or may not know is something that I have become passionate about and certainly my relationship with food has changed through my life.

I felt extremely self-conscious in crafting a suitable reply, but managed to send some questions in response to his story, which Drew replied to almost immediately. We then exchanged correspondence regularly (excluding the Christmas and New Year break), with Drew occasionally texting comments from his mobile phone. I was conscious of Drew's status as a self-confessed 'foodie' or food connoisseur, which we discussed in our correspondence. I was aware that Drew was a highly paid chief executive working abroad. This was someone who wanted to impress and to share his knowledge and expertise. The second person to reply was Alison on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December. By the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, eight weeks into the research, I had only managed an e-mail interview with Drew and Alison. I therefore opted to send out another ten invitations. I received a reply almost immediately and by the 6<sup>th</sup> of January I had a narrative from Beth, who began her food narrative with the following:

This really got me thinking... My earliest memory of food must have been when I was five or under as I remember my father showing me how to make a pie out of all the food on my plate... He died when I was five so I can place my memories in a timeline easily due to the moves we made.

In many ways this 'familial embeddedness' from Beth was a surprise, even though Cotterill and Letherby (1993:74) contend that 'regardless of difference, many women made sense of their lives by referring to individual and family transitions' (1993:74). Indeed, it became apparent that this 'familial embeddedness' was integral to most of the 'life histories' from both men and

women. So that, 'in a very real sense life histories are 'group lives', where the narrator weaves her story with those of her 'significant others'; her children, parent, husbands, lovers and friends' (1993:74). Lawler (2008:39) refers to this as 'active identity-work in the context of kinship' and highlights the contradictions between the self as 'autonomous entity' and the self as 'the embodiment of relationships'. These tensions were certainly evident and explored within the respondent's auto/biographical accounts.

In my diary entry for the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, I commented that the e-mail exchange as a form of interviewing was frustrating, especially in terms of having to wait for people's responses. By this time I had sent out thirty-six invitations and whilst twenty-two people said that they would participate, I was actually only communicating with nine people, including the e-mail exchange/ interview with Drew, which we completed on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2011. My target of sixty completed interviews at this stage seemed a long way off.

One respondent, Jade found my request for her 'food story' difficult to understand. Our initial e-mail exchange is below:

Sure Julie, will be happy to help. And, I have a love-hate relationship to food; it is my biggest 'issue' in life, as probably it is with many people. So, it should be interesting. Will you reflect back too? Happy New Year to you too! Jade

*Hi Jade, Thank you for agreeing to help. What I'm really after is your 'food story'. Perhaps, this will include your earliest food memories, favourite foods, memorable food occasions, whether your eating habits have changed over time and why this may be. Also, absolutely anything food related that you'd like to share with me.*

*In terms of food being an issue and a love-hate relationship, I guess it is for me too, which is probably why I have embarked on this as a topic for research. However, I am no expert on this and whilst I will be very sensitive to your concerns I don't know how much I will be able to reflect back to you, though I will try. Also, if I am honest if you*

*think it might be difficult for you then I should urge you not to participate. I will understand either way, but do let me know...*

Hi Julie, It is not a huge problem to me don't worry. It is just a big topic in a way, because food is so important and yet so hard to 'manage'. But I am learning to manage it in my way, so I'd like to participate. It would just be helpful for me to also know what you discover! That way I might learn something too. J

*Hi J, of course no problem. I can let you see 'findings' as and when I have some!!*

*Hi Jade, I was just wondering how you were getting on. Would you like me to ask you some specific questions or are you happy to send me some of your food autobiography/ reflections when you're ready?*

Hi Julie, I am not sure what you mean. Do you want me to start writing a food autobiography all by myself? In that case it will be something I will plan in on the long term, because I am very busy right now and my attention is very scattered, so I need to focus and not take on another project. If you want to know something about me and my food stories sooner, it is better to pull out a questionnaire, then I do not have to give it a lot of thought, i.e. how to structure, etc. Writing an autobiography is a nice idea, but right now it would pull me out of my priorities. Hope that is clearer. Jade

*Hi J, Thank you, and yes of course I understand. I have given myself 6 months to collect stories and really do appreciate that asking for autobiographies is a big ask from people, even in bite sized chunks, (it really doesn't have to be structured at all), so anytime you feel the need... otherwise no worries at all...*

Hi Julie, Still not 100% sure what you mean with collecting stories. Do you want me to keep a diary? Or write about food as a child? It is a big thing in my family, but I doubt there are many stories I could find written by me about what food means to me. Can you clarify a bit what you want for your purposes? Thank you. Jade.

Meho (2006:1284) notes:

...e-mailed questions need to be more self-explanatory than those posed face to face, with a clear indication of the responses required – there is always room for miscommunication or misinterpretation. However, it is important to avoid being too directive and narrowing the potential for respondents to reply.

Indeed, as is evident here, some were comfortable with a life-history approach whilst others preferred questions and answers (Letherby, 2001:10). I therefore

developed some questions on food/eating and cooking/shopping, to match the original research aims and following examples from Letherby and Zdrodowski (1995) (Appendices 10:3). For Illingworth (2006) CMC is a powerful and enabling research tool and even though the interaction is disembodied in a physical sense, the interaction is no less free from the 'self' or emotion (Illingworth 2006). Indeed, Morgan (2009) argues that the e-mail exchange is not as dis-embodied as it might be assumed to be. Hence, although respondents are not engaged in face work the focus of the interaction is no less intense. Respondents were just as concerned with meaning and interpretation. It was about getting it right, as if there was a script that needed to be adhered to, there was a concern with going off course. This certainly explains some of Jade's anxiety about her participation.

After the e-mail exchange with Jade in January 2011, once respondents agreed to participate, I sent them the outline of what I wanted as before (Appendices 10:3), but also offered them the option of answering questions as well. This proved very effective. Not all respondents requested the questions, but even when they did these elicited rich and detailed replies. For Jade, they provided a really useful starting point and certainly helped in developing our online interaction:

Hi Julie, that's easier. Here are my answers. They are brief, but if you need to know more, let me know! JXXX

A couple of respondents answered these questions very briefly. One of the drawbacks of CMC as identified by Illingworth (2006), is the problem of probing; this is difficult in an on-line asynchronous interview context. In contrast to face-to-face interviewing, probes are difficult in an e-mail interview, when this is

reliant on follow up e-mails that may or may not be answered (Meho, 2006). Generally though, the written accounts were more 'self consciously ordered and reflective' than they might have been in a verbal interview (Handy and Ross 2005:41). It was the case, echoing Illingworth's (2006:1) experience, that this 'qualitative encounter was a shared medium of trust, reciprocity and revelation'. This meant that whilst respondents had greater control over the research encounter, I was perhaps more anxious and exposed. By the 18<sup>th</sup> of January I wrote 'I have been getting some good stories from people, but the whole experience is much more difficult/fraught than anticipated'.

I did change and revise some of the questions slightly as the research progressed and in response to my respondent's replies. For example I removed the word 'diet' early on as it has highly feminized connotations and I did not want male respondents particularly to consider that I was asking them if they participated in traditionally feminine eating practices (Connell 1995, Beagan and Saunders 2005, Gough and Conor 2005, Gough, 2006, Gough 2007, Robertson, 2007). Instead I asked if respondents changed their eating habits. I am not sure if this really made any difference. There were male respondents who had been on a 'diet' or 'changed their eating habits' in order to lose weight. It was perhaps more reflective of my sensitivities than theirs. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, I wrote 'my research is turning into a lesson in pragmatism, which I guess it was always going to be at some level. I have received some amazing stories though.' The e-mail interview with Jade was now underway and although she structured her replies around my questions, we were able to move beyond these and engage in an asynchronous online in-depth interview.

The flexibility for respondents was significant, using e-mail correspondence enabled me to conduct the interviews across time and space. This was useful in terms of the geographical spread of respondents, some were living and working abroad, as well as across the UK, from the immediate locality to the farthest corners of Scotland. I had respondents in Ireland, the Netherlands, Australia, Singapore, Thailand and South Africa. It meant that I could contact those who might be considered members of difficult to reach groups, such as senior executives (Lehu 2004). Indeed, as Meho (2006:1288) claims, this is one of the benefits of e-mail interviews, the democratisation and internationalisation of research. It meant that respondents could e-mail their replies at any time of the night or day. It was unusual, for an e-mail exchange to take place in real time; when both respondent and myself were engaged in an almost synchronous e-mail conversation, though it did happen on occasion.

Some individuals, even though they agreed to participate, were unable to send me their stories/narratives within the eight-month timescale I set for the research project (November 2010 – June 2011). In terms of using CMC rather than speaking to respondents, there were some drawbacks. Daisy made use of a voice dragon, a software package that translated speech into text and five others (James, Celia, Melissa, Quentin and Queenie) corresponded by post. All of these respondents with the exception of Melissa were over 60 years of age. Three people said that they would participate and then asked if I could interview them instead. In the interests of democratic and open participatory methods this meant that I had to re-apply to the University Faculty Ethics Committee. I was reluctant to do this, but felt that if respondents wanted to participate, it seemed unreasonable not to give them the option of talking to me instead. This raises

questions regarding the democratization of the in-depth e-mail interview. This only works if all respondents are comfortable with the written exchange. In the end I only conducted one interview<sup>25</sup>. For this, I took notes and e-mailed it to the respondent for her to approve. This again raises issues regarding the standardization of the research, however I wanted to respond to respondents' needs and this seemed to supersede a concern for standardization. I used the same questions as I sent via e-mail and only interviewed this respondent once.

The variation in the number of follow up e-mail exchanges fluctuated slightly between respondents. I engaged in sending out gentle reminders, but was conscious of not doing this too much. Often, they would reply to say that they had actually written their stories earlier, but had not sent them straight away. Their responses then it would seem were more measured than they might have been in a synchronous or real time interviews. Overall, the stories/interviews varied in length from between a paragraph to twelve pages of text. I tried to encourage them to add more, but sometimes this was difficult to achieve. I was aware that I was asking a lot of respondents in terms of time. Eventually I accepted gratefully that some would only ever want, or be able to contribute a paragraph of text. Although, the majority involved contributed between three and four pages of text. As Liamputtong (2007:157) highlights this is one of the main benefits for the respondent with this type of research, as 'they can reply when they feel comfortable and decide how they will respond'.

The time involved in the correspondence was variable and once the respondent started the e-mail exchange, it took from around a week to six months to finally

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<sup>25</sup> It was difficult to arrange suitable interview dates and the data collection phase was coming to an end. I already felt fairly overwhelmed with data.

complete. This is similar to the work of Seymour and Lupton (2004:303) who found that their shortest interview occurred over 22 days and longest was 42.6. It took from between a day to five months for respondents to send in their first reply after they initially agreed to participate. This was a very intense experience and although an online interview, in theory at least, removes the emphasis on the 'visual' cues and backstage processes, this did not mean that my replies were not measured or self-conscious. The affect conveyed in many of my respondent's narratives was certainly felt by me, and I felt under intense pressure to respond in a way that was appropriate to each and every one of them. This was an affective practice and took up a great deal of time and emotional energy. For example after Jade sent me her brief answers to my questions, I replied:

*Hi Jade, Thank you so much for these, they were great. If you don't mind I was just wondering if you could expand a little on "comfort food" what is this for you? What types of food? Have you identified a pattern to your comfort eating? Is this associated with home? Is there a taste of home? I am interested in the difference (conflict?) between eating 'something good' and 'taking good care of myself' as this resonates strongly with me too. You mention clean food; can you be a bit more specific about this too? What is healthy eating specifically do you think?*

*Also, you talk about the differences between 'home' and life outside the home, which you are living now. How easy or difficult is that in terms of 'watching' what you eat? I often wonder what it might be like to not have to constantly 'watch' my food intake? Do you enjoy eating? What aspects do you enjoy about it?*

*Your reference to the 'child cooks cafe' was interesting, especially your enjoyment of it. Can you expand on this? What aspects did you enjoy the most about it? Do you enjoy cooking? I wonder how you think of cooking and how different that it is to baking? - If you can expand on this that would be great.*

*Hope these are ok Jade? thanks again*

I received a rich and detailed response to my questions here, beyond the boundaries of the original questions.



The email account ([ourfoodstories@gmail.com](mailto:ourfoodstories@gmail.com)) set up especially for the research proved invaluable in keeping all of the correspondence in one place. Though of course this did not mean that I could neglect respondents and their stories, as a 'sensitive researcher' (Liamputtong, 2007:72). I was often aware of the need to respond within a reasonable timescale, if not straight away. It was difficult at times to know 'how much to disclose and what kind of disclosure was appropriate' (Liamputtong, 2007:74), particularly given that this was written text. This gave the written 'words' a kind of permanence that I felt could be open to be misinterpreted in a way that spoken 'words' in a face-to-face encounter might not be. In a face-to-face interview there is always the potential or the opportunity to explain instantly. On the other hand it could be argued that one of the benefits of CMC is that feelings that might be difficult to manage in a face-to-face exchange or that might have a detrimental effect in an interview situation, with CMC it is possible to craft responses and check them for anything negative. So whilst the ability to counter any misunderstandings required skilful negotiation in an e-mail interview, I could actually consider my own emotional responses outside of the e-mail exchange. Indeed, I underestimated the emotional labour inherent in this type of research. Although, I was not necessarily involved in sensitive issues or researching vulnerable groups as highlighted in my proposal, emotional responses are part of life and are therefore not absent from the research process (Gray 2008). As Melrose (2002:345) documents, 'emotional labour' is 'hard work' and can be 'sorrowful and difficult', as it 'involves dealing with feelings', even in this instance if respondents' accounts do not involve 'appalling abuse'.

Mostly, whilst my replies were not instantaneous, in some instances I corresponded quickly with respondents in a flurry of e-mails; often respondents would add elements of their stories via mobile phone as bits of their food memories came back to them when they were out and about in their daily lives. Others were more measured and took a long time crafting their food stories. These were then sent to me as a complete record, or as finished as an autobiography could ever be. I was also sent bite-sized chunks or a flavour of a respondent's food story and no more. Indeed I incorporated 'the bite-sized' food analogy into my correspondence. There was certainly a structure to the majority of the narratives and these centred on transitions. They often began with childhood memories and ended with an exploration of their current relationship to food. Others did not revisit their childhoods at all and remained silent. There was one respondent who said that she would participate but only if she did not reflect upon her past and could discuss her food habits in the present.

### **3:7. Feminist analysis – an affective practice**

From a postmodern perspective in research of this kind, 'objectivity' is replaced by 'reflexive subjectivity and the politics of position' (Grbich, 2004:28-29) or theorized subjectivity (Letherby 2013). These are central to my doctoral study and my analysis of the data. Indeed, according to Liamputtong (2007:17):

...self-reflexivity requires an awareness of the self in the process of creating knowledge and requires researchers to clarify how they construct their beliefs (a process of self revelation) and how these beliefs influence their data collection... the emotions and personal transformation resulting from self-reflexivity are essential components of her feminist research project.

The focus of my study is iterative and shares attributes with CGT as noted earlier. This approach ensures researcher reflexivity and a focus upon assumptions and interpretations. For Silverman (2011:293), this is achieved

through locating the 'self' within the inquiry and a 'cognitive grounded theorist therefore:

...acknowledges the influences of the researcher on the research process, accepts the notion of multiple realities, emphasizes reflexivity and rejects the assumptions that researchers could set aside their prior knowledge.

Another method used when analysing respondents' narratives is the Voice Centred Relational Method (VCRM) developed by Mauthner and Doucet (1998), from Gilligan (1982). This method is usually employed in the analysis of interview transcripts. It refers to the 'voice' of the respondent and is about prioritizing that voice by listening to or reading the transcript texts. Balan (2005:65) associates this method with a 'feminist interpretative lens', one in which the 'self is viewed as having multiple selves or voices, in contrast and conflict with one another (having many subjectivities)'.

Here the researcher is encouraged to conduct four readings of the text. In the first reading the plot and researchers response on an intellectual, academic and emotional level, are identified. In the second reading all of the 'I', 'we' and 'you' statements are located within the text. These are highlighted in order to illustrate how the respondent may think, feel or speak within the text. These are acknowledged as very strong statements of intent within the context of the narratives. These statements are then taken out of the narrative and used to construct an i-poem (although, arguably an 'I', 'we' and you' poem), they can be very powerful representations of the emotional aspects of the narrative.

In the third reading the focus is on the relationships within the text, who is being spoken about, how are these relationships conceptualised and how might this

change throughout the text? In the final reading following this method, the external factors are examined. How do respondents react with their environment? What might be the unspoken, structures and contexts influencing the construction of these narratives? (Gilligan 1982, Gilligan *et al*, 2003, Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, Balan, 2005, Illingsworth, 2005).

The first reading comprises of two parts. The first is identifying the story or plot, the metaphors, imagery, protagonists, contradictions and sub-plots. In the second part of this reading the emphasis is on the reader/researcher responses to the text or 'listening' on a number of different levels, which is similar to CGT. For Mauthner and Doucet (1998), the researcher comments upon her social location in relation to the respondent, as well as her emotional responses. The focus is very much upon the way in which the researcher connects and disconnects with the respondent throughout this reading of the text. This again is a very powerful means of exploring the ways in which these texts or voices may be read and re-read. It ensures a greater insight into the self within the research process. I took some of the narrative cases and identified the plot or story, drawing on the metaphors, images, contradictions, protagonists, subplots and recurrent imagery. I created 'i-poems', for Ollie, Ophelia, Ellen, Molly and Lola (Appendices, 10:4). An extract from Ophelia's i-poem is below. I included the reading of this i-poem in the BSA Auto/Biography Study Group Summer Conference in July 2011, Hidden Lives. The title of the paper was, 'hungry, nourishing hunger and a hunger for love in hidden food stories':

I feel  
I have never tried to harm my body  
I have high expectations  
I think  
I have a strong body  
I feel fit

I am proud of my body  
I'm just

I don't get it  
I'd like  
I think a lot  
I had lots of problems  
I was breast-feeding  
I got an abscess  
I had to carry on  
I believe

I think  
I have a pretty healthy body  
I just don't like the way it looks  
I am aging  
I am at that point  
I am about to  
I don't want to  
I feel lucky  
I have looked after it  
I haven't been to the gym  
I have taken care of myself  
I have friends  
I don't  
I wake up  
I don't drink much  
I hardly drink at all  
I have a sensitive system  
I listen to it  
I can  
I don't like the alternative  
I want to feel well

I think energy  
I am describing someone young  
I think  
We associate health with youth  
I am not sure  
We don't see them  
I guess they  
We all know what  
We should be eating  
I think body and mind  
you  
You feel about yourself  
I have seen

I fear  
We are lost!

The VCRM is a feminist approach to research, which prioritises respondents' 'voices' and relies upon the listening or reading of these. One of the aims of the method is to prioritise the voice of the narrator above that of the researcher, whilst acknowledging the researcher's story. The method recognises the centrality of relationships within the construction of narratives or the significance when constructing narratives of a kind of 'familial embeddedness' (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993), or the means by which respondents (especially women) use significant others in the telling of themselves. It belongs to a social constructionist epistemological position that recognises that human experience is bound up within larger relational dynamics.

In order to represent respondents' narratives I created word clouds from their texts. These word clouds became useful representations of the major themes and ideas expressed in each respondent's narrative. The text from the narratives was fed directly into the online software package from 'wordle.com'. The more frequently the words are used in the text the larger they appeared in the word clouds. This became a useful *aide memoir* when analysing the respondent's replies and it became possible to identify the respondent by their word clouds<sup>26</sup>. For example, 'cooking' and 'eating' as well as 'food' were words used a great deal by many respondents. Of course, one of the problems with these is that some words that may have been used infrequently may in fact carry more weight for example anorexia or addiction. The word clouds were formed from texts that varied in length and there is no allowance or weighting across the texts. They have been effective though when disseminating the

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<sup>26</sup> This is not to suggest that 'word clouds' represent an academic attempt at analysis of the food narratives, but they were useful as an instant and visual representation of the similarities and differences between them.









I conducted several levels of narrative analysis, which began when the first reply was opened on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2010. I simultaneously identified themes, looked for patterns and read across cases. I explored them using concepts that initially guided the study such as gender, emotional responses to food and weight control (Lupton 1996, Bordo 2003). I used tables to document some of the persistent themes from the data, family, body or weight, health and foodie categories. Both the 'family' (DeVault 1991, Cotterill and Letherby 1993, Morgan 1996) and the 'foodie' (Falk 1991, Lupton 1996, Scholliers 2001, Johnston and Baumann 2010, Cairns *et al* 2010) themes were not anticipated in the original proposal for the study. I assumed there might be gender differences, especially when considering women's relationship with food and the body, the extent to which the men would articulate their food stories within the boundaries of hegemonic masculinities was unexpected.

I re-read each narrative identifying the key protagonists following the first stage of Mauthner and Doucet's VCRM (1998, 2003). Mostly, this included mothers and fathers. At times respondents referred to the reproduction of foodways for their own children. Occasionally the parental relationship was missing from the accounts. Sometimes, they included grandparents, brothers, sisters, partners, wives and/or significant others. When a respondent discussed their friends in relation to food this tended to be in terms of discussing food as a means of belonging or exclusion. In this reading I identified the relationship with the body and weight issues, again there were significant silences regarding the body, weight, or health in some of the accounts, especially within the men's narratives. If weight or the body was discussed this tended to be an emotional and embodied narrative and was certainly more common for women. In this

stage of the analysis I identified respondents embodied responses to specific foods, 'good' and 'bad' and these were coded.

I then selected cases that best illustrated some of the key themes, particularly those relating to emotional responses to food. Hence, for the body data chapter I set out to analyse the narratives from Ellen and Ophelia. These two women did not know each other at all and yet I linked them. They participated in the research at similar times, both in early February 2011, and their narratives elicited significant emotional responses from me then. I was keen to explore this too. I therefore became engaged in what Lawler (2008:19) refers to as 'a spiral of interpretation and re-interpretation'.

I began with Ophelia and Ellen's narratives following the four stages of the VCRM closely and went through each of their narratives line by line, coding them in line with the four readings outlined by the VCRM, this included highlighting relationships and the external environment. Later, I took these narratives and following a CGT approach positioned myself closely with the text. This involved a close analysis of my own responses to the narratives, intellectual, academic and emotional. It was during this process that I became emotionally entwined in these two particular narratives and decided to stop this type of close investigation. Instead, in order to include more of the respondents' accounts I concentrated on analysis across the themes, rather than focusing directly on specific cases. I started again with a close scrutiny of the foodie narratives, because these accounts seemed to be less directly imbued with emotion and elicited different responses from me. Of course this did not mean

the men's narratives were not emotional, just that they tended to be cloaked in a normalizing lens of hegemonic masculinities.

Eventually, I returned to Ophelia and Ellen's narratives, as they were part of the 'body' theme. Their relationships with food were closely connected to their bodies and this was something I intended to explore in the context of the rationale and background review of the literature. One of the dilemmas when pursuing a feminist approach to research is the decision on whose voice(s) to include. In the interests of conducting ethical and accountable research there needs to be a transparency about how these decisions are reached, especially in terms of producing a valid account. It is impossible to reflect upon and introduce all of the respondent's narratives within the context of the PhD. There were certainly some voices that resonated more strongly with my own history and/or with the original theoretical framework for the study, which concerned the gendering of the relationship between food and identity. Others were powerful in terms of how their narratives were articulated. Ophelia for example, gave her narrative an almost literary character. It was rich with aromas and textures. She incorporated a lot of brand names, which seemed purposefully positioned within the text; especially in the first e-mail exchange that gave it a distinct 1970s feel. The focus of her narrative was the development of her difficult relationship with her body, as this was one of the original aims of the research it seemed appropriate to consider her narrative as one that would need further analysis.

Indeed, it is only through positioning myself within their narratives and exploring my own responses to them that I gained some understanding as to why this was. This enabled a clearer understanding of their narratives (and mine). Of

course, in terms of interpretation and coding of the data this has been clouded by my own pre-conceptions and my own narrative journey. The impact of this on my understanding of the narratives is relevant. Often, in identifying with respondents the boundaries between self and other become blurred. This has been an intensely emotional journey for me, particularly in relation to Ophelia. Hers is a narrative about hunger; it is about a lack of maternal love and nurturance explored through her relationship with food. It is about significant kinship ties, mothers and daughters. She articulated a longing for a thin body shape, yet acknowledged that this is something she could never achieve. Throughout her life she has craved nourishment for herself whilst admitting that she doesn't really like food very much at all.

I found many elements of Ophelia's narrative difficult. In an effort to understand this, and as part of the analytical framework for this study, I positioned myself closely to her text. In doing so I tried to identify with her story and questioned my reaction to it. This had the effect of making me more emotionally involved, at times angry and others depressed. Generally Ophelia focused upon her relationship with food and her body, framed within wider discourses relating to cultural values regarding the thin ideal. She articulated her story within the context of her relationships with her mother (who died of breast cancer when she was 12) and her stepmother. Yet, Ophelia seemed to explore this by projecting her anxieties about her own body onto her teenage daughter and I found this problematic. Being the mother of a teenage daughter myself, I found Ophelia's policing of her daughter's body unsettling. It made me anxious that she was so closely involved in supporting and projecting the cultural norms and

values regarding women's bodies, those that she so clearly articulated as having blighted her own life, onto her daughter:

In truth, I don't know if I am doing the right thing for her but I don't want her to be unhappy, confused or feel bad about her body or feel she isn't beautiful, because in all honesty, this triggers all of my own feelings which made my early life so difficult. I think she is beautiful with a beautiful body and I tell her so regularly... but it brings up a lot of feelings in me around food and bodies and my own early years. If I think she is eating the wrong things repeatedly I have to stop myself being critical of her as I would be of myself because it is her life and her body but I want her always to feel good about herself and be as gorgeous, relaxed and happy in herself as she can be.

Ophelia, like others referred to experiences of anorexia amongst her school friends, unlike others she included 'an enormously fat' character:

[Girls Full Name] had anorexia though, with her huge head and red hands but nothing was ever said. She came top of the form always, exercised endlessly always playing in every sport and every match going and was always cold and every bone showed. It scared us and we used to whisper about 'anorexia' as if it was something you could catch. On the other hand, [Girls Full Name] was enormously fat, smelly and allegedly snored. No one wanted to share a room with her – even at 12/13 we were discriminating against fat people in our little world.

In the context of my background interest in the politics of 'fat' and 'fat studies', as well as an understanding of Goffman's (1963) work on stigma I find the stereotypes and 'othering' of individuals based on body size disturbing. My struggles with Ophelia's narrative highlight some of the practical dilemmas of an auto/biographical approach where feminist ethics suggest the need for both respect of research respondents and honest reflection on the part of the researcher. It was and still is difficult for me to give a clear reading of Ophelia's narratives without considering my own emotional reactions to them. I have repeatedly worked and reworked this particular data chapter and immersed myself fully in the process at various intervals over the last three years. Indeed, it was this data chapter that I have struggled with the most.

It is notable that I found analysis of the men's data easier to manage on an emotional level. This raises issues with regards to the power and ethics of the research process. Once out of the field the power shifts from the respondent to researcher, it is the researcher who decides whose voices to include and exclude (Letherby, 2003). In adopting an auto/biographical approach I had a close emotional engagement with many of the women's narratives, this was not necessarily the same with the men's, whilst, I was sensitive to notions of objectification my experiences were distinct to theirs. Yet, I sought some comfort in them and the alternative emotional reactions they engendered. In Ollie's narrative for example:

I remember seeing that film where some scientists are shrunk down to microscopic size and journey through a human body (Fantastic Voyage - I think) and this so amazed me that I was convinced that scientists were trying to put a "sub" inside me to do some sort of tests. As a result I used to look out for specs in my food, especially mash for some reason, and if there were any suspicious flecks I would put them to one side. Oh God - I haven't thought of this for years and you'll probably think I need a psychiatrist now!

... I have always absolutely loved cheese - the stronger the better. I remember walking round a Farmers Market in Sussex where I grew up nibbling on a big block of mature cheddar and being asked if I was brought up by rats - I was quite proud of that.

And then Henry, who refers to an occasion we had both attended around twenty-five years ago:

... BBQ's at [Friend's Name's] old house in [Village] of course (I never did get over that T-shirt [you wore] with the large arm holes, sorry I have just had a rub down with a damp copy of the *Radio Times!* He He...

Maybe they were writing to entertain, to make me laugh or to make different kinds of connections with a female researcher. They were certainly illustrative of the power of cultural scripts of masculinity and femininity at play in the research process and beyond.

### 3:8. Summary

My methodological journey concerns auto/biography, feminism, ethics and reflexivity. I have outlined how I used CMC, analysed the narratives and identified the themes that I will be drawing upon in the following data chapters. I have included the demographics, an i-poem and some of the word clouds, which have been useful in aiding my analysis. Overall, the aims of the study were well suited to this type of approach. The use of CMC was beneficial in that it enabled an exchange across time and space when it was convenient for the respondent and the researcher. The respondent and researcher relationship was no less intense than when engaged in other qualitative techniques tasked with accumulating rich data.

The research has certainly elicited some amazing narratives and 'foody thoughts' as Ollie remarked. Some have made me laugh out loud and some have made me cry on more than one occasion. The analytical framework has been beneficial in enabling freedom to explore or play with the data. When conducting research on issues directly related to gender and adopting an auto/biographical approach, the power of gendered discourses on the articulation of individual life narratives is exemplified. It is these discourses that I will be exploring within the following four data chapters. I have not been able to utilise all respondents' accounts. Instead I use some respondents to represent or speak on behalf of others from each of the four themes. As an auto/biographical endeavour I incorporate some of my own reflections, although I am less present in Chapter Seven, when exploring the men's foodie narratives.



## *Chapter 4: Une entrée, 'everything I cook, is cooked with love'*

*(Faye)*

### **4:1. Chapter Outline**

This chapter on the family<sup>27</sup> is the first of the four that examine the themes I have identified in the data. To reiterate points touched on previously, the healthy and body themes were anticipated at the outset of the research process, as noted in terms of its original objectives. I was not expecting to be writing chapters on maternal or foodie identities. Respondents narrated their lives with a purpose and in order to tell a recognisable story with a common vocabulary (Mills, 1959). In this chapter I highlight how they were committed to a gendered division of labour within the domestic sphere particularly when allocating the work of 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991). I emphasise continuities, rather than disjuncture in social relations. Despite accommodating individual family members preferences and maintaining an occupational identity, providing 'healthy' family meals cooked from scratch and eaten around a table, was used as a means of displaying cultural capital and/or appropriate mothering.

In terms of the individualisation thesis it has been argued that 'the' family, like issues of class and gender have 'lost their substance and power due to the progress of individualisation' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). If this were the case 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991) would be just one element of a 'negotiated family' model, in which 'everything can be negotiated' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: xxi). However, this was not the family model

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<sup>27</sup> I use the term 'family' here in its loosest, broadest sense and acknowledge that there is fluidity in the idea of the family and not 'the' family (Morgan, 2011:34).

respondents wrote about. Were respondents documenting a more traditional picture of family life, one that perhaps did not fully reflect their lived reality and if so why? Or is feeding the family at the core of what mothering means, so that to admit to not engaging fully in this activity somehow challenges one's identity as a good mother?

I introduce this theme with a brief review of key concepts relating to family practices (Morgan, 1996, 2011), intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) and maternal identities (Allen and Osgood, 2009). These are considered in the context of a middle class habitus that utilises forms of social, symbolic and cultural capital. This also sets the scene for the remaining three themes. I interweave respondents' and some of my own reflections. These demonstrate the extent to which foodways are social and relational. Indeed, respondents were keen to keep the family 'narrative going' (Giddens, 1991:54). I have considered whether this could be due to the age range of respondents, as none were under the age of 27. Yet, even the youngest participant; Connor frames his narrative in relation to his mother's cooking and family foodways:

My Mothers Yorkshire Puddings (of which were always perfect) to go with the Sunday roast; how she would mash in turnip (swede to the southerners) into the mashed potato because I would turn my nose up at it; the spaghetti bolognaise recipe that was full of carrots, mushrooms and peppers to bulk it out cheaply (I still make it that way-the 'real' Italian one is good but I still prefer my Ma's) and also, not forgetting her fudge recipe that comes from the far North-East from my Grandmothers hand written scrap/cook book which is a combination of the traditional English fudge and the Scottish tablet. In fact all of these come from her mother and no doubt from her mother before her.



young children (Drew, Kevin, Simon, Larry, Ollie, Lex, Faith, Faye, Imogen, Jocelyn, Laura, Lola, Molly, Noreen, Regan, Steph, Zoe), others were living with teenagers (Ed, Ophelia, Katrina, Melissa, Ruth, Valerie, Mark, Nick), for some their children had recently left the family home (Hannah, Ida, Gaby, Willow), or had adult children no longer living with them (Celia, Daisy, Harriet, Linda, Vera, James, Paul, Richard, Stephen, Walt). There were those like myself, who were living with some children but had others who had left the family home (Annie, Beth, Chloe, Edith, Helen, Paula, Ursula, Ian, Jake). There were temporary or intermittent family compositions as well, like Henry's whose stepchildren lived with him and his wife only part of the time. And Sam, whose work took him away from the family home for extensive periods of time, so ostensibly he was not living in a family environment on a full time basis. Two respondents were in long-term non-heterosexual relationships at the time of the study. One of these couples had adult children from a previous relationship, who were not living with them.

Chapman (2004) draws on Morgan's (1996) notion of family practices' and emphasises 'domestic practices' rather than gender roles, as significant because the latter assumes that these are fixed and stable, when he argues they are negotiated and subject to change. Again, as Morgan (1996) suggests, the focus on 'practices' is significant as it highlights the routine and routinized everyday notion of activity whilst simultaneously acknowledging that this is affected by wider cultural, economic and political circumstances (Chapman, 2004:1). Thus 'family practices' or 'domestic practices' are individual and social. In Chapman's (2004:21) account, domestic practice is divided into seven categories that he claims provide a contemporary 'snapshot' of cultural norms

and values (housework, parenting, leisure, providing income, strategic planning, managing money and caring). There is no specific category for foodwork and I suppose this might be subsumed under the heading of housework. Indeed, Chapman (2004) has cooking listed within housework and cookery as a leisure activity and therefore more readily identified with masculinity. Yet, when considering respondents narratives in my study, family foodways were very much more than domestic practices, they were embedded in notions of appropriate mothering and caring work. Specifically, this was about intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), in which foodwork and foodways, both the everyday 'proper' foodwork, such as cooking from scratch and eating around a table, as well as baking and sharing this with children represented a particular middle class habitus.

Hays (1996), Douglas and Michaels (2004) and O'Reilly (2004) argue that intensive mothering is an ideology based on white privilege and that this therefore 'others' alternative mothering practices such as mothering on welfare. Hays (1996:8) definition of intensive mothering is 'child centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive and financially expensive'. Thus, the 'all caring, self sacrificing ideal mother' is the proper ideology of contemporary mothering for women across race and class lines, even if not all women practice it' (Hays, 1996: 9). This corresponds with Allen and Osgood's (2009:7) distinctions between the 'yummy-mummy' and the 'chav mum'. In their work, they note that McRobbie (2008) identifies the 'yummy-mummy' as a distinct consumer 'tribe', consisting of women 'who have established a successful career before embarking on a family'. It is an aspirational identity, occupied by white, middle class professional women. Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008:232)

argue that the 'yummy-mummy' falsely 'universalises middle class femininity and pathologises working class women', especially younger women who have been unable to 'choose' between career and family. In Tyler's (2008:30) analysis the 'chav-mum represents a thoroughly dirty and disgusting ontology that operates as a constitutive limit for clean, white, middle class, feminine respectability'. She contends that the vilification of alternative mothering practices outside of intensive mothering ideologies links:

...new sets of norms about femininity, in which the ideal life trajectory of middle class women conforms to the current government objectives of economic growth through higher education and increased female workforce participation (*ibid*).

Hence, in the context of neo-liberal discourses, the 'yummy-mummy' according to Allen and Osgood (2009:8) 'embodies self-responsibility and self-sufficiency'; the chav-mum on the other hand 'is constituted as the unplanned result of improper and immoral behaviour that results in welfare dependency'. Mothers engaged in my research would certainly have been aware of wider discourses regarding appropriate and intensive mothering ideologies, particularly in terms of the need to distance themselves from practices associated with inappropriate feeding and the cultural symbol of the 'chav mum'.

There are several on-going public discourses concerning family foodways. Firstly there are arguments to do with the decline of the 'proper' family meal and therefore the decline of the 'proper' family, as identified by Murcott (1997, 2012). Hence, there is an assumed association between 'proper family dinners, proper families [and] proper children' (James, et al 2009a: 39). Secondly the concern with a decline in cooking skills, associated with the deskilling of housework (Meah and Watson, 2011) and the rise of a UK convenience-food

market worth an estimated £26 billion in 2006 (Mahon *et al* 2006). According to Celnik *et al* (2012) convenience foods have been associated with less healthy diets, obesity and related chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer (Jabs and Devine, 2006). Hence the rise in consumption of these types of meals is associated with unhealthy diets and therefore unhealthy families, it links junk food with a 'junk childhood' (James, 2010: unpaginated). In Jackson's (2009:10) work 'junk food' is associated with working class mothers, whereas the 'making and preparing of a proper family meal from scratch', whilst accommodating 'the individual food preferences and tastes of different family members', is part of a middle class habitus and a means of displaying a 'healthy' family life.

To reiterate, whilst government rhetoric and public discourses debate appropriate family foodways, they are referring to mothers, as the guardians of health (and morality) in the family. Hence, it is evident in respondents' narratives that; as Morgan (1996:158) notes 'the micro-politics of food revolve [d] around gender' and families tend to be 'mothered rather than gendered' (*ibid*: 82). The cultural scripts available on motherhood/ mothering centre upon dichotomous notions of appropriate/ acceptable/ adequate or inappropriate/ unacceptable/ inadequate mothering practices. In terms of food provision this complies with Warde's (1997) care and convenience antinomy. It would seem that regardless of the extent to which wider expectations around gender have shifted towards individualism, somehow when it comes to 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991) this is still the responsibility of the mother and part of what constitutes 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987). At a time of moral approbation within public discourses on obesity it is hardly surprising that the

role of the mother as the guardian of health, as well as 'moral guardian of family eating' (James *et al*, 2009:8) would prove significant in respondents' narratives. It is notable that the majority of my respondents are middle class. Wills *et al.*, (2009:55) document how 'choosing food in order to promote good health signifies a particularly middle-class outlook on consumption'. And Crawford (2006) and (Fisher) 2008 argue:

...that practices which promote good health require economic, cultural and social capital ... being recognised as 'health conscious' also delivers symbolic capital thereby (re)creating further social distinctiveness at the same time as stigmatising those who fail to achieve 'good health' through the food they eat (Crawford, 2006, cited in Wills *et al.*, 2009:55)

I contend that there are few words that adequately describe the practice of 'feeding the family' as DeVault (1991) claimed twenty-two years ago. Today, this activity is simultaneously valorised and trivialised. Family foodways are considered a matter of public concern because the family is the site that reproduces cultural values, such as responsible individualism and self care. However, because feeding the family is invisible, like other forms of informal care, it is only noticed when it is not done. A focus on family practices and informal care disguises the fact that these are feminised occupations that are naturalised, part of a doxic order that reinforces a division of labour along gender lines. The position of women within the domestic sphere that DeVault was commenting on at the end of the 1980's has changed little. She identified how 'feeding work was how women do gender' (*ibid*: 118), and that 'when women become mothers their awareness of feeding and sense of responsibility for it are heightened' (*ibid*: 111).



In DeVault's (1991:22) study 'half of the women were working outside of the home for pay'. In my study, not only are the boundaries between home and work increasingly blurred, as discussed in Chapter Two, but the 'feminist political dilemma of housewife versus career woman has been replaced by narratives of renaissance women' (Allen and Osgood 2009:7). These centre on the notion that women balance their careers alongside motherhood, that they 'simultaneously work in paid employment' whilst working 'to produce a successful child' (Hey and Bradford, 2006:61). The majority of women and mothers in my study were working. The extent to which these were full time or part time occupations or carried out outside of the home, I did not investigate. There were only nine women who were housewives, which includes Celia who identified herself as a 'retired housewife'. In most cases feeding the family healthy meals was used to 'display' (Finch, 2007) appropriate family values and/or as a source of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

Overall, respondent's food narratives were heavily influenced by hegemonic discourses of 'the family', specifically what might be considered appropriate mothering practices. Morgan (2011) identifies the extent to which family discourses and practices are mutually implicated in each other. He underlines the distinction between mothering and motherhood, in that it is the doing of mothering practices for example that distinguishes them from wider discourses of motherhood. Morgan (2011:69) claims that actors are 'looking in two directions when engaged in family practices'. The discourses that draw on these practices are not produced in a vacuum. This is what Gillis (1997) refers to as the families we live by (discourse), rather than the families we live with (practices).

Indeed, despite new models of parenting and the participation of women in the public sphere, along with the growth of 'individualism, the development of the project of the self or the pursuit of personal autonomy' (Morgan, 1996:197), mothers who contributed their narratives were conforming to cultural scripts of responsible mothering. So that not only is 'responsibility the essence of motherhood' (Fox and Worts, 1999:330), but as Doucet (2009:105) highlights 'in spite of increases in fathering involvement, the persistent connection between women and domestic responsibility remains'. Hence, 'across time, ethnicities, social class, and culture, it is overwhelmingly mothers who organize, plan, orchestrate, and worry about children' (*ibid*) and 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991). Again, in an era of heightened surveillance of foodways and moral discourses on obesity, it is not surprising that mothers were keen to express their adherence to 'displays' (Finch, 2007) of responsible mothering. And it was by reflecting upon family food memories from the past that distinctions between the experience of mothering and the institution of motherhood (Rich, 1986) could be commented upon. The family is therefore a theatre for the civilising of appetites, control and discipline of bodies (those of the children and the self), manners, etiquette and a whole host of 'multiple strands of meaning that are woven around food and eating' (Morgan, 1996:171).

#### **4:3. Family foodways, past and present**

There were strong links between foodwork, appropriate parenting skills, carework and/or 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996). Although not all of respondents were parents themselves, many including non-parents linked the good mother, both past and present with notions of good foodwork. I had not anticipated the extent to which foodwork would be so embedded within a

normative script of appropriate parenting and its significance in positioning the self as a good mother. The division of labour within the domestic sphere persists, whereby 'feeding the family remains an activity conducted mostly by women' (DeVault, 1991:22) and the extent to which this is used by some as a means of demonstrating care and/or cultural capital.

The narratives were rich, evocative, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), as well as highly personal insights into the intimacies of everyday family life. This family theme represents the beginning in many ways, for most respondents their early family food memories become the backdrop for the development of their future relationship with food, whether they were foodies or parents or concerned with their health or weight/body issues. Paula's is a good example of this (bold emphasis from the original):

Mam did a very good Sunday roast with a very small piece of beef (always cooked 'through', as she would call it) with Yorkshires, roast potatoes **and** mashed potatoes, greens, carrots and **always** mushy peas. I now wonder at how she managed to get it all onto the plates. Has to be my most vivid memory from childhood. A very early memory is of Mam trimming the rind off bacon before cooking it and giving me rind to chew on. She was a lover of nature and showed me which wild things were pleasant to eat. Chewing on new rose stems or new long grass, eating wood sorrel and primrose flowers, picking brambles. Also where to find crab apples and sloes, and that great field mushrooms would usually be found in a field where there had been a horse! Foraging is a habit to this day. Something for nothing being irresistible - and wild flavours being much better for not being tampered with and tamed.

The majority of respondents began their narratives within a past family setting, in which mothers were judged on their cooking skills. So for Ellen:

My mother was not a bad cook, but neither was she a good one. Over-boiled vegetables, well-done meat, cheese on toast, things out of tins, and the dreaded Sunday tea, sandwiches, (tongue or ham) with salad (ugh) and salad cream.

Whilst Simon writes:

...my mother was a competent but unadventurous cook, whose style was shaped by rationing, she loved to go to the hawker stalls for dim sum and takeaways that came home wrapped in banana leaf. So cardamom, ginger, lemongrass and sambals was as much a part of growing up as stew and boiled vegetables; peanuts were not only used as a spread for toast, but mixed with garlic, coconut and cumin to eat with skewers of marinated beef.

Hence, it is everyday family foodways that respondents narrated, only one respondent (Richard) referred to Christmas in any detail and none focussed on birthdays or other ceremonial occasions or big food rituals (as in Lupton's 1996 research). Instead they recounted their own small-scale informal family foodways almost as a celebration of the 'everyday'. These narratives were about the production, reproduction, presentation, representation, construction, reconstruction and repetition of intimate family ties. For example, Edith writes:

My maternal grandmother was an excellent cook, an old fashioned type, 3 full meals a day with mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks, she always had a full larder stuffed to the brim with cold roast meats, home baked pies, cakes, biscuits, fizzy drinks, rice puddings, chocolate mousse's, clotted cream, and all manner of Cornish delights! To me this was heaven as on our visits to her and my Grandfather from London to St. Ives my brothers and I would always discuss who was going to eat the gooseberry fools or the delightful toast that was cooked on the Aga with a 'special' toasting iron, you see our Mother never cooked nice things, she couldn't afford to, she was a single mother with 3 children and when we were at home we lived off of cheap meats like liver (urgh)! Or bread... not a good start really! Gran's food was proper food, all very comforting and delicious... yummy, and there was always seconds, or even thirds...'eat up she would say plenty more where that came from'.

Respondents articulated and rationalised individual foodways, likes and dislikes and how these developed. Indeed, as Morgan (2011:118) notes, 'the relationships between food, memories, emotions and family practices remain very strong'. The sedimentation of these affective practices over time influenced respondents' foodwork and foodways, as well as approaches to

feeding their families (if applicable). When food is prepared in the home, the intricacies and intimacies of family life are played out. Smart (2007) refers to these as 'sticky', as it is hard to break free from these family connections, whether positive or negative. The association between food and family is sticky and messy. When articulating one's food history it is difficult not to refer to the origins of tastes, distastes and foodways within a family setting. Thus Edith writes about the origins of her issues with food:

My Fathers family were Anglo Indians who had moved to England in the 50s having proved they were of British origin some years before. Their customs and way of life was very different, huge family feasts with full Indian spices, but no official 'manners' that I had to follow when with my Grandmother (all that table stuff... sit still, don't speak with your mouth full, say your prayers, eat all of your food, golly sounds boring now!) Dad's family ate whenever, wherever, and all the food was Indian, meals went on forever. I was a very fat child who probably used food to cope with the two extremely different cultures I found myself involved in. Food was always a fascination for me...

In Ellen's account, she similarly presents her young self as challenging the expectations of how children should behave:

The world was just getting over rationing, so food was scarce and I was supposed to 'eat it all up'. I didn't. I left my crusts, wouldn't eat the fat on meat, didn't like vegetables (with the exception of peas and carrots) and preferred my potatoes chipped.

Today, in the field of family food studies there has been a subtle shift in the micro-politics of family foodwork, Coveney (2014: 33) argues that in research carried out on Australia in the 1990's that they did not find 'patriarchy on the menu', instead children began to have a 'privileged voice on household food matters'. Dixon and Banwell (2004) in their report on this study document how children had metaphorically become the head of the table. Respondents therefore considered their powerlessness in this context when reflecting on their

childhoods. This was about a lack of care, time and effort. Hence, as referred to briefly in the introduction Larry claims he:

...never really like tomato-based stuff when I was a kid, though Campbell's or Heinz<sup>28</sup> tomato soup was always the exception. Vivid memories as about a 5 year old of Dad getting back from the office and daubing Heinz tomato ketchup all over my dinner... he was trying to be efficient in distributing the condiment to all and sundry at the table while the bottle was in his hand... I hate tomato ketchup in any form – even as the base to another sauce such as a barbeque or sweet and sour. I can detect its presence at about 50 feet and still cannot stomach it... Rarely eat in MacDonald's these days but the American assumption that everyone likes Ketchup and their burgers therefore must come with it as a standard annoys me. Such choices I like to make for myself.

Here Larry complains of not having his food preferences taken into account by his father. Though notably it is his father and not his mother, whom we assume cooked the dinner his father spoiled by daubing it in ketchup. The traditional gendered division of labour is alluded to as his father has returned to the home from the office. Thus, it is the head of the house that adds the (unwanted) flourish to the meal; the person responsible for preparing and cooking it is notably absent from this vignette. There is a distinction being made between the instrumental action of the father, coming in from outside and the potential time and care taken in the preparation of the meal in the home. The association between father, work, masculinity and a global multi-national corporation reifies the doxic order; the feminine contribution to foodwork is naturalised, trivialised, invisible and easily spoiled.

Ruth highlights a lack of (time) care regarding food preferences in childhood, though it occurs in an institutional setting, she writes:

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<sup>28</sup> There were several respondents who used brand names in their narratives. This is potentially another theme that could be explored outside of this thesis. Although these were equally embedded in family discourses.

At pre-primary school the food was disgusting... I really hated rice pudding in particular and used to try and hide it or throw it in the toilet... I was about 5 or 6 when one day a friend called [Name] and I just couldn't eat it... We were kept behind in the kitchen after lunch and the headmistress stood over us. [Name] tried to eat a spoonful and he was sick into his bowl... The headmistress then spooned the sick into his mouth... I will never ever forget it. I was completely shocked... She saw my face and quickly whisked away the bowls and then we were outside in the playground. The smell of rice pudding makes me retch now.

Ruth has a corporeal reaction to an incident in which her individual food preferences were ignored and her human rights impinged. However, it is the instrumental reaction of the headmistress charged with their care that adds to the distress and 'shock'. This lack of food care in an institutional setting was often referred to in stark contrast to the food care experienced in the family.

Yet, as DeVault (1991) argues, 'feeding the family' is carework that takes time.

It was time to care that was missing. Thus, Ulrika claims:

I do have good memories associated with the feel good factor of being made soldiers to dip in a boiled egg. I think that this was my grandmother who was fab. I probably spent the rest of my child hood days hoping that I might persuade my mother to do something of that ilk... She was a busy bird and I came along to consummate her 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage (I have 2 older half brothers).

Hence, Ulrika is identifying how her mother did not have time for her, to feed her or prepare the food that she liked. It is notable that Ulrika like Edith identifies her grandmother as providing nourishment and nurturance, in contrast to the care provided by their mothers, for whatever reason. This is further reinforced when she writes about missing being fed baby food from jars:

I also remember the jars of baby food, which at the time I really loved. I remember missing them so much that I did actually persuade my mother to buy me one when I was 5ish, and discovered that it tasted horrible. So although I had clearly realised that they did not satisfy my taste buds I felt this sense of loss, as I knew I had to resign my self to life without Jars. This might be explained, as I was

not breast fed at all. Apparently my mother managed less than a week before she gave up (mastitis). Not only was I fed formula milk but I am told solids as well from about two weeks old (Probably Jars!!) so that sense of loss when I no longer saw jars was perhaps explainable and a bit like been weaned!

The irony here is that in actually persuading her mother to buy her a jar of baby food, Ulrika is further alerted to the fact that her mother no longer feeds her.

This therefore has the effect of making her feel bereft all over again at the loss of the closeness and comfort she craved and identified with the jars of food. In DeVault's (1991; 228) work she claims that whilst 'not all women feed the family, they live in the shadow of the social demands for the normalcy of care'. DeVault (1991:237-9) expresses concern with being prescriptive about the caring aspects of feeding the family as it reinforces the association of women with nurturance and emotion. She asks, 'what are the consequences of calling this activity work and not that one? Who benefits from such a distinction?' She distinguishes between 'caring for' and 'tending', 'a kind of maintenance work and caring about an emotional, personal dimension of an activity' (*ibid*).

Faye's mother, on the other hand accommodated her food preferences, but only when her father was at work:

One of my very favourite things to eat was roast lamb (this was my mums craving when she was pregnant with me!) and my mum made it at least twice a week for lunch when I was at playgroup - my dad hated the smell of lamb so we had to eat it when he was at work!

Here the power relationships embedded in the gendered domestic division of labour, the breadwinner role and the homemaker are revealed through the cooking of a meal. As Beagan *et al* (2008:665-6) note, emotion work in the domestic sphere includes activities that enhance others emotional well being and provides emotional support. However, foodwork strategies such as these



are framed as individual decisions rather than being seen as collective normative constraints or a result of wider gender divisions/inequalities. Faye describes her early childhood memories from the perspective of a cultural climate that values neo-liberal individualism, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the gender expectations and possible constraints of a previous era. She continues:

My dad and I loved opening a packet of crisps and adding pepper and vinegar to them and shaking the bag up to spread the vinegar before eating the soggy crisps inside!

References to her father are about sharing a snack, or leisure time, reinforcing the gendered division of labour in the home. Similarly Beth claims:

My earliest memory of food must have been when I was five or under as I remember my father showing me how to make a pie out of all the food on my plate. You mash it all up together with a fork, but you can leave the peas whole if you like to make the pie look prettier. He made it into a pie shape then I could pretend it was a cake and cut it into slices and eat it. It was fun.

The light hearted and intimate experience of this encounter is given greater significance by Beth:

When I told my mum this, years later she was surprised because she said he was a stickler for good table manners, so maybe he showed me when she wasn't around. He did like to play. He died when I was five so I can place my memories in a timeline easily.

Here, playing with food, changing it on the plate and making it fun undermines the serious business of 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991) that mothers do.

Beth's mother assumes that this must have occurred outside of the formal eating arrangements around the table. Or when the person who had spent time and effort preparing the meal was not around. Again, this example assumes an invisibility and effortless in preparing food for the family. The cultural scripts of

femininity relating to mothering assume a taken for granted naturalness and an effortless around preparing food for the family.

Kelly writes about her mother's complicated relationship with food and her control of the family through specific foodways:

My mother, a devout homemaker (or perhaps also a disappointed former piano teacher who never worked after marrying abroad) was very keen on healthy eating, so between 1988 (when I was 7) and the early 2000s, the family was not only strictly vegetarian, but also went through stages of being tee-total, vegan, and raw-eating. Paul Bregg's books about separating types of foods were my pain and my bane.

Kelly expresses annoyance with her younger sister, who could 'happily recite which foods 'coordinated' with which other foods' to please their mother and could actually use the word 'co-ordinate' from the age of two. Kelly on the other hand found making decisions about what to eat difficult. She then explains how her father colluded with her in transgressing the rules and regulations imposed by her mothers' feeding regime. She notes that her father was her 'half ally' in the battle against her mother's dietary control, though this was not a straight forward experience as she then had to lie to her mother about what she had eaten. On occasion she 'dared to buy a hot dog', but then had to pretend she was hungry. She had been 'told off for eating cakes, crisps and sausages at friends' birthday parties'. Here, Kelly is highlighting a tension between the authority of her mother's food regime and her own individualism. Her mother is committed to choosing food in order to promote good health, which as noted previously Wills *et al* (2009:64) argue signifies a particular middle class outlook on consumption.

#### 4:4. Feeding the family and maternal identities

Cooking 'proper' healthy family meals is a skilled practice (Short 2006: 89) and a significant aspect of meaningful family-integration (Moiso *et al.* 2004: 265) it is an essential element of doing appropriate mothering. Faye writes:

My mum was a fabulous, creative cook; she loved reading cookery books and took great pride in her cooking. We didn't have a lot of money when we were young, but my mum was a very creative cook and every meal was completely delicious and homemade.

Faye, despite working herself and in common with many women juggling the second shift (Hochschild and Machung, 2003) is responsible for feeding her family. Indeed, Faye's comments are strikingly similar to those in DeVault's (1991:56) research from over twenty years ago; one of her participants was quoted as saying that:

...as soon as I get up on the morning or before I go to bed I'm thinking of what we're going to eat tomorrow.

Two decades later Faye comments:

Oh my goodness! I wake up each morning and the first thing I think about is what are we going to have for supper! It's such a drag, as I can never think of anything new or inspirational, despite the fact that we have lots of lovely cookery books!

In many ways these comments serve to reinforce further the status of 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991) as central to maternal identity. Faye in contrast to her own mother has the additional pressure of having to cook new and inspirational food. Indeed, if preparing and purchasing food for herself or her family:

I would make a packed lunch of something I really enjoyed eating, that's healthy, balanced and nutritious, with a little treat tucked in! ...I just buy things that are healthy and nutritious and things that might be interesting to appear in [my daughter's] daily lunch box!

By 'just buying things that are healthy' Faye is contributing to the notion that feeding the family healthily is easy and natural care work. She positions herself in the mother role and as the 'guardian of health' (Beagan *et al*, 2008:662). This demonstrates the extent to which the caringscape and healthscape can be intertwined (McKie *et al*, 2004:603). As well as, how health discourses seep into family foodways, whereby a 'good mother' ensures the health of her children through cooking/providing healthy food or by being engaged in emotion (food)work. Faye reiterates this by writing 'if I have time [my cooking skills]... are very good, if I don't they are rumbled together! But everything I cook is cooked with love!' Hence, this emotion work is not considered work at all, but an expression of love. This is what Erickson (2005:338) following Hochschild (1983) considers the 'illusion of effortlessness' and 'part of doing the work (of mothering) well'. It contributes to the pervasive trivialisation of the work of managing meals (DeVault, 1991) and reifies foodwork as part of a naturally occurring female disposition.

Jocelyn writes about the transition from cooking to please herself to having to cook for her children:

I used to spend many hours cooking for friends before I had children; nowadays complicated looking recipes put me off, too busy I guess. I'm really "in" to the 5 a day fruit and veg idea and am much more conscious nowadays of the fat-content of food. I read labels in supermarkets, especially when buying for the children, and tend to avoid stuff with too many additives.

She contrasts feeding children with preparing meals for her husband:

When I cook meals for [husbands Name] and I, I tend to open up the fridge and create something and hardly ever follow a recipe for a main course... Though I say it myself I come up with lovely dinners this way...

Hence, Jocelyn is making a distinction between foodwork done to provide healthy meals for the children and the more creative aspects of foodwork she carries out for her husband and herself. Jocelyn is thoroughly engaged in the skilled practice of feeding the family (DeVault, 1991) and unlike the foodies in my study, she has to accommodate government dietary guidelines and advice on appropriate healthy feeding, rather than being creative. The complex character of caring work, the effort and skill it requires, the time and resourcefulness of those involved in feeding the family is highlighted. Ophelia notes that:

...after 15 years of daily cooking for my family I have become much more confident and proficient in food and what it really means. Today I balance the weekly meals between vegetarian, pasta, fish and meat and we have a lot of salad. I have been trying to cook less meat, maybe twice or sometimes including a roast at weekends, three times a week. Teens need carbs so I cook them most evenings but I don't eat carbs myself in the evening now unless it's a pasta dish we are all sharing.

Again, there is a balance between the desires of the individual and the nutritional needs of children. The work of feeding the family is complex and incorporates a 'balance' of different requirements.

The need to display appropriate mothering through feeding the family healthy meals cooked from scratch, was especially pertinent for women working and living on their own with children, such as Valerie:

I am also responsible for feeding my daughter... I make a great effort to make sure she is getting a balanced diet. To this end I nearly always cook meals from scratch. I use meal planners to get organised. I also have to budget quite tightly and meal planning helps with this. I aim to ensure we eat fish a couple of times a week, chicken a couple of times of week, red meat maybe once or twice and vegetarian once or twice a week. We always sit down to eat together at the table, even if it is just the two of us. It gives us a chance to talk and focus on each other.

It is notable that Valerie insists that they sit down to eat at a table. This is a particular aspect of a middle class habitus and one that distinguishes Valerie's family foodways from others, despite their low income and family status.

Hence, 'proper' mothering is about cooking 'proper' meals from scratch, even or perhaps especially if on a limited budget or having the sole responsibility for childcare. Chloe claims:

I like to cook from scratch and meals can take time so I have to plan that around work... I use cookbooks for ideas for quick suppers... thinking about it I do spend quite a lot of time thinking about what I'm going to cook. I shop with meals in mind for each night of the week... this will depend on what's available in the shops and what looks good, and then what time I get home...

In Annie's account of feeding her family, she recalls:

On my wedding day I remember thinking how on earth does someone come up with 3 meals a day for the rest of their life, so obviously huge fear here... I couldn't cook at all and self learnt when I started a family... I now HATE cooking and only realised lately that my food is basic and perhaps sub-standard, I have these past years been curtailed by finances so cut corners with ingredients... whereas in years gone by I would create a Delia Smith recipe each night... I do try and avoid throwing pasta dishes together... but give me a chef and I wouldn't cook again... Recently I've started asking the children to cook.

Annie's approach is pragmatic, as she reacts to changes in her family circumstances. Her children are now older; hence she can ask them to cook. She was the only mother to express a hatred of cooking. In DeVault's (1991:230) study she argues that whether women embrace or resist the responsibility for feeding the family, they are subject to the cultural expectations and discourses of caring that shape action. She contends that the workfull characteristic of feeding is unrecognised by those who do it and it is problematized only when the work is not done, or perhaps when there are difficulties in doing it.

Eating food together around a table is a marker of cultural capital, which is highlighted in Vera's account:

Growing up, we always ate together at the table except Saturday and Sunday teatimes when we usually had sandwiches rather than something cooked and could eat in the sitting room watching TV, but it was still eating together.

Vera neutralises the transgression from the cultural norm of eating around the table by stressing that they were still sharing this activity as a family. Their family identity is not spoiled; eating the same food at the same time together is part of reifying the family.

Otaline writes about the association between poor food provision and being poor or James's (2010) junk food and junk childhood connection:

Then there was the microwave meal. Thick bubbling, congealed beans, over-cooked and the plastic tray crisped and melting into the beans and whatever else was in those godforsaken things – three little triangle compartments of sheer poverty. I cannot believe she fed me that shit. But then, when we were children my mother worked nightshift in a factory – a thread mill. She'd come home at 7.30 and put out our breakfast before we woke at 8. I remember asking her to please stop putting the milk into the cereal before we got up as it was a soggy, gooey mess by the time we did but she was just so desperate to sleep, to get to bed that she'd do it just to have one less thing to do... before she went to bed.

Here food provision is ultimately tied up with class and status and again the provision of good 'healthy' food is about good 'healthy' parenting. It is about time and the lack of it. A lack of time due to having to work outside of the home and the lack of time to prepare or care about preparing healthy meals from scratch. Convenience food is clearly associated with low socio-economic status, a particular working class habitus and lack of care. Otaline continues:

I hated the shit quality of everything we ate. It just tasted shit. Long before we had the discourses on healthy eating we have now I knew this stuff was crap. And it made me really angry – even as a kid. I didn't know what the hell else was out there mind – but I knew that somehow this deal was raw.

Later, Otaline writes about her partner's role in the kitchen:

[Name] now does all the cooking. It started when I was pregnant and he felt rather useless, I think. He wanted to show me care, show me love and so he fed me and, of course, little [Baby name] who was growing inside. He is a fabulous cook: reckless, meaty,. Back then he would attend to my dietary needs and make me eat buckets of Spinach for [Baby Name] (lol). He fed me mackerel so much I haven't been able to eat it since – or salmon. And he loved doing it.

Here Otaline is clearly identifying the role of time in the preparation of food and the association between cooking from scratch as an expression of love/care.

She goes on to explain that her partner has now become a foodie. Although she concedes that since they have had their first child, presumably because of time constraints' cooking for her has become:

...much more of a chore but still he is there cooking each night. It was Chinese-spiced pork belly tonight with rice and Spinach. Damn delicious – though I hate the fat. Anthony Bourdain is his hero. He came to Brighton just before [Baby Name] was born and [Name] queued to have his book dedicated to [Baby Name]. I loved that. He fantasises about teaching him the pleasures of food.

However, when it comes to feeding the family and her new child:

Today [Baby Name] had his first bit of toast. I was anxious but [Name] and I were both delighted – gleeful – watching him sucking marmite on toast! He loved it. I cook all his food. On occasion I will buy an organic pouch but I want to cook for him because I love him. I am deeply concerned about what he eats. I do not want him to even know the tastes of my childhood. There are no 'grandmother's recipes' to pass on. He eats three meals a day now and mostly I cook it fresh because I never seem to have the time to cook and freeze – though I know life would be easier if I made the time.

So Otaline is positioning herself as engaged in appropriate family foodways, displaying a middle class habitus of good mothering as part of a generation



lifted out of poverty. Unlike, Connor's narrative at the beginning of this chapter, for Otaline, there are no grandmother's recipes to pass on. Hence, there is no respite from the lack of maternal care for Otaline, as outlined by Edith and Ulrika who were nurtured/nourished by their grandmothers and by implication not their mothers. Hence, Otaline's own 'junk' childhood (James 2010) is contrasted with the time consuming practices of preparing healthy nutritious food cooked from scratch for her son. Otaline's partner as a demonstration of his love provides food for her, whilst Otaline cooks all of their child's food. Feeding the family is therefore conceptualised as a significant aspect of cultural capital, as Otaline continues:

I can eat whatever I like now... But it does play a big part in our lives still – the joy of it that is. Financially it's not an easy time but food will be the last thing we skimp on – it's fundamental to a good life for me – money or not

A couple of female respondents wrote about their partners cooking. Laura for example:

I moved in with my boyfriend (now my husband) when I left home. He's a few years older than me and had already been married, he'd also been to catering college for three years and although he hadn't finished the course and wasn't working with food he did have a good idea of how to cook. Over the next year or so he taught me some basics and we learnt together how to prepare meals...

Hence, Laura learned to cook from her husband and shared the foodwork with him at this stage in their lives. This follows Kemmer (2000) who interviewed a small number of couples who were just beginning to co-habit. She found that there was a much greater sharing of foodwork before couples had children, although the symbolic value of eating a meal together remained unchanged.

However, once Laura had their first child:

We had our first daughter when I was 20 and this really ramped up my interest in cooking. I avidly read every baby magazine I could get

my hands on and took a lot of notice of any advice given in them. I was determined that my child wouldn't eat food from a jar and that I would feed her the best, freshest food I could. This involved hours of cooking, pureeing and freezing ice cube trays full of various fruits and vegetables that were suitable... From there my interest and pleasure in cooking continued, although I wasn't (and still am not) wildly experimental, I took great pleasure in preparing meals for my family...

Here, Laura is positioning herself in terms of intensive mothering practices. This transition to motherhood means that she now has all foodwork responsibilities in the family. This is part of a commitment to a cultural script of femininity. There is no democracy in the kitchen (Meah and Jackson, 2013); indeed hers is a restrained, considered, feminised cooking practice. She is not wildly experimental, which may be considered more of a masculine cooking trait.

Kemmer's (2000) findings are pertinent when considering Nadia's account of her partner who:

...was a pretty basic cook when he moved in and he has taken such an interest in it he is now much more polished than I am. He has fancy recipe books (that he uses!)

Here, in contrast to Laura's experience but similarly to Otaline, Nadia's partner has become more of a foodie. Notably he has time outside of the domestic responsibility of feeding the family to 'use' fancy recipe books:

I am very lucky as [Name] often cooks now... I sometimes buy organic mince or free range chicken so he has variation. I do enjoy the taste but would be happy, and used to be, without it. I previously bought treats like ice cream as he loves it but ended up eating too much so bought him an ice cream maker and he prepares healthier versions.

But like other respondents whose partners 'often cook', she positions herself as 'lucky' in this regard. Yet, she is still responsible for feeding the family and positions herself as the guardian of her family's health.

Zoe, writes about her own development as a cook and distances herself from convenience food or ready meals:

But when I met [husbands name] in 1997 aged 30, it all changed. He is an excellent cook and used to own a restaurant so I was educated pretty quickly and now am a good confident cook and cook far more simply but with better ingredients and flavours. I cook most days particularly since having children, but he will still cook 40-50% of the time... Now we eat good interesting food every day at home and a takeaway once in a blue moon (2-3 times a year). Ready meals are unheard of here and we eat out sometimes (once a month). But food is a big social thing for us and we have friends and family over a lot to eat.

This is about cultural capital, sharing food, being able to afford to give food away was certainly outside of the experiences of some of the families in Charles and Kerr's (1988) study. It is notable that in both Zoe and Otaline's narratives, their men are good cooks. However, this has not led to a 'democratization of the domestic sphere' (Meah and Jackson, 2013). The dismissal of convenience foods as inferior runs counter to research carried out by Carrigan *et al* (2006) who identified a hierarchy of potential cheats when it came to the use of convenience products by women when feeding their families. In my study cooking from scratch was aspirational and a way of accumulating cultural capital. Hence, women like Hannah claimed:

Once I started to work at buying good wholesome healthy foods and making every meal from scratch, I started to dislike the taste of chips and pizza's.

In terms of middle class tastes and cultural capital Hannah learned to cook healthy meals for her family and her own tastes have changed as a result.

#### **4:5. Convenience, care and intensive mothering**

Traditional family foodways or 'feeding the family' for DeVault (1991) encompass relatively fixed culinary repertoires that were highly routinized,

mundane and everyday. I was certainly conscious of the guilt of not cooking food from scratch for my family and that somehow this challenged my status as a good mother. Even though McIntosh and Zey (1989:126) argue that whilst women can be the 'gatekeepers of food in the home this 'responsibility' is not equivalent to control'. Even when women take on the breadwinner role this does not free her from the moral responsibilities of domesticity. Doucet (2009:112) clearly articulates this dilemma in that:

...men's and women's lives as carers and earners are cut with deeply felt, moral and social scripts about what women and men should do within and outside of household life. Although there has been movement around these moral dilemmas (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Gerson 2002), they nevertheless exist as strong ideological scripts to mothering and fathering.

The idealization of motherhood is woven through all respondent's narratives, whether they were parents themselves or not. For some, like Jade, her own mother had pursued a career when she was a child, and was therefore 'usually too busy to bake and make a home'. Here the connection between 'baking' and 'home making' is somehow synonymous. It was something she envied in her friends home lives, as her own 'life was quick and geared towards work, sports, and homework', whilst those whose mother's were at home 'made pancakes'. For others, the transition to parenthood often entailed the 'increased production or display of gender' (Baxter *et al*, 2008:262) and a reinforcement of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), or 'an all consuming project' (Francis, 2012:374), in which the mother puts the needs of her children above her own, so that:

Good childrearing requires the day-to-day labour of nurturing the child, listening to the child, attempting to decipher the child's needs and desires, struggling to meet the child's wishes, and placing the child's well-being ahead of their own convenience (Hays, 1996: 115)

This 'intensive mothering' Hays (1996) argues is despite, or because of, the demands placed on women by the dual burden or 'second shift' (Hochschild and Machung 2003) in which 'women are still responsible for the care of the house and the home regardless of the presence of a spouse or participation in paid work' (Robinson and Hunter, 2008:479). The family foodways of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996), 'requires symbolic and material resources' due to the desire of middle-class parents 'to maximize [their] children's opportunities for success' (Lareau 2003 cited in Francis, 2012:374). This includes the reproduction of appropriate family foodways. Manners and etiquette for example are inculcated within the family. If this does not occur it can be viewed as a failing of the family (mother) in the duty of care and responsibility. Otaline for example, highlights the shame of not having learned the appropriate way to handle cutlery:

The cutlery thing has followed me. Caught me out, exposed me on more than once occasion. I still feel very anxious eating in groups – especially colleagues, and I avoid it if I can. I still don't know how to hold it all properly – or what order it all goes on that table and I can't bear the shame, the pause to see what everyone else is doing, - and worst of all – not being able to enjoy the food!

Francis (2012) argues that 'intensive parenting' ideology is entwined with neo-liberalism, one that 'emphasizes individual responsibility and self-management alongside a focus on managing risk' (Shirani et al, 2012:26). There is an assumption therefore that parents (particularly mothers) can manage and plan their children's lives through 'concerted cultivation' (Vincent and Ball, 2007). This ensures that their children are turned into responsible citizens. Christopher (2012) claims there has been a shift from intensive to 'extensive' mothering, in that the working mothers she interviewed delegated some aspects of their caregiving to accommodate the demands of their employment. The women she

interviewed were working and were unable to participate fully in 'intensive mothering' but were still ultimately responsible for their children's needs. For women in my study who were mothers, even those who were working full time, doing appropriate mothering was expressed ultimately by feeding the family healthy meals from scratch on a regular basis. This 'pre-occupation with achieving a 'good diet' reflects a middle class disposition for being 'health conscious' and for taking on board 'authentic' health and dietary messages, that are sanctioned by (government) experts' (Wills *et al.*, 2009:65). This was seemingly something that could not be delegated or negotiated. It was integral to the identity of a good mother and the positioning of the self in relation to one's own childhood experiences.

After sharing family foodwork in a negotiated family model I stopped cooking for my family when I started working full time<sup>29</sup>. I add that my children were around 18 and 14 at this stage. That I need to make this additional statement is testimony to the power of the normative cultural script of femininity that equates mothering with feeding. Yet 'feeding the family' (DeVault, 1991) is considered a negotiated responsibility between individuals within the domestic sphere. As individualisation theorists such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 2) argue, in conditions of late-modernity, more than ever social actors discuss, justify and agree their (gender) roles and engage in a 'negotiated family' model. Yet, in my food narrative I wrote that my husband 'now cooks every other day of the week'. After a long preamble about my grandmother not cooking, my mother's hatred of preparing food for my Dad when he never came home to eat it, and the overwhelming sense of responsibility I felt when I became a mother myself.

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<sup>29</sup> I can't say 'feeding' because this incorporates other aspects such as 'provisioning like planning and managing meals' (DeVault, 1991:75). I no longer cook, but am involved in all the other aspects of family foodways (planning, buying and serving).

In fact my husband does ALL of the cooking. However, to admit this even now, seems terrible. It is akin to admitting to being a bad mother. If I do not cook food for my children (admittedly we only have a teenage daughter living at home now – note that I have to note this as well), then how do I practice good mothering? Am I therefore not a mother or just a bad one? It is notable when feeding others who are visiting, that I am universally thanked for preparing the food. I used to protest and say ‘oh please don’t thank me, my husband cooked it all’, but this was always met with such incredulity or seen as some form of modesty on my part that now I just accept their thanks. What is it about being female that means the assumption is that I am the cook? And why can I not fully relinquish this role. My daughter even now still texts me, ‘what’s for dinner?’

In terms of the links between cooking a family meal from scratch and a care and convenience antinomy, convenience food for mothers symbolises ‘lack’. This lack of care is interwoven into a symbolic capital that supposes a lack of education, and therefore a lack of cultural and economic capital. It is notable that some respondents began their narratives within the context of the mass industrialization of food production in the 1970’s with reference to the early pre-packaged foodstuffs, such as Frey Bentos Pies in tins, Vesta Curries in packets, Angel Delight and Findus Crispy pancakes. And it was often in opposition to these influences that a highly stylized and nostalgic view of childhood was represented in which respondents either ate simply and seasonally, from the garden or allotment when they were children or developed a more refined and cosmopolitan taste as they grew up. These are what Carolan (2011) refers to as narratives of relational affectation, or how respondents learned to know food.

Their food preferences are embedded, produced and maintained through the practice of doing 'tastes', over and over again (Carolan 2011:6). These tastes are articulated in terms of class positions and gender norms, emphasizing the power of gendered and classed discourses and practices.

In Otoline's narratives convenience food represented a lack of care and economic resources, what she refers to as 'sheer poverty'. Lauden (2001: 36-44) makes a 'plea for culinary modernism'. She argues that fast, processed food deserves a re-consideration. Her argument centres on a deep history or archaeology of food and foodways. Modern concerns regarding convenience foods mask elite culinary values and snobbishness regarding the origins of food. She claims that the highly processed and preserved foods from the past were equally seen as convenient, foods such as:

Beer... soy milk, soy sauce and tofu... tortillas... red wine, blue cheese, sauerkraut, hams, smoked salmon, yoghurt, sugar, chocolate and fish sauce...

These were all processed and preserved and not 'natural'. Indeed, she claims that 'eating fresh, natural food was regarded with suspicion' (*ibid*, 38). She highlights how 'traditional' diets are not necessarily better and tend to be romanticised. Indeed, she argues that 'it is the modern, global economy that allows us to savour the traditional, peasant, fresh and natural foods from around the world' (*ibid*, 42-3). Her argument centres on the notion that convenience food democratises eating and enables those who might not be able to afford (in terms of time and/or money) access to a range of cuisines. Her argument is therefore against food snobs or foodies who make judgements on eating habits and those who carry out elitist foodways:



What we need is an ethos that comes to terms with contemporary, industrialised food, not one that dismisses it, an ethos that opens choices for everyone, not one that closes them for many... one that does not prejudge, but decides on a case by case basis when natural is preferable to processed, fresh to preserved, old to new, slow to fast, artisanal to industrial (Lauden, 2001: 43)

However, when it comes to feeding the family the 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2002: 167) afforded to mothers who transgress the boundaries of appropriate mothering by feeding their children inappropriate food, as the Jamie Oliver example in Chapter Two highlights, means that mothers in my study only fed their children healthy food. It would be inconceivable to admit to inappropriate mothering practices. Dualist and absolutist approaches to food and foodways ensure that convenience foods are demonised in family food discourses.

Johansson *et al* (2013:465) highlight how parents and children are the focus of nutrition discourse in Germany and Sweden. In their research they contend that mothers 'took the main responsibility for the daily meals, including planning, buying, cooking and serving'. However, this gendered aspect of feeding the family is not problematized and therefore further contributes to the idea that this is an acceptable cultural norm. They are critical of neoliberal policies that stress individual responsibility and rightly highlight structural factors. Yet, their focus is on economics and how finances dictate food provisioning. Again, whilst a turn away from an emphasis on ignorance and educating the masses in proper nutrition is to be applauded, there is a lack of analysis of the role of cultural capital. The researchers ask their participants how they might tackle unhealthy eating practices and it was notable that one response was 'for parents to have shorter working hours in order to cope with everything that needs to be done at

home' (*ibid*, 472). This was not presented, as a direct quote so it is difficult to tell how this was actually phrased it was not given any identifying factors, such as gender or age. However, it clearly identifies wider structural factors at work. Hence, it can be assumed that the second shift (Hochschild and Machung, 2003) has continued implications for feeding the family (DeVault, 1991).

#### 4:6. Summary

To summarise in an era of heightened neo-liberal individualism there is little evidence of a 'negotiated family model' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Mothers in my study were at pains to emphasise that they fed their children healthy food. Feeding the family was a central aspect of maternal identity. Intensive mothering practices (Hays, 1996) were associated with elite cultural capital. Hence, despite working full time or part time and the blurring of boundaries between home and work, women are committed to feeding the family, healthy meals cooked from scratch. Dualist and absolutist approaches to food and foodways means that unhealthy, convenience foods are demonised. These foods are derided and considered indicative of a lack of care. They are associated with 'other' (working class) mothering practices, whereby a lack of care, indicates a lack of education, economic and cultural capital. Feeding the family continues to be a gendered activity, despite men's accomplishments as professional or semi-professional cooks. In these cases, men might share some of the responsibility for feeding the family, but never all aspects of it. Instead there are rigid cultural scripts of mothering especially for middle class mothers concerned with distancing themselves from the symbol of the 'working class mum' who feeds her children convenience food, or 'cheese and chips out of Styrofoam containers in front of a f\*\*\*ing big television' (Deans, 2013).

In the following chapter I explore the healthy theme. This draws on the narratives from those engaged in eating healthily as a complementary or alternative medicine (CAM). This is similarly embedded in the family. It considers notions of responsible individualism and self-care as aspects of a particularly gendered middle class habitus.

## *Chapter 5: Le plat principal, 'Food is no longer the innocent pleasure that it was' (Kelly)*

### **5:1. Chapter Outline**

In this chapter I consider respondents' healthy narratives. This builds on many of the ideas already developed, especially the links between healthy families and healthy food and the display of healthy foodways as part of a middle class habitus (Wills *et al*, 2009). To recap briefly there is an interplay between gender and class, as women, particularly mothers are considered the guardians of health, their own and other family members (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997:179). Being engaged in healthy foodways when feeding the family is associated with cultural capital; it is a means of displaying the neo-liberal aspirations of self-care and responsible individualism. Healthy foodways are part of an intensive mothering ideology.

For the purposes of this analysis I have conceptualized the link between food and health as distinct from and separate to the link between food and the body. I have separated 'body' discourses, which are concerned with issues of weight, corporeal aesthetics and appearance from 'health' discourses, relating to wellness and illness. This is to do justice to the respondents, as some of their narratives were about a battle with food because of weight/body issues, but others radically changed their diet because of 'health' concerns. Hence, issues relating to 'eating disorders' (although arguably a health issue) and obesity will be considered in the context of the body in Chapter Six. I would add that despite public and media discourses purporting the importance of healthy eating, there was a minority of respondents, (mainly the foodies), who did not

refer to 'healthy' eating at all, although they did discuss 'good food'. This is discussed in Chapter Seven.

In some ways the healthy theme was anticipated as I had set out to consider what impact, if any, health discourses had on respondents' foodways. Food is therefore conceptualised within a health and indulgent antinomy (Warde, 1997). Good and bad foods are identified and transgressions that result in guilt and moral approbation. Food is considered by some as a CAM and is used to treat specific conditions. The narratives from Faye, Kelly and Queenie are particularly pertinent and contain similar elements to the illness narratives outlined by Frank (1995). For example, the 'chaos' narrative outlines the emotional anxiety caused by loss of health status, the 'restitution' narrative is about how the individual copes with the condition, the 'quest' narrative concerns the search for a cure and in the 'testimony' narrative respondents reflect on what has been gained or lost by the experience (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2010:49). These may also be considered in terms of Bury's notion of biographical disruption (1982) as respondents negotiate the impact of illness on the life course and everyday life. In Frank's (1995) work like Bury's (1982), these illness narratives have religious and moral overtones, if medicine fails to provide the heroism, then it is the individuals tenacity in overcoming obstacles and not giving in to the 'battle' with the condition or the medical practitioner that has moral or heroic status. I use accounts from others, as the health benefits of food are part of a common vocabulary amongst respondents.



(Bendelow, 2009:42). This model has similarities to the Brown and Harris (1979) study of *the Social Origins of Depression*; they identified the interplay of provoking agents and vulnerability factors as significant in predicting the onset of depression. When considering the use of food as a potential treatment, this would be largely dependent on resources and class habitus. A commitment to healthy eating and dietary restraint are usually considered middle class concerns and key markers of status (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012). In intensive mothering ideology (Hays, 1996), as already noted, mothers may be more open to the potential health benefits of dietary change. The notion of control is associated with an aspirational cultural capital model. In Bourdieu's (1984) treatise on *Distinction*, the lower classes were usually associated with lacking control.

In this theme respondents highlight the dichotomous attributes of certain foodstuffs as treats and treatment. Treats can be a source of pleasure but can lead to suffering and anguish on several levels. This could be a corporeal reaction or an emotional one, because of over eating and feeling out of control, or just eating 'bad' foods (however comforting). It is worth noting that what might be considered good or bad is not necessarily fixed and is influenced by wider social and cultural norms and values. Hence, the current widespread distaste of convenience foods amongst middle class respondents, as documented in Chapter Four. Fred claims:

I think I have a good idea what healthy eating looks like (and I think its quite different to a lot of people I believe who seem to think there are healthy convenience meals and that low fat options are "healthy" irrespective of the rubbish they load them up with to give flavour etc.). Whether I always choose the healthy option is debatable...

Hence, he is distancing himself from low fat 'convenience food', because of its feminised associations with the 'diet' industry.

In terms of treatment, eating certain foodstuffs (good and/or bad food) has the potential to cause uncomfortable physical symptoms or illness. The avoidance of some foodstuffs and/or the consumption of others can treat specific ailments. Hence, dietary change contributes to or alleviates illness or feeling unwell. These dietary regimes became a means of negotiating or managing a spoiled (illness) identity (Goffman, 1963). Changes in dietary practices to treat specific conditions are considered part of CAM. It is notable that CAM is a typically female activity and is usually associated with higher educational attainment and socio-economic status (Bendelow, 2009:111). It is notable here, that in the healthy narratives, thinness is associated with illness, in contrast to the body theme, explored in Chapter Six, which considers the thin ideal (Germov and Williams, 2004) as desirable.

I focus mainly on narratives from Kelly, Queenie and Faye because food as a potential source of illness and/or cure was particularly significant for them. This is not to assume that respondents were not aware of healthy foodways. However, Kelly was recently diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and had been forced to reassess her foodways. Queenie has an unspecified and undiagnosed condition, but found a strict avoidance of wheat and dairy in her diet beneficial for her health. Faye sent two narratives; the first one I explored a little in Chapter Four, on the family. In her second she writes about the ketogenic diet she and her husband adopted to treat her daughter's drug resistant epilepsy. What is notable is that the food used to treat the condition is



what might be considered 'unhealthy'. This adds another moral dimension to the use of this diet and challenges the clear distinction between healthy and unhealthy foodways. What if 'unhealthy' food can be used to treat a debilitating and potentially life threatening condition? And what are the implications of this on maternal identity?

I should add that I find it difficult to use Faye's narratives. The diet she used to treat her daughter's drug resistant epilepsy was highly successful, yet her daughter died from an unconnected 'medical blunder'. Both of Faye's narratives are highly valuable from a research point of view as they highlight the symbolic power of food and are particularly pertinent for maternal identity. In an era of public and moral outrage regarding unhealthy foodways and the demonising of the individuals that practice them, utilising dietary practices that may be considered 'unhealthy' has implications. The use of Faye's narratives continues to cause me anxiety, from a methodological and human perspective, as a researcher and a mother. I hope that I have been sensitive to her story, as she sent it to me so that it could be told.

The focus of this chapter is on the role of food within a moralizing medical discourse that positions certain foodstuffs as 'unhealthy' and the implications of this not only in terms of health/self management but for individual and social identities. I would add that conceptually whilst it is difficult to not consider the body when referring to health discourses, respondents in the study made very clear distinctions when referring to changes in their diets and/or foodways, this was either for health or body/weight reasons. It is respondents themselves who expressed a difference between body aesthetics or 'the thin ideal' and changing

one's diet for health reasons (Germov and Williams, 2004:355). Nadia for example explains the difference between a 'diet' to lose weight and eating or not eating for health reasons:

[I have been on] a proper diet once, from a book when I was 22ish. I followed it strictly, exercised and lost heaps. It was basically a fat free diet. It taught me about low fat foods. I have also been on many wheat free, low sugar, detox type diets. These were to deal with problems like candida. I have a weakness for sugary things so have to take it in hand now and then!

For Nadia, a 'proper diet' was useful in terms of enabling her to learn or become food conscious and many respondents document their learning journeys in this way. Nadia's 'proper diet' is distinct from the many diets she has pursued to cure specific health problems such as candida. I therefore purposely separated the 'healthy' from the 'body' theme, because this is what respondents did, as

Mark notes:

I still am [conscious of what I eat on a day-to-day basis], in that I only eat salads and maybe scrambled eggs for lunch. This is based on being healthy rather than trying to lose weight... I feel guilty now if I eat a pie or pasty for lunch but never usually worry about having a "healthy" dinner.

Of course, the rationale for Mark's distinction here could be related to issues of hegemonic masculinity and the association of dieting as a female occupation (Lupton, 1996, Bordo, 2003). Again, this is explored more fully within Chapters Six and Seven. Certainly, for Kelly her diet is no longer dictated by her 'tongue any more or [her] waistline, but [she is] trying to "listen" to what [her] body actually "wants" to eat, for its own good'. It is notable that she is trying to 'listen' to her body, this listening is a common theme for those engaged in monitoring their food intake for health reasons. Kelly adds that she is no longer 'master' (sic) of her own decisions but having to radically reconsider her diet as a means

of preventing suffering. This has knock on effects on all aspects of her life as a post-graduate student and implications for her identity. She concludes that:

Food is no longer the innocent pleasure it was when I was younger, I've grown to be a bit afraid of it, since it can cause me weeks of suffering if I'm not careful.

I use Kelly's quote as the title of this chapter as she provided a full and detailed account of her 'healthy' narrative food journey. She writes that her IBS has become her 'best food teacher'. Her narrative like others in this theme is illustrative of some of the issues faced by individuals managing their diet for health reasons and highlights the significance of food rules in the management of a spoiled (illness) identity (Goffman, 1963).

### **5:3. Moral discourses of health and responsible individualism**

In the current foodscape the pursuit of 'good' food is considered an indicator of high cultural capital. Healthy foodways have symbolic value and are used as a means of positioning the self as a good morally responsible citizen, an active agent in the maintenance of health. This is not to assume that 'health' is a fixed or stable category, as Nettleton highlights (2006:170) 'health is not a unitary phenomenon and is a highly elastic cultural notion'. Similarly, Rousseau (2012:14) notes that 'healthy' is one of the most semantically unstable words in the English language'. However, this did not stop respondents from engaging with popular and public discourses regarding healthy food and healthy eating. Their stories were liberally sprinkled with the term 'healthy', although it was never expressly stated in most instances what this actually meant in practice. They were actively engaged in a kind of healthism, with health identified as feeling and 'being' good (Bendelow, 2009:136).

What is evident in this theme is the connection between food and health as a form of (self) surveillance medicine. Beardsworth and Keil (1997) claim food is a source of gratification and displeasure, as well as a source of health and illness. For many respondents this meant that on the one hand food could be seen as a potential 'treat' or reward for good behaviour, whilst on the other it could be conceptualized as a necessary 'treatment' for illness. In terms of the former Ellen writes:

I already had a love of sweet things; cake, chocolate, cream cakes (a very special treat) and ice cream. (Comfort food?)...

And then she continues that she struggles with these treats:

This is what I meant by being tempted back into eating chocolate. (There was always an event, a celebration, a reason to treat myself - or, of course, something upsetting that needed me to console myself by letting myself have... a treat.) It is now habit to want something sweet after a meal, almost every meal, and I sometimes try to get either a hot drink or a glass of wine to satisfy that craving. I wonder if having denied myself for several years has caused the longing to return, with a vengeance! Isn't that what an addiction is? A craving?

Ellen hints at treating herself as a form of comfort and consolation, similarly in Jade's narrative treats are related to what she refers to as 'comfort food'.

Then, also sticking to life in London, work is hard, but food is good. So, it was a treat for me to get out of cramped office spaces and bite into a big sandwich, burrito or a rich soup for lunch... Other comfort food: I usually do not indulge on much candy during the day, but the occasional cookie with coffee is very tempting, especially if you are in an office that supplies them in abundance. And, after a hard days work I do like to sit down with a glass of wine (at home, yes) and some crisps, although those are destructive as well... A lot of the comfort food also has to do with being quick and easy. When you work 10 hours a day and want to go to the gym it is much easier to have a quick pizza or burger than to get some fresh vegetables.

These narratives can be seen in terms of another of Warde's (1997) four antinomies of taste, what he refers to as the health and indulgence antinomy. It is notable that comfort food (bad food), is often sweet and therefore has

feminised associations. It is though importantly quick and easy to consume, and this has working class connotations, with its appeal to the need for instant gratification (Bourdieu, 1984). The notion of convenience food as 'bad' contributes to feelings of guilt if too much of it is consumed.

In considering foodways within a health paradigm the individual has a heightened concern for the body and it's ills, as such consumption is highly disciplined, monitored and regulated. Following Foucault, healthy eating is one of a series of potential body regimes (Bordo, 2003) that contributes to the personalization and rationalization of the surveillance of the self. Warde (1997) notes as well, that all four antinomies of taste are potential sources of guilt and anxiety. Making the wrong food choice can compromise an individuals sense of self and 'in the field of social relations is a sign of moral turpitude or impropriety' (1997:173). Hence, researchers in the field of the sociology of health and illness, following Foucault (1977, 1988), have commented that 'eating healthily is a way of constructing a moral self, of being a good person' (Balfe 2007: 141).

Indeed, the connections between food, morality and gender are well documented amongst cross-cultural anthropologists such as Counihan, (1999, Counihan and Kaplan, 1998). The term 'dietetics' originated in early Greek civilization and was a concern with daily conduct and modes of living, health, medicine and philosophy (Coveney 2006). Thus, the notion of 'dietetics' was not just about food, but a way of life that incorporated exercise, food, drink, sleep, and sex as part of living a 'good' life. Coveney (2006) argues that the connection between food and health developed in Britain in response to food shortages in the 17th and 18th centuries. In order to ration food, there was a

focus on nutrition, healthy habits and clean living. This was part of an on-going patriarchal system engaged in the oppression and control of women's bodies (Counihan, 1999). Further, according to Coveney (2006) food morality emerged in the UK and other Christian based democratic countries in the West in response to a Christian ethic that developed out of the problems of the pleasures of the flesh. Or what Counihan (1998:108) refers to as 'the Judeo-Christian orientation that is both dualistic and absolutist'. This has distinct parallels with Cartesian mind/body dualism developed during the Enlightenment and the associated denigration of the female. This dualistic and absolutist approach to foodways causes problems for those negotiating the boundaries between good/bad, healthy/unhealthy food. What are the moral implications of making the wrong food decisions and how might these be managed?

And why is the micro-management of diet considered important? Foucault's (1973) work the *Birth of the Clinic* goes some way to explaining how medicine became a form of social control; what Turner (1987:219) refers to as 'the regulation and management of populations and bodies, in the interests of a discourse, which identifies and controls what is normal'. There is therefore a social and individual concern with the normative, the good and the proper in both public and private life. Similarly the development of disciplinary regimes from Foucault's (1977) work in *Discipline and Punish* and the elements of 'rationalization embedded in the personalization of surveillance' (Warde, 1997:173) is significant. The continued internalisation of the disciplinary gaze is exposed through the intricacies and intimacies of respondents' individualised highly regulated eating plans. Yet 'beliefs about what constitutes health and illness are at once individual and social' (Herzlich, 1973:1). They are subject to

historical and cultural change. One of the most significant changes since Parsons' (1951) research and articulation of the medical model and the sick role, has been the rise in chronic conditions of late modernity, such as:

Diseases associated with the life course... chronic illnesses, which require management (such as diabetes)... and complex disorders of late modernity such as anorexia, depression, eating and anxiety disorders and including the proliferation of acronym disorders such as IBS, CFS and ADHD... [as well as] multifactorial degenerative diseases such as cancer. (Bendelow, 2009:26)

On the one hand these conditions challenge the functionality of the sick role and the medical model, which was developed in an era when the purpose of medicine was curative or to get people back to work (Parsons, 1951). Now, because some of the chronic conditions of late modernity are often difficult to medically define and/or treat this raises problems for those with chronic conditions or who do not fit the medical model. Is it still important for conditions to be medically sanctioned by trained medical practitioners? What are the consequences of blurring the boundaries between what might be considered a chronic condition and issues associated with the life course? Is someone with a chronic condition always ill, or is it a matter of only being ill when the management of that condition falters?

Generally in matters of health and illness, orthodox medical discourse encourages individual responsibility, as Nettleton (2006:42) claims:

...conceptualizations of health and illness in contemporary Western societies... reflect the values of capitalism and individualism... imbued with notions of self-discipline, self-control and will power.

Individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for the management and control of their health. Yet, they may be considered to be breaking the rules of the sick role when engaging in dietary practices not sanctioned by orthodox

medical experts, as 'alternative healing systems are still regarded with suspicion and hostility' (Bendelow, 2009:22). On the other hand a healthy dietary regime may be a useful coping mechanism for those managing a chronic condition and negotiating an (spoiled) illness identity (Goffman, 1963). Hence, there is the potential of a double burden for those managing a condition through diet. The need to negotiate a change in status from healthy to 'sick', can be further compromised if the individual is considered to be managing the condition through diet or CAM, which can be labelled as unconventional. This is part of what Turner (1987:225) identifies as:

...the Foucault paradox' [in that] the provision of citizenship tends to require the expansion of regulation, control and surveillance from the state [which leads to a ] contradiction between individual rights and social surveillance. The medicalization of society involves a detailed and minute bureaucratic regulation of bodies in the interests of an abstract conception of health as a component of citizenship.

Hence, the medicalization of every day life, or the process whereby medicine has made inroads into the domain of 'ordinary life' previously controlled or regulated 'through moral, religious or legal jurisdiction' (Bendelow, 2009:11), ensures that the conceptualisation of dietary regimes are considered an appropriate means of 'doing health' (Moore, 2010). Therefore, respondents could be considered as being engaged in appropriate moral practices as responsible citizens. Paradoxically, if the individual is considered to be practicing a form of CAM and treating conditions not sanctioned by traditional medicine, the individual could be seen as breaking the rules of the sick role and therefore potentially liable to punishment (Parsons, 1951). Or if following a dietary regime outside of what might be considered appropriate within the normalising discourses of health the individual will need to engage in the management of a spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963).



This was particularly pertinent for those monitoring their food intake because of dietary intolerances or other health related issues. Dalia, for example, makes clear distinctions between changing one's eating habits to treat a condition, going on a diet to lose weight and even changing her diet in order to fit in with her partner:

I have only been on one diet in my life! Not that I didn't need to on several occasions. This one diet was brought on by avoiding light surgery in favour of changing my diet to cure a small ovarian cyst. It seems to have worked... but what it has also done is made me eat more healthily.

The distinction here is clear; going on a diet to lose weight is connected to aesthetics rather than health and therefore not quite as serious as following a strict dietary regime because of the potential health benefits or cure. Here the association between the feminised practices of dietary restraint to lose weight and the 'curing' of a sanctioned medical condition is highlighted.

#### **5:4. Treats, treatments and 'sweet love'**

Some respondents had very clear dietary regimes and ate almost the same things on most days; Hannah was a good example of this:

I love food, I have to have regular meals and mid meal snacks, I always have a good breakfast, what ever I am doing I have to start the day with breakfast otherwise I feel grumpy and tired. As I have got older I have become more aware of what I eat and drink, I try to eat healthily, when given a choice I always buy food which contain granary or whole grain, nuts and seeds.

Here, Hannah illustrates her knowledge of her body and its requirements. She discusses her potential mood, 'grumpy' and feeling 'tired' if she doesn't eat a 'good' breakfast. Generally respondents were concerned with explaining how, when and why they had chosen to pursue an often highly regimented and

strictly controlled dietary regime. These were narratives about emotions and feelings; they were embodied as respondents documented their corporeal rebellions to an increasingly alienating foodscape. They were responding in part to what Fischler (1988:948, 2011) has referred to as a kind of 'gastro-anomy' in which:

Modern individuals are left without clear-cut socio-cultural clues as to what their [food] choice should be, as to when, how and how much they should eat. Food selection and intake are now increasingly a matter of individual, not social decisions. And they are no longer under ecological or seasonal constraints. But individuals lack reliable criteria to make these decisions and therefore they experience a growing sense of anxiety.

Whether this growing sense of anxiety manifests itself in a corporeal sense on or within individual bodies is difficult to measure. Certainly, respondents were explaining how they had developed their own individual dietary regimens in response to anxiety about when, how and what to eat, but for them this was an affective practice a response to embodied experiences (Wetherell, 2012). It was a learned health consciousness that they had developed over time. Fischler (1980, 949-50) argues that:

Food fads, fad diets, food sectarianisms, new trends in culinary aesthetics may be indicative of an aspiration to re-establish dietary regulations and norms in the face of growing normlessness...

He critiques the shift towards heightened individualism with regards to foodways and how this serves to undermine the commensal aspects of sharing food. This was not lost on respondents and some, such as Imogen, wrote that despite following a fairly strict dietary regime, 'If I go out I'll eat whatever I'm presented with as it's maybe a bit rude not to'. Fischler's (1980:949) use of the term 'food fad' implies something temporal, fleeting and unimportant.

Respondents' dietary journeys were far from brief or short-lived crazes. Indeed,

their 'quest' narratives (Frank, 1995) documented how they had finally been able to control difficult to treat symptoms and biographical disruption (Bury, 1982) by changing their dietary habits. Queenie and Kelly experienced pain and suffering if they lapsed. Faye and Dalia adopted condition specific diets and experienced significant improvement in these as a result. I detail more about Faye's experiences later.

Of course, generally speaking a commitment to healthy eating can be understood as a means of performing responsible individualism and can as part of a middle class habitus. In terms of affective practices (Wetherell, 2012), eating the wrong things or bad food has consequences for the individual in both a social, moral and corporeal sense. So, whilst the focus for respondents was on bad foods in the context of health discourses and the medicalization of the practices of everyday life, sometimes it was not necessarily that the food itself was 'bad' but that certain foods caused 'bad' physical and/or emotional reactions. The association of items such as bread or chocolate or sugar (sweets) for example with pleasure, childhood innocence and/ or comfort was common. Yet, excess consumption of these was considered sinful, as Nadia writes:

My general rule is if healthy at home then that is a good base to then have treats when out and about. If there is nothing too evil in the fridge then there is less chance of me eating badly. If I have chocolate at home I have little self-control, I would snack on it before an apple so it's best to not buy it.

Her use of the word 'evil' is notable; this is a strong word to use when describing food, especially something that maybe considered an innocent or a potentially comforting treat like chocolate. The level of agreement across narratives in all of the themes around what constituted a treat is notable as well

as the consistency amongst respondents about the types of food that needed to be avoided in order to be well. There was a general consensus that eating 'healthily' was important in maintaining 'health' and feeling 'good'. The 'bad' or 'unhealthy' food categories were alcohol, dairy, meat, sugar and wheat products. These categories incorporated specific food items such as cheese, chocolate and bread. There were degrees of avoidance or acceptance of these foodstuffs and it was generally in the context of treating other ailments that they took on particular significance. In the previous chapter 'healthy' food had a certain symbolic capital and was used as a means of displaying a particular middle class habitus when feeding the family. In this healthy theme respondents were more closely engaged in the subjective monitoring and surveillance of the self and others. It was through these 'moral narratives' (Nettleton *et al*, 2010:296), that the individual gained or regained control over their food intake and therefore their health. These journeys outlined how their relationship with food had developed from a state of innocence or ignorance to a well-developed sense of mastery (sic) over, or susceptibility to, certain types of food. They are akin to Frank's (1995) 'illness narratives'. Imogen, for example, writes:

I also started to listen to my body more, recognising what made me feel uncomfortable or upset my stomach and this led to my beginning to cut out white bread and over the following five years or so most wheat products. I explored food combining and gluten free diets and have tried cutting out dairy but have kind of settled on a mostly wheat free diet that is otherwise very varied...

Here, it is notable that Imogen like Kelly has become engaged in 'listening' or monitoring her embodied responses to food. She continues:

I think probably it's taken me this long to work out what I can eat in good amounts without having a detrimental effect on my health as I basically love food! I love eating good quality nice things but always hated the heavy full tired feeling I had after eating too much stodgy food as a kid.

Imogen notes that as a child her diet left her feeling 'very full quite often', which she writes was not so much a matter of inappropriate parenting, but a matter of not having access to information:

I think there is a lot more information available to kids now regarding a healthy lifestyle. I don't remember ever being told about healthy diets at school or at home for that matter.

There was a consistency in accounts around feeling full or heavy or tired which was associated with eating too much or consuming the wrong foods and the opposite of this if a healthy diet was adhered to. Zoe writes:

We had a cleaning lady who used to cook for my father and leave food in the fridge... sausage rolls and vol-au-vents. Hideous lumps of pastry that needed a litre of tomato ketchup to make them palatable. He [father] used to eat sandwich spread sandwiches... My mum's cheese scones were and still are great. Going out for a meal was a huge event... as a child, we always ate at home. The thought of all that pastry is making me feel quite sick though!

It is worth noting that Zoe writes:

...Mum left home when I was a teenager (12/13?) so I learnt most of my cooking skills and planning skills at school.

This may account for the strong reaction to the food left by someone other than her mother. Zoe continues that now:

I like salads, lots of crunchy textures and good flavours. And light food - and its generally down to the way it makes me feel. My body goes into sleep mode if it has to digest anything too solid and I like having energy.

Hence, good food is light food and this means that Zoe feels light and this is important. In all of these narrative accounts the emphasis is on feelings, these are embodied and emotional responses to food, the environment and the social context in which this food has been consumed or prepared.

Overall, respondents expressed an engagement with health discourses and knowledge of the correct food choices deemed beneficial for one's health. Healthy eating is viewed as integral to being a responsible moral citizen and 'Coveney (2006) reminds us, that the discipline of nutrition informs the construction of notions such as responsibility and health' (cited in Nettleton *et al* 2010:746). Hence, Hannah's narrative is littered with references to healthy eating and this is controlled:

The above food diary is a fairly typical day – always a healthy start... From here on the day always starts out to be controlled and healthy, but at work someone always has a reason to bring in cakes/sweets, I cannot resist and indulge with the rest. Always a healthy lunch, same crackers, marmite and cheddar, apple and or yogurt. Supper, again, always home cooked, healthy main course with fresh fruit optional.

Hannah's dietary regime is fairly disciplined and highly regular. Yet she is still able to conform in social situations like Imogen, she indulges in (unhealthy) 'cakes/sweets' and joins in with 'the rest'. Hannah will suspend her dietary regime in order to fit in with social norms and values around the commensal aspects of sharing rituals in the workplace. Nadia writes that she has a:

Strong dislike for unhealthy, overly processed food e.g.: junk with additives. I generally prefer vegetarian options so I am uncomfortable with takeaway animal foods such as chicken or burgers. I prefer vegetables and wholefoods. This developed from health issues when in my 20's and learning more as a result about wheat free, low sugar, less fat etc. I choose organic when I can afford it...

Nadia's dietary concerns began because of issues to do with her health and she describes unhealthy food as:

...anything too 'plastic': food that has become too removed from its original natural source. I stay away from meats that I feel have not been humanely produced, I only eat free range and/or organic meats and in small quantities. I eat soy as an alternative to meats and dairy, and prefer organic dairy produce when possible. I check labels and avoid too many numbers, or even too many ingredients. I am wary of too much sugar so avoid lollies and soft drinks.

In Nadia's narrative, unhealthy food is so alien as to be not even 'food' but plastic. However, she writes about her childhood:

Dinner was basic, chops and potatoes, cauliflower cheese, tasteless spinach (my friend's mum added salt – much better). Mum did bake which was a blessing after her pretty average meals... biscuits and cakes, crumbles and upside-down puddings, rice pudding (my favourite). Unfortunately many memories tinged with sadness, as there were often arguments at dinnertime, not a particularly peaceful household.

Later, she continues by adding:

My love for homemade cakes, biscuits and desserts is definitely linked to my mum's baking. Times of comfort in an often-discordant home (grumpy father!)

Here Nadia is not critical of her mother's foodways, instead she attributes a 'complicated' relationship to food to the problems of negotiating 'a Western culture of plenty' in contrast to the spirituality and ascetic feelings she associates with her experience of other cultures:

I have experienced returning home from a ten-day silent retreat where I've enjoyed wonderful mindfulness choosing what to eat and slowly chewing each mouthful to finding myself at a dinner party mindlessly gorging myself.

Nadia is extremely conscious of her diet because of the associated health problems she has had with candida, which she blames on an over consumption of sugar. Her healthy narrative food journey can be considered a response to Fischler's (1980, 2011) notion of gastro-anomy. Nadia's strong dislike of overly processed 'plastic' junk food and commitment to healthy food could be interpreted as a means of countering the impact of an alienating and highly industrialised foodscape. Again, this is associated with the accumulation of cultural capital, as processed 'junk' food is considered low status food.

## 5:5. Food as CAM

Some foods that tend to be identified as ‘bad’ within health discourses can actually turned out to be ‘good’ in the treatment of certain conditions. This is the case with the ketogenic diet, which relies on a high intake of fat and protein in order to send the body into ketosis. When the body is in this state, it is more likely to be free from seizures. This has implications for those involved in implementing a dietary regime outside of what might be considered ‘normal’ and/or ‘healthy’. I explain more about this later on in this chapter. Suffice to note at this point that because of the rigidity of the boundaries between good and bad food and the extent to which these are embedded within moral discourses, any dietary regime however beneficial for health causes problems if it utilises food from the ‘bad food’ category. It means a negotiation of Warde’s (1997:174) ‘indulgence’ versus ‘health’ antinomy, as noted earlier. This contributes to feelings of anxiety and guilt and these antinomies have powerful moral overtones that can compromise a persons’ identity (*ibid*: 193).

Although ‘good’ food is conceptualized as significant for a healthy diet/ lifestyle (way of life) the use of food as a treatment for certain conditions is not wholly sanctioned by orthodox medicine. Nettleton *et al* (2010:297) note that the ‘avoidance of food because of food intolerances is associated with alternative and unconventional lifestyles, fashion and trends which in turn implicate the person who suffers’. The question is how do those involved in using food as a treatment negotiate these contradictions? This has significant implications for those forced to adjust their dietary habits because of health or illness. In an era of responsible individualism there is a moral imperative to be well and to be unwell can be stigmatising (Goffman, 1963).



In this healthy theme, respondents considered certain foodstuffs as treatments for particular conditions, such as a high fat (Ketogenic) diet as a treatment for drug resistant epilepsy. However, treats for some had to be excluded from the diet in order to avoid becoming ill. For others the avoidance of what might be considered 'treats' had the potential to alleviate pain and discomfort. Hence, respondents in this theme were actively engaged in a kind of hyper surveillance of food consumption in the interests of controlling health and/or illness, either theirs or others (children, partners, families). The use of dietary management techniques as a possible treatment however positions them outside of conventional and orthodox medicine. It is generally considered part of a repertoire of CAM that employs more holistic approaches to health care and places the 'responsibility for health and illness in the hands of the individual' (Baarts *et al*, 2009:727).

The route to dietary change as treatment tended to arise as a result of the inability of orthodox medicine to diagnose and/or treat symptoms. Although in some cases a medical opinion was not sought and the respondent had just heard that this was a possible means of treating the condition. This seemed to be particularly pertinent in cases of eczema. For example, Kevin comments:

[When planning meals] I have to think of their favourites and veggie options and our youngest is off dairy products due to eczema... We never feel sure [if it works] – we have also done soya free and tomato free – overall I think his eczema is improving but honestly couldn't say if it's the dairy – occasionally bad spells have seemed linked with a lapse in diet but also that hasn't always happened – not very definitive sorry.

Similarly when positioning the self in the role of a proper mother, with responsibility for the health of the family, Chloe notes:

[I have] never been on a diet but have moderated type of ingredients in family cooking for health reasons... i.e. family health... eczema... daughter can't eat too much dairy.

On the other hand for Nick, dietary change in the interests of health if not sanctioned by orthodox medicine was problematic. When asked why he was avoiding bread, for example, he replies:

The white bread thing is probably a bit faddish but I have read / heard / seen the odd thing which says us humans were never designed to eat flour of the highly refined type we pass off as bread anyway. I like the idea of nuts, meat, fish berries, root veg etc. like cavemen and not much else. The Romans had bread but it was pretty much spelt I believe. Tudors also had a good diet... or at least those eating inside Hampton Court with a healthy veg soup on the go all the time... a pottage... cooking away in a giant cauldron...

He presents his rationale within a historical context and distances himself from the feminized and faddish practice of 'healthy' eating. He continues:

We get spelt from the cult weirdo's in the market and one slice is all you need for breakfast... slow release etc.... Whereas you can eat slice after slice of manufactured white bread and still feel hungry / empty / bloated etc.

This highlights how certain dietary practices if not fully sanctioned by nutritional science are difficult to legitimate. Nick's engagement with the practice of purchasing spelt bread is positioned elsewhere, on the boundaries of the intimate self. Nick is able to distance himself from its production, whilst simultaneously making it 'other'. Nettleton *et al* (2010:297) claim the 'avoidance of food because of food intolerances is associated with alternative and unconventional lifestyles, fashion and trends which in turn implicate the person who suffers'. Thus, Nick trivialises the benefits of the bread as a 'fad' and again as a means of distancing himself from the possible stigma of association. Again, a concern with healthy food fads is potentially feminising. His comments position him in opposition to the consumption of highly processed or

manufactured white bread, which has symbolic capital and is associated with unrefined or working class tastes. What Mennell (1985) refers to as intolerance to the excessive industrialisation of food. Indeed, he documents how it was prestigious in medieval times to eat white bread amongst elite groups. They considered themselves to have sensitive digestions and associated unrefined bread with the unrefined classes. There was a movement in the 1950s away from refined products to less processed foods.

Respondents who changed their diets for health reasons either to manage symptoms for themselves or their children, were aware that nutritional approaches to treatment were potentially illegitimate and outside of orthodox medical practice. For some orthodox medicine was actually at the root of the problem in the first place. In Faye's account, there is a hint that her daughter's drug resistant epilepsy began shortly after her MMR vaccinations, she claims:

[Daughter's Name] first presented with seizures at the age of four and a half months, just after her immunizations.

In Kelly's 'quest narrative' (Frank, 1995), the cause of her IBS:

... was certainly somehow connected to the four or five instances of tummy flu and food poisoning that I had had, but forgotten. Also, the tons of antibiotics I have ingested thanks to their liberal prescription by [Place Name] doctors in the 1980s. Also the change of food due to my immigration to the UK. And even stress (only then did I realise that I was anxious in the mornings – but later I also found out that the IBS actually feeds a physical feeling of anxiety, so the relation between stress and IBS is more complicated). And I also started realising that I may have had a hidden food-absorption problem for years without even suspecting. This could be one of the reasons for my strikingly bad health and constant low-level inflammations I've had since I can remember myself, i.e. really bad teeth... very early arthritis... persistent tonsillitis... peripheral neuropathy and carpal tunnel syndrome of the arms at 18... osteopenic bones at the age of 25... reproductive problems... problems with sleep and concentration... etc. etc. etc. I also came across stuff that blamed candida for many of these food related problems...

It is notable that respondents did not refer to CAM directly, but nutritional approaches and herbal remedies are considered to be CAM (Bendelow, 2009:21). Hence, not only were respondents grappling with strict dietary regimes in the interests of controlling symptoms, they were managing the implications of practicing non-orthodox treatments. Bendelow (2009) and Kennedy (2010) consider the practice of CAM as a potential source of stigma within Goffman's (1963) framework on the management of a spoiled identity. This means that those engaged in CAM work have to engage in information management in social interactions.

Queenie explains how she developed her dietary regime in response to physical conditions triggered by grief at the loss of both of her parents and the stress of dealing with their deaths. This 'lack of appetite' is considered by Lupton (1996:33) to be 'an emotional response' to life events (the link between death or loss and dietary change is another thread that will be picked up in Chapter Six). However, Queenie writes that she was already practicing CAM, by making reference to Greenlife<sup>30</sup>, which is a store specialising in 'natural products and remedies'.

Obviously I should have gone to the doctors, but didn't, by the time I did eventually go I'd stopped eating wheat for quite some time and a celiac test could not be done. In the meantime a visiting Iridologist in Greenlife told me to avoid all wheat products, which I did. It was like a miracle I felt so much better immediately.

She continues:

The memory of the unpleasant symptoms from eating wheat means that I don't ever lapse, it just isn't worth it; at the very worst I'd get a stomach-ache. My/our friends kindly do wheat free meals for me; I do

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<sup>30</sup> Greenlife is a store and online shop that 'specialise in the sale of natural products and remedies for you and your family including vitamins and minerals, natural health supplements, natural skin care, bath and shower products and organic herbal teas'.  
<http://www.greenlife.co.uk/>

sometimes take a particular ingredient or food item if I am staying somewhere. It's not that difficult, most supermarkets do a 'free from' range now and even Carluccio's<sup>31</sup> have gluten free pasta on the menu!

Here, by referring to a mainstream Italian restaurant chain, she positions her dietary habits within popular cultural norms. Therefore her dietary requirements are acceptable outside of a specialist CAM arena. Queenie also explains how her intolerances may have developed:

In recent years I've become very interested in the mind/body connections and it has occurred to me through thinking about your questions how, why and when I became intolerant to wheat, that there may be a possible connection to the extreme stress I was feeling at the time. In the space of about three years my father became ill and died and 18 months later my mum died. Being an only child and very close to my parents I found all that happened during that time very difficult (I know I'm not alone in that) but did my very best to help them in every way. Somehow I went in to some kind of 'overdrive', which I'm sure most people do at these times, but on reflection it must have taken its toll on my body, I became very thin and was completely exhausted.

What is notable here is the notion of being 'very thin', 'completely exhausted' and therefore ill or requiring treatment. Queenie links a loss of appetite with the death of her parents, similarly Ophelia's mother's death triggers weight loss and Ellen's newfound ability to diet occurs after the loss of her mother. These two narratives are explored more fully in Chapter Six. However, what is interesting is the notion that a thin body is indicative of illness, as this runs counter to the cultural ideal of the thin body as desirable. There is an evident contradiction here between being thin as a result of illness, loss or bereavement i.e. perhaps due to factors beyond the individual control and being thin as a result of purposely following a weight loss regime in order to conform to the elite aesthetic of the thin ideal. Again, this is examined in Chapter Six.

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<sup>31</sup> Carluccio's is an 'Authentic Italian' restaurant chain, with stores across the UK. <http://www.carluccios.com/>

Faye and Kelly on the other hand explain how they had come to use 'food' as a means of treatment due to a failure of orthodox medicine. Faye writes about the difficult and lengthy route through an alienating orthodox medical landscape for her daughter's drug resistant epilepsy. To begin with their daughter's neurologist told them that it was:

...a revolting diet that doesn't have a very good success rate" and "you have to eat packets and packets of butter and jars and jars of mayonnaise". I told her that I didn't care what you had to eat; we wanted to try the diet for [Name], because it was our only hope. It took over a year to persuade her to let us try the diet, and in the end she gave in.

Faye continues:

We came home with a menu plan from the hospital for mackerel floating around in olive oil, whipped cream with artificial sweetener with a few grams of kiwi fruit stirred into it. Yes, we had a very creative dietitian - not! [Name] ate all her food without hesitation and I cried buckets because of what I was forced to feed her.

Eventually, Faye and her husband devised:

...new meals for [Name]; containing, amongst other things, healthy oils (safflower, sunflower, olive and grape seed), salmon, asparagus, avocado, swede and goats cream.

So, for Faye, whilst the introduction of the ketogenic diet alleviated all of her daughter's symptoms, it challenged the notion of what it was to be a good mother. It is notable that the:

...serving of food reflects Mauss's (1990) classic definition of the gift in that food creates and sustains caring relationships between people and displays an ethos of care... [as food is prepared it] reaffirms her concept of self and sense of identity as mother and wife (Warin *et al*, 2008: 104)

In her narrative, Faye cannot bring herself to describe the food as 'bad' or 'unhealthy' and in the end it becomes a diet of 'healthy oils'. This is despite the

positive and life changing impact the diet had on her daughter's drug resistant epilepsy, as Faye declares:

...we noticed a positive difference in her seizures and overall well-being almost immediately. It was as if a veil had been lifted... We continued weaning [her off the] medication and as the days and weeks went by her seizures lessened in frequency and severity. We had won the lottery! No! It was better than winning the lottery! The diet quickly became part of our daily lives and it was a real blessing because we got to meet the daughter we had longed for - the little girl hiding behind a huge array of medication and their side effects.

In the healthy narratives, the conditions alleviated through adherence to strict dietary regimes are what Turner (1987:224) refers to as 'disorders related to stress and lifestyle [which] do not lend themselves to simple solutions or what we might call 'heroic medicine'. In other words some of the illnesses of late modernity appear to be untreatable with conventional medicine. However, this does not mean that these conditions or ailments are less prone to the need for medical sanction and distinctions continue to be made so that:

...medical professionals have become the moral guardians of contemporary society, because they have a legitimate domination [monopoly] of the categorization of normality and deviance' (*ibid*, 217).

If health is considered the norm then anything that deviates from this is automatically stigmatized, it is how individuals learn, manage or adapt to this that becomes significant.

For Kelly, food is the main protagonist in the story, following a 'military metaphor' (Lupton, 2003:65) more common in the body narrative food journeys, Kelly is engaged in a 'battle' with food as she asserts, 'however, my "food story" would be incomplete, if I didn't mention the battle with that pesky thing called IBS that I've been fighting ever since I came to the UK'. It is notable that she refers to her condition in a familiar, light-hearted way, this 'pesky' condition, as if

it is a mere nuisance and yet uses a military metaphor. Hers is an emotional journey and following Frank (1995:7), the condition is not so much a 'disruption', but is seen as 'part of life's map or journey'. Indeed, Kelly's narrative utilises heroic, tragic, ironic and comic sub narratives in dealing with the biographical disruption of her IBS (Bury, 2001: 263)

Typically for those engaged in the healthy foodways as a means of controlling conditions or symptoms, many respondents suffered from more than one ailment. This was not a matter of having the 'high cholesterol mantra humming in the background' as Ian had written, but for someone like Edith for example:

I have many food fads as I suffer from IBS, Acid Reflux, Hypothyroidism and some allergies, all of these things can dictate what, how and when I eat... I am very conscious of what I eat, but I do not always listen to my body and rarely pay attention to what I am supposed to eat, I go in fits and starts of being super healthy, and I mean really healthy to junk food... reasons for this could be time, money, laziness, lack of family unity at meal times, all very informal these days.

Edith's narrative was the only one that contains a confession to not 'always' listening to her body, it signals an ambivalence and resistance to the power of dominant healthy eating discourses. She presents reasons for not complying, yet by referring to 'really healthy' dietary practices as food fads, she manages to reinforce the notion of them as temporal and fleeting and not that serious anyway. Queenie on the other hand has a very strict dietary regime that is maintained at all times. She acknowledges that this is potentially problematic in social situations, but claims that most of her friends are very accommodating of her diet. This counters Warde's (1997:173) contention that 'because people eat in social situations even the most self-disciplined will relax their abstemious



personal regimes'. And challenges his assertion that 'people are not generally known for their eccentric eating habits' (Warde, 1997:182).

Similarly, the idea that Faye might have compromised her daughter's diet in the interests of social interaction due to the 'quasi-moral conflicts between the imperatives of asceticism and conviviality tomorrow and today, control and abandon' (*ibid*) appears highly unlikely. To begin with the preparation of food was rigorous and immensely time consuming:

Each meal took us 2 hours to calculate, but we soon devised a selection of healthy, appetizing menus. It took over an hour a night to weigh up and label [Name] meals for the following day.

Yet, as already highlighted the impact of the diet on her condition was immediate. Faye explains her daughter's reaction to the diet:

[Name] was a complete angel about it all and never once tried to eat anything that wasn't keto friendly. She would have friends around for tea and she would attend birthday parties, the whole time eating only her own ketogenic food we had prepared for her. I find it very difficult now, knowing that she never once had a slice of her own birthday cake. I don't know why I should find this so upsetting looking at the full scale of things, but I do. I suppose it's because it's such a simple pleasure, and one most parents take for granted.

Hence, even though Faye is occupied in the immensely time consuming act of mothering through the provision of such a highly specialised diet for her daughter and despite the rewards that this brings, she had the added pressure of managing her daughter's 'spoiled' illness identity (Goffman, 1963). This would have been particularly pertinent on social occasions such as birthdays. Her daughter would be excluded from the act of sharing the birthday cake that her mother would have made especially for her and this adds to the tragedy of the situation for Faye. It denies Faye the ultimate opportunity of being a good mother and sharing that intimacy with her daughter.

However, when considering rigid dietary management practices Balfe

(2007:138) notes that:

...disciplinary practices are often not completely disciplined... people might fail in their ability to articulate the practices of one discourse because they are equally committed to the practices and ideals of another.

It is difficult to imagine how Faye or Queenie would not be completely disciplined regarding their dietary regimes, given the implications of lapsing.

Kelly though, is just beginning her dietary regime and identifies contradictions in managing a student identity that would usually entail a more carefree and convivial attitude towards food as she claims:

The two things I've not managed to eliminate from my food (for longer than my heroic forced 2-month diet in April and May this year) are coffee and cakes! :-)

Although, she has strategies for alleviating any side effects if she is caught out by 'bad' food choices, in social commensal eating situations:

I tend to not be too careful about what I eat in restaurants... but then I carry around enzymes and charcoal and stuff just in case. My best find are good Italian restaurants in which I can eat a load of olives before the main meal, that is delicious and seems to make me feel good after, too.

This is about 'social' eating and the pressures to belong and fit in and in many ways this is what Faye found difficult about her daughter's diet, that it marked her out as different and unable to participate in 'normal' social activities, as unusual food regimes can be stigmatising (Goffman, 1963). So, whilst a disciplined approach to eating alleviates conditions for Faye's daughter and Queenie, it does have repercussions for social interaction and the management of a spoiled or stigmatised identity, even beyond the notion of the condition

marking the individual out as different. In social situations the previously hidden dietary regime is made public and forces the individual to engage in the management of a 'spoiled' identity (Goffman, 1963).

If food is considered within a moral discourse it can be difficult for individuals to negotiate alternative food identities when food rules are so rigid. So that even when supposedly 'bad' foods, such as the high levels of fat needed in the ketogenic diet, have far reaching and remarkable health benefits the identity of those entrusted with carrying out the dietary regimes can be challenged by the act of feeding 'bad' foods, particularly when feeding healthy food to children has such high symbolic and cultural value. Indeed, as indicated previously feeding the family healthy food is part of a middle class habitus. It is a way of displaying cultural capital; to be forced to transcend the boundaries in this field is risky. Of course, Faye was not engaging in these dietary practices lightly, or through lack of knowledge, but instead was highly engaged in practices of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). Her dedication to her daughter's dietary requirements and the emotional work involved in her care was admirable. That she should need to justify her actions is testimony to the rigidity of the symbolic and cultural division between what is considered good and bad food.

## 5:6. Summary

In this theme, respondents wrote about how they had developed 'healthy' eating regimes, or become health conscious over time. This was in the interests of treating underlying health problems, such as IBS or candida, unexplained symptoms of stress, feeling tired, heavy or full. It is notable that there were some who lapsed their dietary regimes in social situations (Imogen and Hannah) and others who had to negotiate or manage a spoiled identity, either

their own (Queenie, Kelly) or others (Faye). Then there were those whose disciplinary food practices were difficult to manage and maintain (Edith).

All of those in this theme and most respondents in the study generally demonstrated a tacit awareness of health as capital (Bendelow, 2009). This had a symbolic value for participants; healthy eating was a moral act and a responsibility. Respondents conveyed an understanding of and a commitment to disciplinary regimes of self-surveillance through the monitoring of their own dietary habits and by listening to the body's responses. However, whilst healthy eating as an aspect of responsible individualism fits with the social norms and values of a medicalised society and a middle class habitus, the use of food as a CAM does not fit quite so easily. Hence, those engaged in rigid adherence to food as CAM were more likely to need to justify their decisions to do so. They would be forced to manage a potentially stigmatised or spoiled identity, particularly in social situations. It is notable again, that this theme is classed and gendered. CAM is a particularly middle class, feminised concern, similarly the monitoring and micro-management of diet for health reasons.

In the next chapter I explore the body theme. This centres on narratives from those whose foodways are related to their body weight.

## Chapter 6: *Le dessert, 'I try not to eat sweet things' (Ophelia)*

### 6:1. Chapter Outline

The aim of this chapter is to explore the body narratives. This has been structured around sub-themes that focus on how bodies are represented, including my own. This theme was one that I anticipated when starting this study; I wanted to consider the extent to which individual food histories were related to issues of weight management if at all. I argued in the proposal that this was because of my reading of a feminist literature such as Orbach's (1982) *Fat is A Feminist Issue* that explored women's relationship to food. This was expressed in terms of dissatisfaction with the body, a desire to please and an on-going unwavering commitment to dietary and weight management practices (Lupton 1998, Bordo 2003). This was my experience. I have used a quote from Ophelia in the title of this chapter heading, as it is a typical response. Thus, despite a 'love' of certain foods, (in this case 'sweet things') these foods are avoided. This is despite the notion that 'sugar and spice and all things nice', is 'what little girls are made of' as the nineteenth century nursery rhyme attests. This highlights how respondents' narratives are embedded in wider socio-historical contexts. For example, the avoidance of 'sweetness' could be interpreted as a denial of femininity. This theme includes narratives from women and men but the men's narratives and their relationships with their bodies were expressed differently.

I pick up on some of the threads established in previous chapters, particularly the interplay between gender and class. The desire for a thin body has long been associated with elite cultural capital. It is connected to issues of self-restraint in dietary and sexual practices, as women's bodies are considered in



Indeed, as Jane Mills (1991:45) claims in her definition of cheesecake:

For five hundred years cheesecake meant a cake or tart made of cheese, or curdled milk, eggs and sugar. During World War Two it joined the long list of slang words, which refer to women as edible and sexually available to men.

Of course language is not fixed or stable and meanings change over time and across cultures. However, the conceptualisations of women as somehow sweet or edible or even as a pudding, secondary to the main event, (i.e. the proper main meal) or as a morsel to be enjoyed on the side, are associations that persist. In Judeo-Christian ideology the duality central to Western morality focuses on the control of the body through fasting and chastity (Counihan, 1999, 101-103). Hence the links between food and sexuality have a long history of dualist and absolutist rhetoric that positions women as 'other' whose appetite for food and sex needs to be controlled.

James (1979) demonstrates how parents controlled children through the regulation and governance of sweet rations or 'kets'. Ophelia writes:

One summer holiday she [stepmother] told me not to drink coke even though everyone else was, because I was fat. I sat sipping water mortified whilst everyone else drank gallons of coca cola. Back home, now aged 15 I started to drink coffee in my bedroom with sugar in it to comfort myself and eat chocolate whenever I could... If I ate anything she thought might be 'bad' for me she would tut and give me that 'are you stupid' raised eyebrow glare, which just made me, feel guilty and so I ate 'naughty' foods when I wasn't with her... I would never ever eat anything like chocolate in front of her so my sweet addiction was forced to go underground!

Here the moral imperative to control one's food intake for Ophelia, especially 'naughty' foods such as chocolate or sweet drinks has lead to 'a pattern of self sabotage', which she 'struggles with today'. This she identifies as a problem of

inappropriate and poor mothering. This is how, for Ophelia, the connection between sweetness and fatness, desire and control were established.

This theme is therefore about control of (sweet/forbidden) food and bodies.

Women in this theme identify strongly with the thin ideal and distance themselves from being fat or fatness. Beardsworth and Keil (1997:178) argue that the:

...preoccupation with thinness is so powerful that 'fat oppression, the fear and hatred of fat people remains one of the few acceptable prejudices still held by otherwise progressive persons' (Meadow and Weiss, 1992:133)

It is notable that the thin ideal (Germov and Williams, 2004) differs from other body conceptions such as slimness (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997, Lupton, 1996) or slenderness (Chernin, 1981). In the narratives from the women in this theme there was a pre-occupation with being thin as a cultural ideal and this was not about being slim or slender. Their narratives were about a corporeal self governance or surveillance in which weight and dietary management techniques became part of an internalising patriarchal gaze and on-going body project (Lupton, 1996, Bordo, 2003). Hence, the decision to eat a pudding or have something for afters was not free from guilt or moral approbation. In relation to this, I would reiterate that notions of normative femininity have long been associated with sugar and sweetness. Of course when considering public health discourses sugar (sweetness) is often considered addictive, something that may be craved and its intake controlled (not unlike femininity). On the other hand sweetness or chocolate for respondents was considered a treat, a comfort and a pleasure. If its consumption could be controlled so much the better.



Respondents in this theme therefore detail the origins of their relationship with food and how this related to their body weight. They had strong emotional attachments to certain foods and having to avoid these was akin to the pain of unrequited love as Bryony expressed so eloquently, 'I love bread but it doesn't love me'. Yet the social milieu in which respondents were writing is one in which 'fat' bodies are reviled and 'thin' bodies considered a master (sic) indicator of health and beauty/femininity. However, although they were documenting their pursuit of weight loss, their successes and failures, few respondents identified themselves as fat, nor did they generally make use of the BMI<sup>32</sup> as a key measure of appropriate body weight, their own or any one else's. Only Ralph mentioned the BMI and in the context of 'my BMI is ok'.

The thin body ideal in western societies is an elite, masculine body, hard and in control; it eliminates any feminine curves or references to hips and breasts. It is according to Saguy (2013) considered an element of elite cultural capital; rich women are associated with thinness (interestingly though not necessarily thin men):

Achieving and maintaining thinness is an important way in which the contemporary elite in rich nations, and especially elite women, signal their status... pursuit of (female) thinness is an integral part of elite and middle class habitus (*ibid*,13)

Added to this are the current concerns related to the medicalization of the fat body and the contested correlation between obesity and ill health. So not only is the thin body shape desirable as a cultural marker of success, but also is an indicator of health and beauty/femininity, regardless of what means are used in securing or maintaining it, i.e. this is not necessarily about healthy eating.

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<sup>32</sup> An exploration of the BMI is detailed in Chapter Three, where I explain that it is an over rated and inadequate epidemiological tool. I make use of it here, only because it is an identifiable and verifiable measure.

I had, as documented in Chapter Three, planned to focus on Ellen and Ophelia's narratives when considering the body theme. Instead, I incorporate some of their narratives, but broaden the focus to include others as well, including Bryony, Ida, Melissa, Hannah and Ulrika. I use Henry's narrative, as he was the only man to document a weight loss journey and Helen and Gaby who had anorexia, as well as Sam who had an 'eating disorder of sorts'. Before exploring some of these body narratives, I make some comments about my body.

### **6:3. My Body**

This chapter has been and continues to be challenging for me not only when I began to write it around the early part of 2012, but also when the data was coming in a year earlier around February 2011. The problem arises due to the emotional component of the narratives and the extent to which I identified with elements of their stories. This has at times been difficult to articulate and fully comprehend. I have been engaged and immersed in the data at various intervals only to withdraw defeated. Partly this is because of the need to position my self and the necessary exposure that this entails, but because my own narrative journey has been shifting and unfolding over time. I have had glimpses into the narratives of others and these have illuminated or thrown light upon elements of my own. The dilemma remains, though, how much to reveal of the self for the purposes of this research and how much to keep hidden or safe; how much of the 'others' narratives to reveal and what the revealing of these 'others' tells of my self.

The writing up of this chapter has been intensely problematic for a number of reasons. Mostly, these centre on gender, as Inckle (2007:92) claims, 'gender is played out upon the body, which is already marked as Other – female – through the norms of femininity'. The anxiety and trauma expressed in the women's narratives, of having to control one's femininity is not unlike having to manage a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman 1963, Saguy 2013) in a society that values maleness. Woman is the 'deviant category, the other from a male model of a normal subject' (Frost, 2001:31). This resonates with my own narrative, as my mother complained to me that my father found her full-breasted body after childbirth unattractive. He preferred flat chested skinny women, masculine body shapes or perhaps how she looked before she had children. This resonates with Frost's (2001:31) other 'prescriptions for womanhood'; that 'woman is her body', she must 'be slim and beautiful' and that 'feminine sexuality is passive and defined by men'.

I consider myself a fat person, even though my actual body weight has never gone beyond the boundaries of the BMI healthy body weight range (18.5-25). This is because I associate fatness with body fat or fat on my body rather than my weight or BMI. This is about feelings and emotions and 'feeling' fat rather than 'being' fat. This fatness is about femininity, it is held in adipose tissue that marks my gender, on my breasts and on my tummy. So that:

...Fat functions as a floating signifier, attaching to individuals based on a power relationship, not a physical measurement. People all along the weight spectrum may experience fat oppression, (Wann, 2009:xv)

Like Ophelia I learned to talk about fat amongst my friends as an adolescent and engaged in 'fat talk', which is not only about fat bodies, but is a way of

'establishing friendships with some girls and ostracising others' (Ambjörnsson, 2005:114). Ambjörnsson (2005:117) contends that 'the expression of dissatisfaction with one's body becomes an important way of performing one's identity as a girl'. Hence, 'this dissatisfaction becomes a normal female state, so that talk about fat becomes talk about being a girl' (*ibid*, 119). She concludes that:

...fat talk is a way of staking a claim, of making yourself visible and legitimate, of showing people that you have independence, individuality and style. But at the same time fat talk ironically signals the opposite: it indicates conformity... it is an "absent presence". It is present as talk only to the extent that it doesn't actually materialise on people's bodies... (*ibid*, 120)

I learned to read fat bodies, my own and others. This 'lipoliteracy' (Graham, 2005:175) refers to the act of learning about fat by reading about it as well as reading fat for what 'we believe it tells us about a person in terms of their moral character and their health' (Kulik and Meneley, 2005:07). Hence, 'the fat body is pathologised independently of what the body actually does with food or movement' and leads to an oversimplification of the notion 'of fatness as compulsive over-eating and average size as healthy' (LeBesco, 2009:148). Similarly, the conflation of health and beauty with thinness is contentious, because of the assumption that a thin body is a healthy body and a fat body is not. This masks a diverse range of potentially unhealthy eating, purging and exercise practices that are not considered problematic so long as the individual's weight is within a normal weight range. Again, 'the average sized body is taken to be healthy regardless of whatever detrimental practices', the individual may engage in (LeBesco, 2009:148).

The pre-occupation with the moral value of food and the over reliance on weight as the chief indicator of health (Jutel, 2005) reinforces the stigma attributed to bodies that do not conform and pathologises fatness, as Malson (1998:105) contends:

The fat body' is constructed as ugly, unattractive, disgusting and shameful. It signifies gluttony and uncontrolled sexual activity. The 'fat self' is unhappy and lacking in self-control and self-confidence

Again, the focus is on a lack of control, which is associated with femaleness and the working classes. Indeed, the 'hegemonisation of healthism and pathologisation of fatness' are tied to notions of appropriate womanhood; this is expressed through multiple cults and symbolic representations of thinness (Eckerman, 2009:10). This ensures that:

...even those people who do not view themselves as particularly fat find themselves implicated in this constant struggle over food consumption, leading in some cases to anxiety, guilt, shame and self-disgust as they attempt to conform to normative standards of health, beauty and self control. (Jallinoja *et al*, 2010:125)

#### **6:4. Respondents' Bodies**

Indeed, respondents in this theme expressed an uncritical acceptance of body weight as an indicator of health. It was this need to present themselves as healthy responsible citizens that was significant, even when exploring the potential problems that this entailed in negotiating their food likes and dislikes. Unlike Lupton's interviewees in the 1990s, respondents in my study did not demonstrate a 'disdain for the asceticism required of them by weight control edicts' (Lupton 2013:99). Some catalogued their highly emotional struggles with controlling their body weight, but did not consider this an imposition or a problem, more a fact of life and how they had to live. It was part of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987). A concern with dietary restraint is associated with elite cultural capital (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012) and by

narrating this struggle respondents were claiming these class aspirations for themselves.

The majority of women tended to distance themselves from any notion of being considered fat and this word tended to be avoided, as were 'O' words, such as overweight and obese (Wann, 2009:xii). This counters Lupton's (2013:71) assertion that 'people who identify as fat or overweight often represent their efforts as a battle with overwhelming urges to indulge in food'. The women my study, did not identify themselves as 'fat', yet still expressed a need and longing for certain foods. This was normalised, part of a cultural script of femininity.

Respondents wanted to eat the food they loved; bread, chocolate, crisps, though, these tended to be 'negotiated pleasures' and rationalised within a 'will to live a healthy life' (Jallinoja et al, 2010:125) and/or part of a 'weight loss script of femininity' (Malson, 2007:29).

Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Five health and body weight are both means of doing gender and performing femininity. However, women in this theme placed a lot more emphasis on their bodies and their weight as significant aspirations, rather than referring to health issues. They wrote about their relationship to food in the context of what they ate in order to manage their body weight. Food intake was something that had to be controlled and not being in control was considered a problem, as Ophelia writes:

I started to eat things that I normally wouldn't, e.g. almond croissants, pizzas, puddings, crisps. I suddenly didn't care about what foods I put into my body and over the next six months I continued to eat badly especially in the evening and my weight has crept up to perhaps the highest it has been for a long time. I just couldn't stop eating the wrong things and I was dealing with a new feeling of 'what's the point' now I am 53 and just one big blob of cellulite. I had to get a grip and I hated the feeling of being so out of

control. It hasn't been a good year for me and my body and food and this is partly due to my age and the way the body changes after the menopause.

Being out of control is significant, as Malson *et al* (2006) attests, self-monitoring and self-control; health and well-being are constituted as matters of individual responsibility. Hence, a high value is given to practicing appropriate self-care and maintaining control is a means of securing cultural capital. Also, as Howson (2004:114) claims:

Feminists identify the control of food intake as part of the pursuit of slenderness, a form of tyranny that distorts the female body and creates a sense of alienation from their bodies.

This is perhaps evident in the extent to which respondents reflected upon their past selves. In looking back they viewed their bodies with a less critical lens and without the emotional intensity of those earlier times. This was about embodiment and feelings. These clouded the individual's sense of their past and present body size and shape, as Ophelia declares:

I never felt thin and I wanted to – of course when I look back now at pictures of myself, I was really slim... Looking back at pictures of me at this age I can see that I am holding a huge amount emotionally in my body rather than being fat and this gave the impression that I was a bit podgy...

And in Ellen's narrative:

I noticed that I was pear-shaped when I was 21, which came as a bit of a surprise - I'd always been thin, with a good (big) appetite My sister was heavier than me so when we shared a year at college together, I was then about 25, she suggested we did a low calorie diet together. I obviously believed that I was too heavy then, and so went on this very successful diet. I felt sexy and attractive when I was that much slimmer - I was around 7 stone (as I remember). I never liked my shape, and it is only in hindsight that I look at pictures of myself from any previous time and see that I did not see myself clearly. (I think that that is still the same now). I associated being slim/thin with being attractive...

Bryony notes:

From pictures I can see that I had put on weight between 13 and 14 but I was by no means fat.

It is notable that these narratives are about body size and weight, losing it and gaining it, as Ida claims she has 'lost/gained/lost/gained, currently losing again'.

She began her narrative with the following statement:

I've just embarked (again) on a journey to lose 4 stone EEEEEK!!! I want to get married and I want a much smaller dress size to do it in

Ellen writes about her history of weight cycling. How she embarked on a low calorie diet with her sister and 'lost well over a stone in weight – I was thin again. I could feel my hipbones sticking up when I lay down. I felt fabulous'.

Her weight loss though did not last and:

I had put on weight and was putting on more - this bothered me. Food was a source of consolation and celebration - so giving myself treats (sweet things) became more regular. When my mother died, I felt able to take on another diet (this is only the second time in my life that I seriously dieted)... I lost weight, felt good, my digestive system speeded up considerably (where it had been quite sluggish).... I lost weight, steadily and successfully. I felt more attractive, of course

Bryony was 'sent to water aerobics class' by her 'mom' who thought she 'was getting a bit too chunky' (not fat). She documents a struggle with 'weight', weight gain, controlling weight, maintaining a healthy weight, losing weight, fluctuating weight and weight creeping back. In Melissa's narrative she begins:

Food was never really an issue for me until I went to boarding school at 14. Suddenly a girl was not considered pretty unless she had a 'great body'. I'd never contemplated this notion ever before and remember being surprised by it and noticing my own for the first time... We were always dieting in my boarding school and weighing ourselves every day. I went through a phase of eating only breakfast and lunch and lost a lot of weight, thus gaining a 'great body!' I particularly remember the joy of weighing in at 8 stone one day when I was 16 or 17 and 5 feet 5 ½. When we were hungry in the evenings we used to go into the tuck room and smell the food, oohing and ahing in pleasure!



At the end she writes:

I've put on a lot of weight but feel my body is testament to my love of good food (I weigh about 11 stone now) and have come to terms with my bigger size and quite value it. At least I don't look haggard and wrinkly! And my husband says I look 'bountiful'

Melissa's use of 'good' food here is ambiguous, can 'good' food make you put on weight? Or is she referring to what might be considered 'bad' food. This reinforces the problem of considering food and foodways within dualist and absolutist discourses. Earlier in Melissa's letter, she writes about her commitment to organic, home made and home grown produce. A concern for healthy, organic food is part of a middle class habitus (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012). Foodies, as explored in Chapter Seven, are concerned with 'good' food and this is contextualised as a concern for authenticity and cooking with the best or most appropriate ingredients. Foodies rarely if ever mention their body weight and present their food histories in the context of acquiring good taste as a form of cultural capital. This creates a problem for women, as elite cultural capital is associated with a thin body shape, whilst elite cultural capital for foodies (men) is about fine dining or 'good' food. Here Melissa is trying to marry a number of conflicting aspirations. She distances her body size from those that might be considered fat (or big) and thin (haggard and wrinkly!) and instead considers herself 'bountiful'. However, earlier on in Melissa's letter, she writes 'I was 8 stone one day when I was 16 or 17 and 5 feet 5 ½'. This means that she would have had a BMI of 18 as an adolescent, which would locate her body weight at that time in the underweight category. Now at 11 stone her BMI is around 25, which is within the healthy body weight range. She may even be

taller now than she was at 16 or 17. In other words, although she claims to be a bigger size than she was, her BMI is not in the overweight or obese category.

In Ophelia's narrative on the other hand her only reference to weight, is when she declares that 'she wasn't over weight'. Instead she was 'struggling with puppy fat', 'emotional padding' or 'all over puppy fat padding' that gave the impression that she was 'a bit podgy'. Although she admits that 'I have never liked my body much' but that this 'isn't about being fat'. Ophelia's concern is about thinness, as elite cultural capital and the aspiration to be thin:

I had a new friend [Name] who lived in a nearby village and we became close. She was at boarding school in [Town Name] and was completely obsessed about being thin. Until I met her I hadn't really thought about it much, nor really considered that being 'thin' was in my control... I started to want to be thinner although I was too lazy to really do something about it... I spend a lot of time reassuring her that she is thin and vice versa, this is pretty much all we talk about in our letters [at that time]...

She continues this part of the narrative by introducing another friend:

I had a beautiful friend called [Name] who lived down the road and all the boys flocked round her. She was thin, much more 'developed' than me (i.e. she had a woman's body whilst I was still struggling with this all over puppy fat padding) and I felt invisible when she was around. My elder brother who I worshipped went out with her and I felt like I lived on another planet.

Later Ophelia 'was very very thin' when she got married, 'under 8 stone' because 'she had been extremely ill' and 'had to put on weight to get pregnant'. Ophelia does not detail the specifics of her illness at this time and it is notable that this is not seen as a desirable or wanted thinness, especially as it interferes with other normative scripts of femininity, namely motherhood. The association between thinness and illness is similar to Queenie's healthy narrative explored in Chapter Five, when she writes about being thin and ill after the loss of her

parents. However, Ophelia in a similar vein to Melissa writes about her battle with weight, but claims to never having actually been that big:

I feel that I have always battled with my weight since teenage years, but in fact I have never been larger than a size 12 at my largest and most of my clothes are still size 10. Having big breasts has made me feel bigger than I am as my frame is really quite petite but up top I look bigger and this has, I think been my biggest problem. I look bigger than I really am underneath and that has been annoying. If I was rich and I wasn't worried about having an unnecessary operation I would book a reduction tomorrow.

Ophelia identifies herself as accepting of elite cultural values and thinness is a longed for aspiration.

Respondents in this theme described their relationships with food as an embodied experience intertwined with how they 'felt' about their bodies, food and eating. These were about 'loss' on lots of levels. These narratives were about weight loss and a loss of control over the rational masculine self and this was expressed as a moral failure or a giving in to an uncivilised, (feminine) urge for certain foods. Ellen tries to explain this in terms of addiction (below). In Moran's (2011:117) autobiography, *How to be a Woman*, she argues that 'over eating... has come to be regarded as the lowest ranking of all the addictions'. However, Moran (2011: 116) makes it clear that she is referring to 'those for whom the whole idea of food is not one of pleasure, but one of compulsion'. In Ellen's narrative thinking of chocolate as an addiction does not necessarily fully explain her 'emotional' need for it. Although she explains:

I consider that I have an addiction to chocolate, so that I don't (or indeed can't) keep any in the house, without eating it. I have managed to give up smoking, and drinking, for the most part, but chocolate seems to be the hardest thing... I have smoked on and off throughout my life. I have given up successfully at least three times. The last time was around ten years ago. I know I can 'give up' things. But at the moment, as much as I would like to, I cannot give up the sweet food in my life...

Hannah claims:

My downfall is chocolate; I love chocolate – not a lot but small nibbles... I feel quite annoyed if I don't eat some sort of plain chocolate in a day.

Women tended to write about a longing for the foods that they denied themselves when trying to lose weight, whether this was chocolate or crisps or bread. Ophelia comments:

I have also always had a love / hate relationship with bread. I love it but it definitely isn't good for me and for a while between having children I gave it up entirely and found that I could keep my weight pretty static and eat whatever I liked, but in the end, I found it too hard and it crept back in to my diet, just like I find giving up sugar hard. Both of these foodstuffs puff me up but I love them, it is a battle... I try not to eat sweet things and for me it is better if I give them up completely because once I start I just can't stop and the chocolate bar is gone! I know it's ridiculous but there you are... My weight has always fluctuated usually because of my love of sweet things...

Hence, for some there was a longing for foods they could not eat because they wanted to be thin and a longing to be thin or thinner. This was a battle and a struggle. This is one of the contradictions at the heart of contemporary femininity, aptly summed up by Kate Moss, a model and minor celebrity, 'nothing tastes as good as skinny feels' (Wardrop, 2009: unpaginated). The implication being, you can either eat or be thin. Of course as Ophelia notes even when she was thin she 'never believed [that she] was thin enough'. Eventually she has learnt that she does not 'have a thin body shape and would never have been able to achieve the impossible that [she] longed for'.

A couple of respondents referred to how they had been fat in the past. Ulrika for example:

I historically have had to be very careful, as a flat footed bow legged fat child I was forced to lose weight as a part of my treatment I was on an 800 calorie a day diet aged 8. That was tough at that age. I remember running for the first time I fell over as I was going so fast, it was brilliant. I still have awareness in food choice and some (a lot less) self-control, but am not obsessed but with that I am recently at least a stone heavier as a consequence. Oops!

It is notable that 'fatness' was a condition that needed treatment here and this was not part of a performance of femininity. Ulrika was not engaged in 'fat talk' or reading fat on her own or other bodies. She had been fat as a child and put on a strict dietary regime in order to treat this condition. She is aware of eating too much and has some self-control, despite this though she is a stone heavier. However, this is trivialised somewhat with her 'oops!' reference. Henry was 'fat' in the past as well. He wrote that he had 'been fighting' with his weight since his middle 20's, but had gone on to lose almost 5 stone and had 'maintained' his 'weight ever since'. And his rationale for losing weight:

As you guessed, obvious answer, because I was a fat bugger. Saw a photo of me and decided that I could no longer be that fat.

It is interesting that Henry and Ulrika give these past selves a 'fat' label. Monaghan (2007) argues that the use of this sort of pejorative term is a pre-emptive strike against others deriding one's body size. On the one hand this positions Henry and Ulrika as bodies resistant to hegemonic healthism and embracing of the pleasures of eating and drinking, it distances them both from the 'feminine coding' of 'dieting, body consciousness and obsession with one's appearance, which are considered negatively and as stereotypically female' (Lupton, 2013:64). On the other, because these fat bodies were in the past, Henry and Ulrika are complicit in the objectification of themselves and other fat bodies; this is not how they are now. Henry's weight loss is also in his control. Even, when he does not comply exactly with his diet plan, as he can not avoid

alcohol, he writes: 'my biggest downfall has always been alcohol which is packed with carbs, but if I give up people tell me I might live longer, I think it will just feel that way!' This is presented as not a problem, it is just a matter of control and permitting himself to engage in certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity, such as drinking (in stark contrast to Ellen's narrative). Henry explains that his diet was so successful he had to moderate it:

I went from almost 110kgs (17st 4) to 78kgs (12st), but people were asking me 'how is the treatment going?', cheeky buggers! I felt great, but my wife and very long-standing female friend managed to convince me that 80's to early 90's was perhaps healthier. So I now fluctuate between 85 (13st 5) and 90 (14st) depending on how good I am being. The training remains fairly constant and my avoidance of rice, potatoes, pasta and bread also remains constant. However if we are at friends and they have just baked fresh bread or a rice dish then no prob. I just avoid it when I can...

Henry's weight loss is pragmatic and devoid of emotion, other than feeling 'great'. He presents himself as unconcerned with his health and it was only the significant women in his life as the arbiters of the family's health who managed to persuade him to moderate this diet. In terms of comparing this account with those of the women respondents, it is perhaps the framing of his diet as a success and a continued success that differs. A change in weight from 78kgs (12st) up to 90kgs (14st), for example, could be considered a failure or a loss of control. The notion of weight cycling is accommodated and not problematized. His weight loss is controlled and framed in terms of a rational choice. The occasional lapse could be considered in terms of Jallinoja's *et al* (2010:125) 'negotiated pleasures'; or the strategies used by individuals when negotiating between food pleasures and their overall will to live a healthy life'. Here Henry's inability to avoid alcohol, fresh bread or a rice dish at a friend's house is not considered an 'unhealthy treat', but 'negotiated, balanced and rationalised'. It is not linked to an emotional struggle or battle. These 'negotiated pleasures'

resemble what Coveney and Bunton (2003) term 'disciplined pleasure', Sassatelli (2001) refers to as 'tamed hedonism' and others 'pleasure in moderation' (Crawford, 2000, Pajari *et al* 2006). In other words they do not fall outside of the chosen dietary regimen and are therefore not considered lapses or a loss of control.

There were men who wrote about weight loss practices. Walt, for example, writes that all his family have to 'watch their weight', so it was not that he was interested in the feminised practice of dieting for aesthetic reasons. He therefore checks the calories of food that he buys on a regular basis so that he rarely buys products with over 400kj per 100gs. James writes that 80-90 per cent of the time he bases his food choice loosely on the point system developed by weight watchers. He has followed 'weight watchers twice, but would never follow them exactly' and 'lost about 6 or 7 kilos both times, but exercise is better for keeping it off'. Again, there is no notion here of individual failure if weight loss is not sustained. The reference to six or seven kilos is dismissive as if it is an arbitrary figure, when it is around a stone in weight. His claim that he would 'never' follow the diet exactly indicates his resistance to the feminised performativity of such dietary practices. His diet is bespoke, by changing an element of it gives the illusion of control and makes it different from feminised dietary practices.

### **6:5. Dis/Ordered eating/bodies**

One of the original aims of the research as noted previously, was 'to consider the extent to which individual food histories were related to issues of weight management if at all'. The University Ethics Committee responded by insisting I strongly advised' potential participants 'not to participate if they had suffered

from an eating disorder (this is examined more fully in Chapter Three). Despite this, notions of dis/ordered eating were always going to be part of the study, because there is not a fixed ahistorical definition of what constitutes an eating disorder and as Malson (2009:137) identifies:

...eating dis/orders are complex, heterogeneous and shifting collectivities of socio-historically located subjectivities, bodies and body management practices that are constituted within and by rather than outside of the normative discursive contexts of contemporary western cultures.

Indeed, because a controlled thin body shape is considered culturally desirable for women in Western societies, weight management practices and dis/ordered eating tend to be feminised preoccupations. Hence, they can be trivialised and/or pathologised. Certainly, body weight is considered a master signifier of health and according to Malson (2009), Anorexia Nervosa (AN) enacts par excellence the masculinised, individualised, hyper disciplined and almost revered micro management of the body. However, the British Psychological Society and Royal College of Physicians guidelines on eating disorders in January 2004 (CG9), claim that the preoccupation with body weight, fear of fatness or pursuit of thinness are considered significant in the aetiology of Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia and Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS). Similarly, the National Institute for Mental Health (2001) in the US defined eating disorders as 'serious disturbances in eating behaviour, such as extreme and unhealthy reductions of food intake or severe over eating, as well as feelings of distress or extreme concerns about body shape or weight' (Giovanelli and Ostertag, 2009:294). Again, these feelings are considered a constituent element of heteronormative femininity.



It is notable that in proposed changes to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) IV<sup>33</sup>, for AN the usual measure of 'underweight' as a BMI of less than 18.5 is to be removed and 'markedly low body weight', based on the individual clinician's judgement, used instead. This indicates a shift away from the certainty of the BMI as an accurate indicator of AN. The removal of amenorrhea as a criterion is under discussion. These changes to the DSM suggest new variations in those presenting with eating disorders and the problems of having fixed psychiatric criteria. This highlights the problems of quantifying something that is subjective, culturally specific and medicalised feminine practices. I practiced a variety of food restriction or weight management techniques and/or dietary regimes throughout my life, though I have never been diagnosed with an eating disorder. Of course this does not mean that my eating practices would therefore be considered non-disordered.

In terms of conceptualising eating disorders Sam writes:

A particular memory that sticks in my head is there because it was, at the time, a bit of a watershed, I had been battling with an eating disorder of sorts where I would get very nervous around eating food in the company of others, this was awkward because I was going to college at the time and had to attend lunch in the canteen, I would often not bother as I could not face it, the symptoms would generally be a feeling of intense nausea while trying to eat. I never bothered to talk to any sort of specialist about this, just worked my way through it eventually...

He continues:

My relationship with food started out stormy, I really had very little time for food or eating, it got in the way of everything else that I was doing with my life and slowed me down. This grew into a standoff as I've already described where I could not face eating even though I was hungry, I never actually got physically sick from this disorder but felt very ill often, basically a series of panic attacks would overcome me when ever I had to deal with eating anything more that very casually...

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<sup>33</sup> The DSM IV is under review and will become the DSM V. These are the official clinical guidelines on all psychiatric conditions that are used to inform psychiatric and general practice.

I use this example from Sam to challenge the medicalization of eating disorders and the conceptualisation of them as feminine. Sam is male, what makes his account different, is the lack of rhetoric about embodiment. He was anxious about eating, but this was not about a longing or desire to be thin.

Whilst many female respondents in this theme engaged in narratives of anxiety, fear, grief and loathing of their own bodies and their eating habits, this did not lead to empathy for their fat sisters nor those who had been diagnosed with AN. In the context of 'fat sisterhood' for example when I embarked on this research journey I had already attended Evans (2010), ESRC funded Health at Every Size (HAES) seminar 'fat in the clinic' and was engaging with the political concerns of fat activists, HAES practitioners and fat studies academics. It seemed to me that the 'tyranny of slenderness' (LeBesco, 2001) and the assumption that a thin body was a key indicator of health masked the reality of women's lives. The problem of 'obesity' and the focus on 'weight', as Aphramor (2010:30) argues: 'obscures the health benefits of diet and exercise', and perhaps crucially 'weight loss maybe achieved at the expense of health'.

In reply to some respondents and as means of closure I directed some of them to the HAES website. To my mind I was suggesting that the problem was not about the food that they were eating or wanting to eat, but the social conditions that ensured that women were constantly dissatisfied with their bodies. That if only women were untethered from the heteronormative constraints of having to be thin and the 'weight-loss script of femininity' (Malson 2007:29) then everything would be fine. The reactions from the women ranged from interest in the notion of listening to the body, and eating what the body needed, to outrage

at the idea that bodies outside of what might be considered an undefined 'normal' weight range would be acceptable at all. For Ophelia, 'until we shed the ingrained belief that thin is beautiful, I fear we are lost'! And Laura argues:

Of course there are plenty of skinny people around who never exercise and have appalling diets, similarly there are lots of people around who are pretty healthy but a bit overweight (I'd like to think that this is me!)... It cannot be true that an overweight body can truly be healthy in the long term... I don't believe that people should be chastised for being big but it shouldn't be accepted as being healthy either.

Laura cannot accept that an overweight body can be a healthy body, even though she admits to being a 'bit overweight' herself. Helen, on the other hand discusses an anorexic friend, despite having had anorexia herself she writes:

One of my friends had anorexia – very serious, dropped to 4 and a half stone at the age of 16. She was off school for quite a while and when she returned she put on a massive amount of weight and ended up being huge. Once she had returned to school I remember her sitting at the dining table and scooping up the rashers of bacon (still in the fat) and stuffing them in her mouth and then picking up the plate and pouring the fat into her mouth...

Ophelia, as documented in Chapter Three, writes about a couple of girls at her school, one who was 'extremely fat' and another who suffered with AN. Yet, in relation to her experience, she writes:

When my mother died as I turned 12 I lost a lot of weight very quickly and my dad and various relations were very worried about it. I found them wittering on about it very very annoying, it seemed to be all they talked about but as I saw it, I didn't want to eat much and I didn't see the problem. I had just lost my appetite that was all. It took months for me to regain it. Being thin at that time didn't make me feel any differently about myself, I certainly wasn't doing it on purpose and gradually my weight returned to normal. I also had a delayed puberty because of the shock, even though I already wore a simple bra at 12 nothing else happened until I was about 15 and my periods didn't start until I was 16.

Here following Burns (2009:131) if we consider the meaning and experiences of these practices rather than the body image of the anorexic or the bulimic, it is

possible to consider how these women were articulating themselves and 'managing mourning, emptiness and anxiety through embodied practices'. For Ophelia the loss of her mother is intertwined with the loss of her appetite and weight loss. This is an embodied reaction to trauma that is interpreted by those around her as a wilful act of self-starvation. Ophelia is keen to explain that she did not 'feel' better being thin at this time and why would she? If women are positioned as being obsessed with their body weight and thinness then their behaviour is interpreted within this frame. Whereas as Squire (2002:61) notes in reference to her own experience of bulimia at the death of her mother:

I found that bulimia was a way of managing anxiety in the absence of other forms unavailable to me. My weight gain in the early stages of my mother's illness, and subsequent weight loss prior to, and following, her death, provided a context which was unlike the tales I had read of teenage girls dieting and starving themselves in an effort to be slim. I began to understand my bulimia in terms of grief... In the numbness of grief bulimia was also an attempt to feel less empty through an intensely embodied and physically invested space... one of a number of practices in the absence of an embodied mourning ritual...

Gaby's narrative about her anorexic and bulimic behaviour between the age of 11 and 16, is a series of embodied responses to trauma, a car accident, a hospital stay, her parents splitting up and being an only child dealing with these circumstances alone. I represent her narrative here as it was sent to me, written in just one long stream of consciousness, with lots of short sentences, all of them not quite finished, but quickly following on to the next, in a rush to get to the last sentence:

At 11 years old when I had a car accident and lost some weight and was told I looked better (I'd always been the heaviest in my class and teased for it) and then when I got out of hospital I decided to lose more weight... started to eat less and to find out how little food I could survive on... almost as a scientific test. Also parents split up at this time and I was an only child so maybe needed more attention... Refused to eat calorific food and ate cottage cheese, lettuce, raw carrots, apples. I avoided anything with calories even if I was hungry.

Drank black coffee and water and took laxatives... lost so much weight that I was taken to a specialist who told me that if this pattern of eating continued, I would never have children... that comment sparked a change in my eating habits I guess. Also at 16 I met a guy and fell in love and we were going to pubs and I drank beer and ate crisps and embarked on more of a student diet plus my self confidence started to develop, so there just wasn't time to worry so much about what I was eating. realised that I could eat more and not put on masses of weight. When pregnant, I enjoyed putting on weight but still controlled it... swam every day with first baby... to stay toned I guess... but the swelling side was good! Ate whatever I wanted but ate healthy nutritious food. After that, it was a case of eating with the family and enjoying everything we ate together, which I had prepared... but still controlled the content. Now eat enthusiastically and quite a large amount, considering my size!

I found Gaby's narrative upsetting. I empathised with the young girl trying to control her life, her hunger and perhaps still needing to control it now. And, having been teased for being the heaviest in her class at school can be seen as representative of the 'fear of fatness' that 'is assumed to underpin the disordered eating practices that lead to exceptional thinness' (LeBesco, 2009:146). Indeed, it is argued that the fear of the imperfect, fat self is stronger than the hope of a perfect thin self, particularly for young women today (Dalley *et al*, 2013).

Gaby was not the only woman to refer to pregnancy. Although the women's experiences in my study run counter to Charles and Kerr's (1986) claim that 'virtually all women have a relationship with food that is problematic [and that] except when pregnant, it was virtually impossible to be relaxed about food' (*cited* in Beardsworth and Keil, 1997:179). Today, in an era of heightened awareness of responsible individualism and increased medical surveillance, as highlighted in previous chapters, the idea that women (or men) could ever relax about food, especially when pregnant, appears incongruous. Indeed, Earle (2003) found that pregnancy was not the opportunity to transgress gendered

norms and values regarding one's body. Although, her study focussed on women's attitudes to their bodies and not food, she did conclude that women were not changed by pregnancy. They wished to be seen by others, as they were before (*ibid*: 251). Hence, in Hannah's healthy narrative as a responsible individual practicing self-care and as part of her narrative journey to health consciousness, she complies with government guidelines on healthy eating and drinking during pregnancy:

Being pregnant with [Son's Name] at 22yrs stopped me drinking alcohol for 9 months, the take-aways and fast food purchases rapidly reduced and a sensible daily diet began...

And then in her second pregnancy:

Being pregnant with [Daughter's Name] at 24yrs again stopped me drinking alcohol, again a healthier approach to food began, and I stopped eating pate, as I was advised with the 2<sup>nd</sup> pregnancy.

In Ophelia's account, she had already identified how she had to put on weight in order to get pregnant and then:

Pregnancy didn't suit my body terribly and I got a lot of cellulite, which means that I don't feel confident on the beach nor sailing or anywhere where I need to keep cool.

However, at the start of Gaby's narrative she refers to being 'teased' for being heavy which can be considered an element of 'weight based stigma' and discrimination (Saguy, 2003:16). It was this mostly uncritical acceptance of the 'cultural prescriptions of feminine beauty as thinness' (Malson, 2009:139) and therefore the 'fat' body as 'other' that I found especially problematic. There was no mention of double standards or inconsistencies between the sexes for example. The notion that big male bodies are associated with power, whilst female ones are not, was not problematized. Bergman (2009:141) when

passing for a 'big dude', suffers no abuse but when she is 'seen' as a fat woman:

Packs of boys follow me mooing; women with aggressively coordinated outfits accost me in the grocery store to inform me that I *can* lose thirty pounds in thirty days and that they would *love* to help. There are pig calls...

She claims that 'my fat, taken together with my height and confidence in my body while I am out in public view say "man" in this culture' (2009:142). In my study I assumed I would encounter a kind of 'sisterhood' in which I naively considered that given the potential difficulties with weight control, there would be an acceptance of other women's bodies, other weights, other shapes and sizes, but it seemed that for some at least, the problems they had with their own bodies did not mean that they were accepting or tolerant of other peoples.

In some respects the cultural concerns with 'individualistic competitiveness and personal display' (Malson, 2009:139) and the tensions between the care and indulgent antinomy (Warde, 1997) feed directly into the condition of 'being a woman' in contemporary Western cultures to such an extent that even to accept a notion of 'other' bodies as acceptable undermines constructions of 'good femininity' (Day and Keys, 2009:91). So that qualities such as self-sacrifice, self-denial and restraint are written on the thin female body and clearly missing from the fat female one. As Burns notes (2004) good or ideal femininity is achieved via the restraint and control of food intake. Indeed, according to Gard (2009), ethnographic research suggests that talk about food and dietary restraint is central to modern white 'girl' culture, whilst boys and men concern themselves with discourses that celebrate bigness and deflect public pressure to show dietary restraint (Gard, 2009:41).

## 6:6. Academic Bodies and Representations

The focus on the presentation of the self when negotiating these body narratives is relevant. Respondents' bodies were made visible through the research process; it was in the telling of themselves that put flesh on them. When reading about their struggles and battles with weight it could be assumed that their actual bodies were fat; however 'feeling' fat is different to 'being' fat and the extent to which respondents engaged in 'othering' bodies outside of the 'healthy BMI weight range' would suggest that this is where they located themselves, fighting to stay in a constantly shifting uncomfortable middle ground, which was assured by reference to those outside of it.

I have documented elsewhere (Chapter Three) my experiences at conferences when the motivation of the presenter's interest in their research has been challenged and/or questioned. The most striking example of this for me was at the second ESRC HAES seminar in 2010. This seminar series is well documented with power point slides and recordings of presentations available online (ESRC, 2010). The lively debate in which these presentations were embedded is not and the discussions from the day resulted in an official recording of the following key themes:

1. The types of 'authority' called upon when people speak about fatness and the different ways in which HAES, Fat Studies and Fat Activism challenge or perhaps reinforce these forms of authority;
2. The extent to which HAES, Fat Studies and Fat Activism can address the experiences of those who may chose to lose weight or otherwise engage with health interventions without objectifying or vilifying those people;
3. The ways in which the body size of the practitioner, researcher, activist, etc. who speaks about or practices Fat Studies and HAES is important and has implications for the ethics and legitimacy of their engagements with, and accounts of, fat bodies.



What is striking here is the notion that the body of the researcher is significant, especially when they are engaged in representing other bodies, rather than speaking about their own. Of course an interest in the position of the researcher is not new and is central to feminist concerns with the ethics and power inherent in all research processes (Letherby, 2003) as discussed in Chapter Three.

Academic scholars have been concerned with the positioning of themselves with regards to writing about fat. There have been two recent books published which incorporate scholarly attempts at positioning the academic body, the American Sociologist Saguy's (2013) book '*What's Wrong with Fat?*' and the Australian Sociologist Lupton's (2013) book '*Fat*'. From the beginning of her book Saguy (2013: 25-6) acknowledges that when asked why she is interested in research in the area of fat, her position as an academic with a 'long standing interest in the issues of framing, gender and social movements' does not fully answer the question and she adds:

My adult BMI has always been on the normal weight category... Yet exposure to pervasive cultural messages that women can never be thin enough has nonetheless contributed to difficult personal struggles with eating and body image at different points in my life... I also have a personal stake as a mother of two young children... how best to speak to my children about body weight...

Towards the end of her book Lupton (2013: 88) attempts to counter potential criticisms of her work from fat activists as she admits, 'I have always been thin and I have never struggled with body weight issues'. This she includes because she claims that academics writing in the area of fat activism write from an embodied position within a 'sisterhood of abundant flesh' that focuses on the lived experience. Lupton (2013) argues that 'fat activists' or size acceptance scholars are feminist women who themselves identify as fat' and she includes

the 'radical nutritionist' Aphramor in this category (Lupton, 2013: 88). However Aphramor, identifies herself 'as a thin, middle class dietician' (2012:13), so not a fat nutritionist as identified by Lupton. Coveney (2011:15) claims dietetics is the 'art and science of healing through the management of diet', whereas nutrition is the 'science of the provision of cells and organisms'. This has implications for practice and the deep archaeology of these professions, with dietetics originating with the Greeks and a philosophical concern with daily conduct regarding, exercise, food, drink, sleep and sex (Coveney, 2006).

Lupton's criticism of fat activism perhaps masks her own anxieties with regards to her thin body negotiating a fat field. She claims that 'it is not only fat women who are discriminated against or incited to feel guilt and shame by hegemonic obesity discourse' (2013:88). Of course this may be correct but she is still keen to identify that she has a lived experience of some of these issues as she later claims, whilst reinforcing normative femininity:

I do have direct experience, as a mother of two school aged girls who juggles her own feminist and ethical principles with attempting to promote her daughters' health and emotional well being (*ibid*: 89)

Lupton (2013: 88), concurs, then, that it is difficult 'regardless of body size or weight', not to be affected in some way by the power of 'obesity discourse' though it is not clear exactly what she means by this and makes little attempt to clarify how this is defined. She persistently refers to 'fat people' throughout her work as if this category of people is an uncontested objective empirical reality. She provides little in terms of empirical evidence for her claims and even less on her lived experience.

In terms of the representation of academic bodies in their work, Saguy (2013: 25) prioritises her 'relative thinness' and argues that this is an advantage as 'people tend to attribute positive traits' to thin people and she is therefore 'considered a more objective' and 'credible commentator on debates over fatness' than if she was fat. She continues that 'thinness in our culture is what sociologists call an unmarked category'. Having attended the ESRC funded seminar series on HAES (2010, 2011), as well as a number of BSA organised Medical Sociology Conferences (2011, 2012, 2013) and the BSA Food Studies Conferences (2010, 2012), in which I have engaged with academics presenting their work on both 'fatness' and 'thinness', I would argue that all (female) bodies regardless of their size are regarded as 'marked categories'. Whilst thinness may be valued it no longer remains an unmarked category. References to thin bodies certainly elicited hostility from respondents in my study (as at seminars) as much as fat bodies did. It would seem that when reading the bodies of others the boundaries of acceptability or appropriate body size are subject to moral appropriations and a pathologising of all body types, particularly female ones, with fat female bodies considered the worst.

### **6:7. Summary**

The body narratives that I chose to present within this chapter have been challenging because I had an embodied response to them. The research process I engaged in involved emotional work and this has at times been difficult to manage. My emotional reactions have tended to leave me feeling depleted and depressed. I have felt anger at times with respondents and their narratives. In hindsight, this anger is misplaced. I am actually angry with myself, as well as the social system that enables these narratives to be produced. A society that encourages the marginalisation and stigmatisation of individuals on

the basis of a constantly shifting notion of appropriate body size is unjust. Yet, this is not just about fat bodies, for me a fat body is gendered, it is the female body that is implicated here. So a woman being critical of fatness (or thinness) for me implies a critique of femininity. My female body is mutable; it can change over the course of the reproductive cycle throughout a lunar month. Indeed the size of my body has ebbed and flowed throughout the whole of my life. Put simply, as an academic colleague of mine said some years ago, when I told her that my PhD was about the gendered relationship with food (and by implication body weight), 'what's to find out, sometimes we're fat and sometimes we're not'. However, in a civilised, dualistic and absolutist society that values masculine notions of control, management, will power and rationality, the 'other' female body is always in need of containment. Some of the female respondents in my study expressed disgust at their own bodies at times, mainly because they considered that these bodies were out of control. For me, one explanation (and there are others) could be that fatness is the means for them to express their dissatisfaction with their bodies and this was ultimately about not having or lacking a male body (control), or even thinness envy.

In the next chapter, which is the last of the four data chapters I examine the foodie theme. This again explores gender and class and how these are played out in the culinary field. This next chapter is particularly concerned with food and foodways as markers of cultural capital.

## *Chapter 7: Un digestif, 'generally speaking it was mostly a diet of beer' (Sam)*

### **7:1. Chapter Outline**

The focus of this chapter is a 'foodie' identity, which is about status, distinction and taste. What is significant in this theme is that food and foodways have become markers of cultural capital. For foodies this is about acquiring elite cultural tastes and becoming a 'food adventurer' (Heldke, 2003: xxiii). All of the men who participated in the study, whether they were foodies or not were keen to articulate their interest in food in terms of hegemonic masculinities in order to distance themselves from traditional feminised foodways. Hence in the heading to this chapter, Sam refers to having 'mostly a diet of beer' as a means of distancing himself from feminized dietary concerns with healthy eating. Gough (2007:237) cites 'meat-eating, beer drinking and womanizing' as forms of hegemonic masculinity and argues, following Connell (1995) 'all men are complicit in supporting hegemonic ideals through their practices, whether it be weight training, promiscuity or high alcohol consumption'. I refer as much as possible to hegemonic masculinities in the plural as this acknowledges the fluidity and situatedness of the term.

I introduce the concept of the foodie and some of the issues and problems of definition. I then explore the impact of the dualistic gendering of food and foodways and how men negotiate these culinary fields by recourse to hegemonic masculinities. I consider kitchen spaces, BBQ's, vegetarianism and meat eating. In the next two sections I focus on the foodie identity, in the first this is explored in the context of shifting culinary fields. In the second I consider how 'my' foodies differ from those in the literature. I mainly use narratives from



for both was on changing tastes in food and patterns of consumption after Bourdieu (1984), particularly the shift in tastes from 'snob to omnivore' (Peterson and Kern, 1996). Some of the foodies in my study clearly articulated cultural omnivorousness, or the appreciation of high and low tastes within a culinary field. Others however demonstrated a social distinction through a commitment to elite tastes and hostility to symbols of mass culture. For example, Henry claims that he hates 'Tesco's and would rather eat grass than go through their doors'. He documents some of the restaurants he has experienced:

...Memorable restaurants, how long have you got. Fish cooked in a paper bag in a posh restaurant in Highworth. Then nouvelle cuisine at Inglesham forge, the full grill in the grill room at the Dorchester, multiple meals, including our entire wedding, at *Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons*, 7 course gourmet dinner party on New years eve for 16 people at our home 2 years ago, all for under £40 I could go on forever...

That respondents' experiences of elitist culture should engender open hostility from a female only audience at a presentation is perhaps indicative of how deep class (gender) distinctions are still felt. And how powerful food and foodways are at communicating difference on many levels. When the same data was presented at Cardiff it was to a mixed audience, within more of a foodie environment amongst food scholars keen on localism, sustainability and artisan food for example. Here, they were supportive; they did not berate me for presenting respondents experiences that ran counter to theirs.

The foodie theme in common with the others in the thesis, incorporates issues to do with taste in relation to social status and distinction, as well as gender. I argue that a 'foodie' identity is used as a means of expressing cultural distinction, elite status and masculinity. Hence, the food and foodways written

about by foodies demonstrate an understanding of the role of food as a marker of symbolic and cultural capital. Some of the foodie narratives chart a journey from a taste of necessity to a taste of luxury, from low to high status with regards to food and cultural distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984). Others engage in a cultural omnivorousness and enjoy what might be considered 'high' and 'low' food cultures (Peterson and Kern, 1996). They did not participate in ordinary omnivorousness without committed engagement (Warde *et al* 2007a). Indeed the foodies in my study were keen to demonstrate their taste, participation and knowledge of the elite culinary fields in which they played. I suggest that in this context the notion that women could be foodies appears incongruous; a foodie identity is a masculine one.

There were twenty-six men who contributed to my study. Their ages ranged from 27 to 76, although they were mostly between the ages of 39 and 60. In terms of their NS-SES, eleven of the men identified themselves as belonging to social class 1. The most striking difference between these narratives and those from the women is the extent to which they were located within the public sphere and outward looking. In other words their narratives were less to do with the domestic sphere, body management or the feminised practices of cooking as 'emotional' (Hochschild 1983, DeVault 1991) or 'love' 'labour' (Lynch, 2007) and more to do with how their food and foodways had led to the development of 'epicurean' (Scholliers 2001) or 'elite' (Bourdieu 1984) tastes.

A foodie is defined by Johnston and Baumann (2010) and Cairns *et al* (2010) as an 'individual who is passionate about the pursuit of good food... with a long standing passion for eating and learning about food' (2010:591). In their



working definition of foodies they exclude those ‘who were directly involved in the food industry’ (2010:223). In my research Simon is a self-employed cook who writes a blog and articles for food magazines. Larry worked in a professional kitchen part time in his youth. And Sam and Jake were employed in agricultural food production in the past. Of course these experiences and knowledge would impact upon their food narratives, but excluding the self-employed cook, none, at the time of the study were involved in the ‘food industry’ or had been for some time. I am not sure of the benefits of excluding those who are directly involved in the food industry from the foodie category. In my study this would only exclude Simon and yet his occupation means he is passionate about good food, so I include him.

There are further boundaries and distinctions made within the culinary field. Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) differentiate between ‘foodies’ and ‘chowhounds’. This centers on debates around aesthetic appreciation (taste), authenticity (participation) and knowledge acquisition. The chowhounds claim to be less elitist in their trailblazing quests for authenticity in their foodways and fully embrace cultural omnivorousness. In my study, Dave notes:

I do not consider myself a “foodie snob” in that I believe that all sorts of establishments and types of food have their place. One of my favourite restaurants is Michael Caines Abode at the Royal Clarence Hotel, Exeter, where we have enjoyed sublime *Michelin* starred cuisine – I was also distraught on finding out that my favourite doner-kebab shop in Exeter had closed!

Here, Dave may be considered a ‘chowhound’ as he distinguishes himself by disavowing foodie elitism. Drew on the other hand writes:

My true food hero though has to be Anthony Bourdain, a food rebel, but I love his philosophy re food. When he travels he eats local not in 5 star restaurants and this is the only real way to get to experience the culture. When I went to Beijing my big ask was to try Peking

Duck, it wasn't the Wall, it wasn't shopping, it was just to try proper local food. When I go to India it is Dosas for breakfast, not full English. It is those little apprehensive moments before trying something new that get me, that moment of discovery and the thought that I could replicate it for others who have never tried it.

Again, Drew is highlighting his quest for authentic cuisine. However, he admits to following Anthony Bourdain, his true food hero and rebel. In the culinary field according to Naccarato and LeBesco (2012:77) chowhounds are leaders; it is only foodies who mimic experts and follow culinary trends. However, on the chowhound website they distinguish between 'true' and 'false' chowhounds, which for me takes the argument too far. In the final analysis both chowhound and foodie identities suppose high economic and cultural capital, 'only those with leisure time, culinary knowledge and economic resources dine out on a regular basis' and can fully engage in chowhound or foodie practices (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012:83). These types of distinctions serve to highlight the elitism of 'culinary capital'. In the culinary field the drawing of internal boundaries between smaller groups, serves to reinforce the significance of the wider field in which the actors position themselves. It is notable in Drew's account, he positions himself as a 'food adventurer' (Heldke, 2003: xxiii) and a rebel, and these are gendered.

### **7:3. Gendering Tastes and Dis-tastes**

Bourdieu (1984:56) explains that

...tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference, it is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes...

In Johnston and Baumann's (2010) treatise on the foodie, they identify omnivorous support for both 'high' and 'low' food cultures as significant. They highlight an interest in authenticity and exoticism amongst their foodie

respondents. Warde (*et al* 2007a: 146) defines cultural omnivorousness as a 'breadth of cultural involvements', in three separate dimensions such as 'taste, knowledge and participation'. These dimensions are significant in acquiring a foodie status. However, in Warde *et al* (2007a) these are measured in terms of 'taste' in music, literature, television, film, painting and sport. Thus, whilst there are instances of cultural omnivorousness and explorations of change in cultural hostility between social class groups, Warde *et al* (2007a) do not explore omnivorousness in relation to food and foodways. This could be because food and foodways, especially in the domestic sphere are conceptualized as feminine. Hence, elite patterns of consumption are usually associated with male activities. So that when it comes to measuring cultural omnivorousness as a sign of cultural distinction amongst privileged groups for example, an interest in sport (masculinity) is seen as a dimension of cultural omnivorousness when food and foodways (femininity) are not. Cultural omnivorousness then tends to relate to activities outside of the domestic sphere, as markers of distinction and elite status.

Hence because cultural omnivorousness focuses on male activities and values outside of the domestic sphere, when foodies bring their culinary practices into the home they are framed within different parameters that change the domestic space. Drew writes for example:

In doing up my first house in Scotland there was only one concern - I wanted to have a say in the kitchen design - the cooker etc etc - the rest of the house could be bright pink, I did not care as long as the kitchen looked good. Then the final move to a house with a big kitchen such bliss...

Hence, Drew is making his mark on the domestic space, it is his and not a feminine 'bright pink' space. Gough (2006: 387) argues that 'cooking and

enjoying diverse cuisine [are] no longer regarded as exclusively women's business'. And Gough (2007:2481) notes that 'it is feasible that shopping, cooking and enjoying a greater range of foods have been absorbed into current definitions of masculinity'. It is notable that in both of these examples the reference is to a diversity or greater range of cuisines. Hence, whilst men may engage in traditionally feminised foodways, they are doing so from a position of omnivorousness, their participation on this field is framed therefore in terms of a 'breadth of cultural involvements (Warde *et al*, 2007a: 146) and associated with elite cultural capital.

Another dichotomous aspect of food consumption in Western culture is the association of femininity with vegetarianism and meat eating with masculinity<sup>34</sup>. This has been well documented amongst scholars such as Fiddes (1991) and Adams (1990) in '*the Sexual Politics of Meat*'. Bourdieu (2005:75) argues that meat is 'the nourishing food par excellence, strong and strong-making, giving vigour, blood and health'. Certainly, the men in my study identified with this, for example, Lex comments:

...one of my favourite meals is steak and I think this is perhaps because I associate it with Dad as it was his special thing that he cooked. It still feels special to me now and I take charge of cooking it in our house.

In this account, meat is not just about its significance in terms of consumption, but its preparation requires special treatment and this is an important household role that he has learned from his father. Tom, as well had a strong 'need' for meat: 'I very rarely order or cook vegetarian. I tend to feel I need meat on my plate'. Adams (1990:36-7) argues that there is a:

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<sup>34</sup> I have purposely made reference to Western culture; to acknowledge that there is a large part of the world where vegetarianism is the norm.

...kind of symmetrical symbolism between meat and vegetable, masculine and feminine... men are active and consume foods imbued with power... women are passive and consume foods derived from inactive, immobile forms of life.

Of course this is an over simplified symmetry here, but meat is expensive to produce and has long associations with high cultural capital and elite status.

The relationship between meat and masculinity raises issues for men who are vegetarians 'as men who refrain from meat eating may be regarded as repudiating or undermining conventional conceptions of masculinity'

(Beardsworth and Keil, 1997:213). Indeed, in Nath's (2011:276) Australian

study, 'meals without meat are still widely considered by non-vegetarian men to be feminine dietary choices, while meat and animal products are the superior food for a 'real' man'. She argues that vegetarian men were engaged in

negotiating their masculine identities within a context in which meat is

associated with sexuality and strength. In my study Gerry writes (emoticon and confidential comments in original text):

There was also a short right-on phase of vegetarianism. AKA living off Bulgarian red wine, chips, bean stews and buckwheat bakes. This suited an agenda of direct-action, peace protesting activism. And the chips and red wine (and some speed too) suited parties, discos, club-nights in town, and occasional forays to London. The other food discovery of this time was hash-cakes :) (Assume this is confidential). Then I moved to London to work on the [Political Organization], and into a shared house where they ate bacon and sausages. My politics were already getting more flexible. My vegetarianism lasted about two weeks.

Gerry associates his vegetarianism with politics and the public sphere; it is not a domestic (feminised) concern. It is part of a lifestyle that incorporates more risky behaviour, such as drug taking and partying and activities usually associated with what Collinson (1996) refers to as edgework, or 'living on the edge as a means of performing dominant masculinity' (Robertson 2007:48-9). In Gerry's account this is a phase and something he grows out of.

Ian claims, he is:

Not keen on vegetarian food because it's a tad insipid unless it's Indian and there I find a whole range of aromatic spicy tasty dishes. One of the best was lentils, thick brown and juicy. Had those in Bombay with fresh cooked coriander nan - fantastic! (Ian)

Ian is therefore explaining that if he doesn't have masculine food (meat) then he has chunky fish (not food that requires picking) or strong and spicy Indian food. It is notable that vegetarian food is palatable if it is Indian. It demonstrates cultural omnivorousness as vegetarianism is common in Indian culture. The fact that Ian ate this in Bombay, contributes to his cultural capital and potential foodie identity. This is about authentic cuisine and 'gourmet' globetrotting, key elements of a foodie identity.

#### **7.4. Foodies in a shifting foodscape**

In understanding a foodie identity, Johnston and Baumann (2010) and Cairns (2010), follow Heldke (2003) and focus their interviews and analysis on issues of 'authenticity' and 'exoticism' in food and foodways. Naccarato and LeBesco (2013) similarly identify the theme of authenticity as a significant aspect of 'culinary capital'. They claim that health; dietary restraint and sustainability are privileged values in a culinary field that distinguish the elite from the rest. They argue that amongst upper middle class Americans there has been a shift towards, local, artisan, sustainable, organic and mindfulness eating. Meah and Watson (2013) discuss the 'provenance' and 'ethics' of the food supply, which they link to consumer anxieties. What is notable with all of these concerns is that they are not easily practiced amongst those with little economic capital or time. They are specifically about acquiring cultural capital within an elitist culinary field.

Another recent shift in the culinary field is the move away from the rigid rituals associated with fine dining to more casual dining. Pearlman (2013:12) argues that the fine dining experiences of the past 'had a designated, specific cuisine style, surroundings and rituals of service'. This meant that 'an unsophisticated diner would be easy to spot' (*ibid*: 4). Hence, the sophisticated diner is more likely to engage in cultural omnivourness (Peterson and Kern, 1996).

Today, Marsden (2013: unpaginated) notes that the *Michelin Guide 2014* acknowledges the rise in relaxed counter dining and simple restaurants.

Marsden (2013: unpaginated) quotes the editor of the guide who claims that 'dining is becoming a less structured, less formal affair and opening times and menus are more flexible to reflect the way we live our lives'. In Johnston and Baumann's (2010) exploration of the foodie identity a shift to casual dining might be indicative of democracy at work across the culinary field. Or it could indicate a continued cultural omnivoroussness amongst foodies. What is clear with all of these emerging themes is that they are a means of drawing boundaries and creating further distinctions within the culinary field. A committed foodie would need to have a feel for the game, to participate in and have an understanding of these shifting foodscapes. I would add that 'casual dining' does not mean the food served in these establishments is not expensive. The only pub in the UK to be awarded two *Michelin* Stars is Tom Kerridge's, Hand and Flowers in Marlow, where a main course from the *A La Carte* Menu costs around £30. These shifting 'tastes' in dining perhaps say more about who has access to these cultural fields rather than a democratisation across them (as identified in Chapter Two). It is notable that some of the foodies in my study were clearly engaged in elements of omnivoroussness and expressed a concern with authenticity. Others considered

themselves 'food adventurers' and the 'quest for novelty', 'authenticity' and 'the exotic' were important in this regard (Heldke 2003:9).

Johnston and Baumann (2010:53) argue that foodies 'physically look like anybody else and are not distinguished by fatness'. However the frontier foodies in my study did not mention their weight or bodies at all. This is a very loud silence and did not mean that they were not 'fat'<sup>35</sup> or were not overweight. It may have been that writing about food to a female researcher is already fairly threatening to a masculine sense of self; to be interested in discourses relating to body weight and diet as well is too much. The foodies in my study focussed upon the development of epicurean tastes, asserting culinary expertise and participating in shifting culinary fields. 'Fatness' is difficult to define and measure. It says more about the climate in which Johnston and Baumann are working and their prejudices perhaps, that they feel it necessary to mention this. I am not sure of its appropriateness or applicability when defining a foodie. Although, I acknowledge that in the US especially, thinness is associated with high social class and elite cultural capital. Again, this could be related to the number of women they included in their study.

Johnston and Baumann (2010) and Cairns, *et al*'s (2010) findings originate from the same study on foodie culture in the United States. Johnston and Bauman (2010) focus on a Bourdieuan conception of distinction and Cairns *et al* (2010) discuss gender. They conduct in-depth interviews in the United States with 30 'foodies' within what they refer to as a 'gourmet foodscape'. They use snowball sampling and recruit respondents 'who were thought of as having

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<sup>35</sup> I purposely use the term 'fat' and not medicalised categories such as overweight or obesity. This is a political statement and acknowledges that these are contested categories. The term fatness was also used in Bauman and Johnston's (2010) study on foodies.



strong interests in eating good food or gourmet food' (Cairns *et al* 2010:223), although the notion of what constitutes 'good food' is not clearly defined. In their study, central to this foodie identity are issues of education, exploration and the evaluation of what they referred to as 'worthy' and 'unworthy' food. Again, these types of food were not delineated in any detail. Yet, it is the idea of the foodie as interested in distinguishing or learning how to distinguish between these food groups that is central to the foodie identity. In their findings Johnston and Baumann (2010) clearly highlight the tensions of pursuing a foodie identity, particularly in relation to democracy and distinction, so that whilst their foodies celebrated a kind of cultural omnivorousness, in which they seek authentic or exotic cuisine, this actually means that they are simultaneously engaged in a culinary aestheticism that sets them apart, particularly from those unable to afford to spend time sourcing the right ingredients for example.

Cairns *et al* (2010) consider gender more directly. They examine their women's foodie narratives through care work, knowledge and expertise. However, in 'doing gender in the foodie kitchen' (Cairns *et al*, 2010:591), it is apparent that the woman's' foodie identity is not one that sits easily with traditional feminized gender roles. I argue that a foodie identity in my study is male. Indeed, Hollows (2003) argues the men who engage in domestic cookery do so as a creative leisure activity, which distinguishes it from feminized domestic labour and as such it becomes 'a domestic culinary masculinity' (Hollows 2003:239). For women in my study, it is the care work element of their narratives that differentiates them from the foodies. It is impossible for them to be a foodie since it entails much more than a passing interest in 'good food'. The pursuit of 'good food' is so encompassing for foodies like Drew:

Some of my favourite food moments have been shared with another foodie friend in [Village Name], marinating bits of pig and roasting them, in fact spending all day cooking them and then devouring it with a good bottle of wine. Then waking up and realizing you have left overs for breakfast - that has to be some of the best food moments. I love food and the best way to get to try this used to be cooking it. My wife laughs about me sneaking off to the summerhouse with a bottle of wine and my "porn collection", which actually consists of one of my many, many, cookbooks - working out what to cook next and how to cook it. I miss that about Scotland and having the facilities to do that. Guess I shouldn't complain about being cooked for, but cooking was my relaxation, my Saturday night in, my Sunday afternoon.

Drew has recently moved out of the country and expresses a sense of loss regarding his former foodie identity, which is curtailed slightly as he notes:

Moving to Singapore has changed my relationship slightly to food. Unbeknown to me, Singaporeans love to talk about food, their next meal nearly as much as they like eating and the variety and ingredients are amazing. The only down side is that because everyone eats out, kitchens are small and not air conditioned - so cooking is like a work out in a sauna.

I argue that feeding the family is not a key issue for the foodies in my study.

This does not mean that they are not interested in cooking for their loved ones, but this is not part of their domestic responsibilities in the home, as Dave claims:

Cooking continues to be a passion. It is my way of unwinding at the end of the working day. I almost always cook the evening meal for [Name] (my partner) and myself. I love cooking for her, particularly her favourite, *Moules Marinières*.

Simon too, explains that his everyday cooking decisions are based on 'which food fad is currently being toyed with in our house'. This implies that whilst he has a more measured and professional approach to food preparation, his wife is more susceptible to whims and fashion, which he accommodates. Again, this is about clearly defined gender differences in the home, even though he is the

cook. In Ed's narrative his cooking is relaxed and exciting, but not everyday domestic cooking:

I enjoy cooking, but not to the extent that it is an ordeal and a worry. The whole buzz for me is serving up something that's tasty, and a good enough reason to get a bunch of my favourite people around the table.

So, for Ed, food is a social event and not a routinized everyday activity.

Generally, for foodies, domestic, everyday cooking and shopping is not their primary concern. Larry's response is typical, the 'routine shopping is handled by my wife', whilst he cooks:

...mostly for friends and family. I like to entertain and although Sunday roast is a favourite, I try to challenge myself from time to time... I have recently bought a new full width range/oven and it is definitely getting used. If I want to do something different, I cast my mind back to the places I used to work and try to remember menu items.

It is notable that Larry refers to his recent purchase of a 'full width range/oven'; this is a high status domestic item.

Other foodies whilst they were clearly interested in 'good food', did not, like Nick or Sam, engage in cooking much at all:

[My wife] is pretty much in charge of the kitchen so she plans what we eat really. When she's not around she tends to leave food / meal suggestions for me to do for the children. When I am here on my own I tend to revert to bachelordom... cereal, or toast or fried eggs. Don't really cook for me. (Nick)

My wife [Name] generally decides what we are going to eat and this is governed by budget and time... I like to cook but seldom do and I love fresh ingredients... I am a great fan of fresh veg and my homemade hot chilli sauce is to die for. Nowadays I love to explore the tastes and textures of different foods and find myself very animated while cooking "Potjiekos" on the fire. Potjiekos is a South African style of cooking in large cast iron pots over an open fire, very slow, all day stews, fabulous!... As I have become more at one with food my cooking skills have got better and better, I still don't cook much but enjoy it when I do. (Sam)

It is interesting that for many of the men, as well as the foodies, cooking outside of the kitchen on an open fire or a barbeque liberates them from the domestic sphere. Lex for example writes: 'I love BBQs and again I think this is associated with being at the cottage (on holiday with his father) and being happy there'. Similarly, Tom declares: 'when I decide to cook, I'm quite a good cook, but my repertoire is limited. They haven't changed much. Fry-ups and BBQs are my other specialties'. Tom's food references are fatty and meaty and not healthy or feminine. Cooking is clearly his decision and something he chooses to do outside of the domestic sphere. Walt is a foodie, who not only cooks on a BBQ but claims that:

BBQs for 15 is normal for me, I enjoy the artistry of food, the planning, preparation, the balance the mix, colour, tastes, the variety of ingredients. I don't just do it for those who come, but also for the pleasure of the creation.

So for Walt, the BBQ is an arena for demonstrating culinary skills and expertise, cooking in this way is an art and a performance. It is certainly not everyday domestic cooking.

I argue that the foodies that Johnston and Baumann (2010) and Cairns *et al* (2010), interview for their study are different to the foodies I identify in mine. Theirs is a very loose definition that included women engaged in feeding their families 'good food'. In my study 'feeding the family' is not a foodie activity, although as I explain in Chapter Four, it can be a means of securing cultural capital for women if they engage in intensive mothering. Similarly there are those in Johnston and Baumann (2010) and Cairns *et al*'s (2010) study who expressed more of an engagement with and an interest in health discourses

around food. Again this is not the case for foodies in my study, healthiness is not a concern. Respondents engaged in health discourses I discussed within the healthy theme in Chapter Five.

Certainly foodies in my study tended to distance themselves from the types of food prepared in their childhoods. This is a means of asserting a kind of neophilia, as Falk (1991) and Lupton (1996) identify. Thus, appearing adventurous in seeking out new tastes is connected to the desire to reject foods from one's youth and family background. And/or what Bourdieu (1984) refers to, as cultural distinction. Thus, neophilia or performing a foodie identity is part of a specific class habitus. Respondents were keen to demonstrate their status and the extent to which this may have changed. For Lupton (1996) neophilia is part of an emergent gourmand identity, what Scholiers (2001:07) claims is a:

...close connection between food and identity [and the] category of people typical of the booming urban life of the 1980's and 1990's' and those who could be identified as 'foodies' or 'well to do epicureans whose main activity involved eating at fashionable restaurants.

The foodie identity is about asserting class status and a gender identity associated with hegemonic masculinities. These male foodie narratives were generally classed and narrated from a very privileged white perspective.

### **7.5. Foodies and hegemonic masculinities**

A foodie identity is performed outside of the domestic sphere. The focus is on eating out, gourmet globetrotting and perhaps bringing these authentic or exotic foodways into the home. Even for those who did not clearly express a foodie identity, the world outside of the domestic sphere is the arena in which they positioned themselves. For example Paul and Richard both articulated specific historical contexts and change throughout their lifetimes, they identified issues

relating to rationing, refrigeration, improvements in food distribution and the reduction in the price of food, rather than dwell on the role of food in their intimate or family lives. For them all of these outside factors had a direct impact on what they ate in the past and what they were eating now (neither of them cooked). This is an exploration of the impact of science and technology (masculinity) on the domestic (femininity) sphere. Richard provided a detailed table identifying all of the food that he eats on a day-to-day in comparison with what was available in his youth:

**Table. 2.1. Richard’s ‘checklist for today comparing with childhood’**

Yes/No and the comments relate to my childhood up to 1945 (aged 0-10). At that time, during WW2, we lived in a small village on the north coast of [Country], not returning to [County] until two years after the war in 1947.

Today’s main food items	Available <b>1940-45?</b> Yes/No	Comments
Breakfast		
Muesli	No	My mother could have made something from oats and raisins but muesli’s time had not yet arrived!
Kellogg’s Corn Flakes	Yes	I think that they were wheat flakes during the war
Yoghurt	No	
Bananas	No	
Tea	Yes	Lyons Tea (but no tea bags then)
Pasteurized Milk	No	Farm milk only. TB risk. Also the milk frequently went sour in summer and had to be kept in the mesh safe area to keep insects off. No fridge
Porridge oats	Yes	
Juice	No	There was no equivalent of Tropicana orange juice, just orange squash (i.e. water added to a concentrate)
Granary bread	No	White only. Unsliced. As you know, the introduction of sliced bread was seen as a cultural breakthrough by the great unwashed.
Marmalade	Rarely	My mother made it after the war but not during (I think).
Butter	A little	Rationed
Margarine	Yes	But not spreadable

Lunch		
Home-made soup	Yes	But rarely.
Oatcake	No	
Cheese	Yes	Cheese was not popular because it always went rancid in summer, being left on a cheese dish with a lid.
Coffee	No	There was no instant coffee and we did not have ground coffee except on special occasions using a percolator on the stove. This was very rare as coffee is imported but the delicious smell made a great impact on us. Once a year at most. Instant coffee appeared long after the war. Powdered Nescafe first
Apple	Yes	
Teatime		
Marmite	Yes	
Jam / lemon curd	Yes/No	Homemade jam. Lemons after the war.
Granary bread	No	White only; no granary
Tea	Yes	
Cake	Yes	
Dinner		
Wine	No	My mother was teetotal of necessity (cost) and father had a glass of port every Christmas. The bottle sat in the sideboard cupboard for most of my childhood! Wine was a huge luxury in those days and very expensive.
Grilled plaice	No	Fish all came to the village fish shop and cod was the norm. It rarely seemed fresh and we did not enjoy it so that, whereas I now prefer fish to red meat and will opt for fish at a good restaurant, as a child I did not enjoy it. This also applied in the Home Counties in the 50s where Mac Fisheries was the only retailer. Only in [City] from the 60s did this attitude towards white fish change. On the other hand we enjoyed smoked haddock and kippers, although they were nothing like as good as the real article in [City].
Meats		
Sausages	Yes	
Bacon	Yes	
Ham	No	
Beef / lamb	Yes	Rationed but every Sunday the roast beef (sometimes lamb; rarely pork) was on the table

Chicken	No	There was no supply of mass-produced chicken. This came after the war.
Goose/ turkey	Yes at Xmas	
Vegetables		
Broccoli	No	Never experienced it in [Country]
Cabbage	Yes	Garden in season/ greengrocer
Peas	Yes	Garden in season
Sprouts	Yes	Garden in season/ greengrocer
Spinach	No	
Chard	No	
Onions	Yes	
Potatoes	Yes	
Broad beans	No	My father should have grown them!
Heinz baked beans	Yes	Hugely popular
<i>Heinz spaghetti in tomato sauce</i>	Yes	
Rice	No	Never as a vegetable; frequently as a dessert, to our disgust very often
Pasta	No	spag bol came in after the war.
Desserts		Not done yet
Ice cream	No	
Frozen desserts	No	
Cheese and biscuits	Yes	But no Stilton. Just cheddar and often went rancid in summer. The introduction of Danish Blue c1950 was as exciting as sliced bread!
Grapes	No	
Apple/rhubarb crumble	Yes	But my mother preferred pastry tarts to crumble
Christmas pudding	Yes	Always homemade in those days.
Cream	No	
Fruit salad	Yes	But no kiwi fruit, banana. Tins of pineapple and peaches may have been available under rationing during the war, I forget.

Thus, neither Richard nor Paul engage in cooking for the family, but articulate an interest in this instead, by focusing on historical and technological changes outside of the domestic sphere.

There are other means by which men negotiate their masculinity within a traditionally feminised arena and this is directly related to hegemonic



masculinities. For example interests in food, are articulated within the context of beer drinking:

I eat out much more than I used to. I always thought of it as a waste of drinking time, which for many years was the main reason for going out - but I enjoy it now. (Ollie).

I guess we must have eaten other stuff, as well I don't really recall much more, generally speaking it was mostly a diet of beer. (Sam).

Men also tended to explain their weight management practices in terms of beer drinking. Tom, for example writes:

I have always had to force myself to eat as I could quite happily go without if I knew I would survive and maintain a good weight... I was once told in my late teens that if I wanted to put on weight, I should drink Guinness and eat steak. The Guinness has done me well now for nearly 20 years, but I've never been a big fan of steak... I have to be [food conscious on a day-to-day basis] as my energy levels suffer easily if I don't eat well. I am constantly grazing on something.

Similarly, other men wrote:

I was always skinny and don't like the idea of getting a belly (although, this probably has more to do with beer than food...) although I reckon I'm the least fat of my contemporaries. (Ollie)

I've never been one to watch my weight (I'm 6 foot 8 and only just over 12 stone) so I'm on the skinny side. That said I drink a lot of alcohol so do sometimes watch what I eat if only to balance the calories from the booze. (Fred)

There have been occasions where I've stopped drinking beer for a few weeks to lose weight, but BMI is generally okay... I never last long as I want to be on a beer diet. (Ralph)

It is notable for Fred that he will cut out food in order to be able to drink more and that Ralph wants to be on a beer diet. These examples exemplify the power of cultural displays of masculinity through beer rather than food.

If men engage in foodwork they explain it by reference to hegemonic masculinities, for example Dave claims:

I proved to be a dab hand in the kitchen and was soon cooking the evening meal a couple of times a week. I not only enjoyed the preparation and cooking but also, much to the astonishment of male friends in the pub football team, the sourcing and buying of ingredients - food shopping in other words!

He is acknowledging that food shopping is a highly feminized activity, however it is framed within the context of the pub and football, which are highly male oriented pursuits.

Another foodie is Gerry and his food narrative begins with his mother sieving his mushroom soup, 'I was a very fussy child. I didn't really like things, which had much in the way of texture. I made my Mum sieve tinned mushroom soup to get rid of the little black bits of mushroom':

What next? - boarding school. bleeeurgh. Tough meat. Custard. Limp salad. Over cooked veg. Only fish fingers and chips redeemed this dismal fare. Two good food memories of that time which I remember: firstly overcoming my aversion to the texture of mushrooms - along with the young matron who gave me the nickname of Billy - which then stuck with me until I was 18 - we went mushroom picking in the big field next to school. Not magic mushrooms I should add - they came later! Big fat field mushrooms. And then she chopped them up, cooked them in butter and made us all mushrooms on toast. I didn't want to, but I did and oh boy! How good did that taste?! I think this was a quantum taste leap for me-I guess I would have been about 11...

School dinners and over cooked vegetables were common themes. The 'over cooked' element is significant and is in stark contrast to the care that his mother and his matron took over preparing his food. I argue that the distaste many respondents articulate, particularly around school dinners, relates to this lack of care. This is not to suggest that the food did not taste bad, just that this distaste is embedded in a notion of school dinners as representative of institutional care that made no allowances for individual taste or autonomy. The reference to 'magic mushrooms' is an acknowledgment that whilst he is interested in food,

he did participate in more traditional 'risky' forms of hegemonic masculinities in his youth. For Robertson (2007:47) men are 'risk takers' and 'at risk' due to having to conform to notions of hegemonic masculinities. Again, as mentioned previously taking drugs is a kind of edgework and a means of 'transcending the banality of every day existence' or 'living on the edge as a means of performing dominant masculinity' (Collinson, 1996, Robertson 2007:48-9).

Another means of explaining an interest in food within hegemonic masculine boundaries is to refer to the provision of food as an adventure. For example, Ed comments:

My earliest food memories are the spicy dishes and fruit of the Caribbean, where I grew up... Watching Dad gutting freshly speared fish, and throwing them on the grill to cook, and him revelling in the hunter/gatherer role. Enormous crayfish, oysters, yellow fin tuna, stingray, grilled over a wood fire and then dressed with nothing more than squeezed lime and paprika. Crab stew. There always seemed to be a lot of people at these meals - we all were in and out of the neighbour's houses every day... By contrast, later on, the school dinners of England seemed to echo the drab, colourless, unexciting surroundings in which we now lived. Stringy meat of unsure provenance, floating in watery gravy. Faggots, these unappetizing balls of meat held together with a nauseating membrane, vegetables boiled to within an inch of extinction...

He begins his narrative with his father as the hunter and 'throwing' food on to a grill in a non-caring (masculine) way. Travel and exoticism are significant in terms of status and distinction (and masculinity). Ed's journey begins in the Caribbean with his family and this contrasts starkly with the food he is served in England, where he articulates his distaste of the food and the country he finds himself in. There are elements of resistance to a civilizing process (Elias 1978) related to food rules and rituals in his narrative. The cultural heritage that saw him running from house to house and having food thrown on to an open fire is constrained and his discomfort is expressed in terms of the food being

overcooked. There is reference to the unsure provenance of the food in this new country in stark contrast to the visual feast he saw his father prepare earlier. Again, distaste is not just a physiological experience. He continues:

My school friends seemed to take all this in their stride, and it was only later that I realized the ordeal the few who ate at [our] table must have endured as Mum served up 'foreign muck' like spaghetti Bolognese, chicken and rice with paprika etc.

So, not only is the food in England alien to him, but the food he enjoys and the food his Mum cooks marks him out as different, 'foreign' and distasteful. This adds to his sense of alienation from his new environment.

A foodie identity is about hegemonic masculinities, as well as sensual experiences that are part of an elite cultural habitus that values painting and art as well as 'haute cuisine'. It is about pleasure and sex, for Simon most directly as he claims he used to cook in order to 'schmooze the ladies'. Drew's earlier reference to his cookery book as his 'porn collection demonstrates how powerful the discourses of gender are in that Drew feels compelled to describe his interest in cookbooks in a highly sexualised and macho way. The reference to a 'porn collection' isn't 'food porn' (which is something else), but a collection of books about cooking food. Instead of 'sneaking off' to look at pornography, which is articulated as almost acceptable within the boundaries of heteronormative masculinity (his wife knows about it so its ok) he is taking a bottle of wine with him (which adds to the sense of this being a sexual or sensual encounter) to his shed to read his cookery books. So, he cannot admit to reading about food unless it is presented in terms of a highly sexualised, risky male arena. Indeed, the foodie narratives can be read in direct contrast to the traditional feminised foodways examined in earlier research (Charles and

Kerr 1988, DeVault, 1991). It would be difficult to imagine a woman discussing having to plan the week's family food menu in this way. In the research carried out by Cairns *et al*, (2010) they highlight the extent to which the male foodie identity differed from the female foodie identity. Primarily, this is about care work and the extent to which women are involved in the routinized and feminised practices of domestic cooking (DeVault 1991). The male foodies in their study as predominantly in mine were not engaged in food work as care work, whilst the women in their study tended to engage in both.

The foodie as understood by Johnston and Baumann (2010) and Cairns *et al* (2010) is a cultural omnivore and as such, taste, knowledge and expertise are significant. A feel for the game and playing in a foodie field is what matters. This means engaging in debates and discussions or 'talk' about food, through blogs, specialised magazines, cookbooks and television programmes. Respondents, who were foodies, were keen to demonstrate their expertise. Indeed, it is interesting how Drew relays his concerns about living abroad:

I hope my time in Singapore does not deskill me - certainly my knowledge of food and ingredients is growing here.

Many foodies presented themselves on the frontier of new food horizons and enjoyed 'diverse cuisines'. For respondents like Drew and Simon, for example, their narratives went almost beyond the foodie identity outlined by Johnston and Baumann (2010) and Cairns *et al* (2010). They adopted a highly adventurous, explorative and innovative approach to food choice, an almost hyper-foodie, or what I have termed a 'frontier foodie' identity, exemplified by Drew:

Early bad food memories are around being force fed vegetables and school dinners. Both of which put me off certain foods for a long time... School dinners, my memory is that each one included beetroot, every meal beetroot, spam, mash and beetroot, boiled fish

and beetroot and the only value this vinegary pink thing added was colour - to everything, hands, potatoes in fact anything that touched it. Yuurch... It took me 19 years to grow to like it / even try it again - then one day at Borough Market I had a eureka moment, feta, beetroot, mint and lemon pasta – I now grow it, bake it - eat it raw and the Borough recipe is a strong family favourite.

Whilst his distaste is about beetroot, it is within the context of ‘polluting’ other foods on his plate, it belongs to a memory of school dinners in which he had no autonomy or control. And it is these types or ‘masculine’ instrumental qualities that are valued and desired. The theme of being ‘force fed’ is common amongst respondent’s reflections and this usually related to overcooked vegetables (again). Today as a parent, this is probably anathema to Drew, who makes a big effort to make his food palatable for his family.

The foodies’ narratives were journeys of discovery detailing how they had developed a more refined and/or adventurous palate that is totally different from or an extension of the cultural influences they had during their childhoods. These narratives involved adventures or what Heldeke (2003:xxi) refers to as ‘an expedition into the unknown, a pursuit of the strange’, in cooking and eating from around the world. This is often in contrast to the ‘unadventurous’ cooking of their mothers, in Simon’s extract for example:

I was fortunate that my family lived in places like Hong Kong and Malaysia where our senses were constantly open to new sights, smells and flavours, where the Army tradition of curry lunches was still practiced and pineapples grew at the end of our garden.

In Johnston and Baumann’s (2010:98-100) study ‘gourmet globetrotting’ is part of the foodie identity, as ‘finding new and exciting cuisines earns a kind of social status’. This underlines the extent to which the foodie identity is linked to elite status and cultural capital. It is about confirming one’s belonging to a group that

is able to travel the world and to learn about exotic cuisines. As Johnston and Baumann (201:104) illustrate 'cultural capital is required to appreciate foodie discourse and discern which features of exoticism are worth pursuing'. It is of course about economic capital as opportunities to travel and experiment are not open to everyone; it is about distinction and division. Hence, Dave writes:

...enjoyed a wide variety of dishes including Coq au Vin, a 70s favourite - and due for a renaissance I think, stuffed heart, liver and bacon casseroles, curries, fresh sardines. Steak and kidney puddings, steak Diane, Swiss steak, braised steak, roasts on Sundays - pork beef lamb and chicken - and puddings! We were probably a bit more adventurous than our friends - even attempting to cook Chinese food - this was difficult because although we trapped down a reasonable cook book we just couldn't get the ingredients - no Chinese supermarkets in [City] in those days... From those days onwards, having mastered most of the basics, cooking became, and still is, an everyday part of life.

This is not a feminine identity, these men are 'doing' or expressing a particular form of masculine 'foodie' practice. This is not a practice of obligation and responsibility, they were not preparing endless routinized meals for their families and they were not nurturing or feeding the family in De Vault's (1991) sense of the term. They never expressed any interest in the 'healthiness' or otherwise of their food. They were building upon and adding to their knowledge, experience and expertise regarding all aspects of food preparation and eating. They recounted tales of their foodie exploits from both abroad and at home. Simon and Ed included recipes with their food narratives. The knowledge of specific, specialized chefs and these particular chefs' expertise in certain gastronomic areas is significant in building the 'frontier foodie' identity.

These frontier foodie narratives had more in common with what Johnston and Baumann (2010) refer to as 'foodie adventurers' from Heldke (2003). However, Heldke (2003:19) claims that 'we like our exoticism somewhat familiar,

recognisable, controllable'. Similarly, in Johnston and Baumann's (2010:120-1) study their foodies 'avoided norm breaking exotic food'. They 'concluded that the assumptions about foodies interest in global cuisine is overstated and that whilst... norm breaking foods generated foodie cachet, most of the foodies... were generally not interested in adhering to that standard'. Of course, this may have been because of the number of female foodies that they had in their sample. The frontier foodies in my study were interested in the exotic. Perhaps the addition of hegemonic masculinities to the foodie mix increases the desire to impress in terms of strange and exotic food consumption, for example Ed:

Whilst cruising down through the Windward Island chain in the Caribbean towards Trinidad, we stopped off on the French island of Martinique. It was a Sunday, and we decided we'd have a day ashore and a lunch... After wandering around looking for an interesting place to eat that wasn't on the tourist track, we stopped at a slightly run down, though brightly painted looking place. There was no menu; just what was being served that day- salad, chicken curry, and a selection of tropical fruit. The salad appeared, a large plate laden with colourful ingredients including avocado and shrimp, and what appeared to be diced beetroot. Feeling pleased with the results of our determined search for somewhere that didn't serve burgers, we toasted our good luck with chilled beer. After a while we started talking about the odd taste of the beetroot, and how it didn't taste cooked or pickled. Finally, it dawned on [one of our companions] that she had heard of this dish years previously when she was a student doing her year out in France. The 'beetroot' was neither cooked nor pickled; it was finely diced cow's nose...

It is notable that in Johnston and Baumann's (2010) and Cairns *et al's* (2010) joint study they interviewed 17 women and 11 men, of whom 11 were parents. It is this gendered dimension that might account for the cautious responses to exoticism that they found from their respondents. Similarly, the focus on local, organic and seasonal foods, which they claim are 'ubiquitous in foodie discourse' (Johnston and Baumann 2010:139) were not as prevalent amongst foodies in my study. Indeed a concern with organic food became an issue of cultural hostility for Dave:



Hugh Fernley Whitingstall has some good recipes, however he is far too up his own backside with the organic mantra - who in their right mind would pay £22 (yes twenty two of your English pounds) for a medium sized organic chicken from his shop in Axminster! You may have noticed dissent with the organic mantra! No proven benefits as far as I'm concerned - good fresh ingredients yes, but they do not have to be organic.

Of course this could be interpreted as an example of Dave distancing himself from eco food politics, which has left wing, liberal (feminine) connotations. Or it could tell us something about the branding of certain celebrity/media chefs. Either way what Johnston and Baumann (2010;167) refer to as 'ethicureans, someone who seeks out tasty things that are sustainable, organic, local and or ethical (SOLE food)', were not identifiable markers of 'cultural capital' amongst the frontier foodies in my study.

The language used by frontier foodies, when discussing favourite chefs is notable. They tended to refer to them by their first names, signifying a familiarity with them as friends. For Drew, 'Heston is a legend' because of his culinary knowledge. This is about the ways in which hegemonic masculinities allow for only specific forms of male admiration of other men, especially around sensual practices such as food, physical activity, sport:

I have a number of old cook books 1890's through to 1930's and what I see is that many recipes today are cyclical, reappearing and becoming fashionable, these are the classics and many chefs are good at preparing them or even adding a twist. But Heston has revolutionized how I think about food and challenged psychology around eating food - sadly I have never eaten at his restaurant but he does fascinate me.

Also, for Drew and Simon their routes into this 'frontier foodie' identity began within a context of hegemonic masculinity. So Drew:

Moved away from home at 19 - that's when cooking became a necessity, moving in with lads, cooking in was the cheapest option

and the deal was if you cooked you did not clean up - so this I think was what swayed me... Then as I got older got my own place, Jamie became famous and food and cooking became trendy - I would say I was ahead of the curve though already experimenting.

And Simon:

I found myself working in Dublin. It seems an odd place to have an epiphany about cooking, but the combination of the City (it was expensive), my salary as the junior working for an art dealer (meagre) and the daughter of one of his clients (yummy), seemed to do the trick. She was pretty and posh; I was skint, but eager. So with a menu from a borrowed cookbook, I queued at the butcher and fishmonger looking for ingredients and advice... But I enjoyed the company of chefs, not the provincial journeyman who did it because he couldn't do anything else, but the ones with swagger and a knowing braggadocio, who were in it because no other industry could put up with them, who rated a person for their sauces, their sourdough or skills under pressure. And all the time I ate well, I picked up knowledge about marbling in meat and rigor mortis in fish, about 'top heat' and 'bottom lift'.

Both Simon and Drew are associating themselves with skills, expertise, and experimentation. Their routes were almost accidental or contingent, they didn't set out to become interested in cooking, it sort of happened, for Simon in order to impress a woman and for Drew he only became interested in a feminised domestic activity (cooking) so he didn't have to participate in another inferior domestic activity (washing up), as if it was a decision between the lesser of two evils. He was then skilled in this arena before it became trendy and fashionable.

It is within the realm of eating offal that the test of a true foodie comes in to play. For Johnston and Baumann (2010:120) 'When food flagrantly violates social or culinary conventions, it creates a bold spectacle of norm breaking exoticism and this is especially evident in the gourmet focus on eating offal'. Offal is the foodstuff that elicited disgust for the majority of respondents, as Henry comments:

I never liked insides, so heart, liver, kidneys etc. I have always loathed. I did try lamb hearts recently and realized why steak is so popular! I was also once confused by a foreign menu and ordered calf's brain, sorry I just had to go and be sick, and pride forced me to eat the lot. Not as bad tasting, as you would think just a friable texture... sorry had to be sick again, which stuck in my mind.

His narrative is a foodie journey of training and exploring his palate. Although, clearly for Henry some foods are off limits and his distaste is so strong that he has to rush off to be sick. Beyond the physiology of taste, this cultural and almost universal 'distaste' is related to the concept of eating food associated with 'insides' and 'waste' or what Douglas (1966) referred to as 'pollutants'. These pollutants could generally be associated with the feminine, 'unclean' bodily fluids/parts, menstruation and so on. The 'distaste' of offal could be related to its use as a cheap substitute to the more expensive parts of the animal and a distancing from foodways that used a lot of offal in the past. However, there were 'foodies' for whom eating offal is a sign of a true foodie status. Hence for Nick, offal is acceptable if eaten in France, 'pretty much like everything except offaly things, though I do like black pudding – at least in France where it is FAB'.

Eating certain types of food is articulated in the context of 'bravery'. It is considered a means of demonstrating hegemonic masculinity. Johnston and Baumann (2010:122) claim 'exoticism is an important strategy for validating foods in an omnivorous cultural discourse'. Eating offal becomes a component of a frontier foodie habitus, as Drew writes:

Talking of Beijing - let me share my favourite restaurant story - I was in Beijing with an Australian and American colleague. Having found a good local restaurant and persuaded them to eat there. We sat and perused the menu. Peking duck was a must and we selected some other dishes. Then I saw Devilled Duck Hearts as side dish and asked the waiter for a small bowl, as I was fascinated. They

appeared small purple and plump covered in chilli oil and I started to eat them. I was asked by my colleagues what I was eating and advised - "duck hearts", "no your not" was the response "they are olives" - "no they are duck hearts" I advised, although they did look like big olives". "Shut up and give me an olive" was the response. Handing the bowl over they carefully selected an 'olive' each. And synchronized placed them in their mouths. Instant reaction, one swallowed and swore the other nearly threw up in a napkin. "They are duck hearts - why didn't you tell me" - this was probably the first time I have been reprimanded for telling the truth. Gladly I finished the bowl myself'.

It is hardly surprising therefore that when considering high levels of cultural capital amongst foodies, that not only are they often from a high status elite group, but that they would engage in hegemonic masculinities.

## 7.6. Summary

In summary I have explored some of the key themes regarding the relationship between masculinity and food. The men who chose to participate in this study did so by engaging in hegemonic masculinities and negotiating their masculine identities within a traditionally feminized domestic sphere. In order to overcome the feminine connotations associated with an interest in food many resorted to comments about beer, sex and sport. Men were often engaged in distancing themselves from food and foodways traditionally associated with women, such as vegetables, unless they were highly spiced. They were keen to eat meat, especially steak that needed to be cooked specially (by men). If the men did cook, this is on special non-routinized and certainly not domestic everyday occasions. This took place outside of the domestic sphere, on a barbeque or open fire, or with high status recently purchased items. Any associations to feminised activities such as vegetarianism, healthy eating or weight loss, were re-contextualised within hegemonic masculinities, by reference again, to beer or sex or sport. So men became vegetarians as a means of getting a girlfriend or it is framed within a milieu of more risk taking activities. These were free choices

and were not part of a heteronormative feminised approach to food and foodways. Cooking and eating were not activities that they worried about because of their weight.

Men who were actively engaged in foodie culture articulated their food narratives in terms of hegemonic masculinities, so that a foodie identity is about an elite status, cultural omnivorousness, knowledge and expertise. So that shopping and cooking rather than being highly feminised domestic activities could be safely conducted as part of a search for authentic or exotic cuisine, as well as an expression of expert knowledge, 'taste' and distinction. Thus I argue that a foodie identity is a masculine one, it assumes high levels of economic, social and cultural capital and there are elements of high adventure and risk taking.



## 8:2. Findings

The original aim of the research as approved by the University Ethics Committee was to investigate the relationship between individuals and their food choice using an auto/biographical approach. I have since distanced myself from an individualised conception of choice (discussed below) and analysed seventy-five narrative accounts of individual foodways, as well as my own. This is set against a background of public policy debates in the UK around enabling individuals and families to make appropriate food choices (Chapter Two). There is a lack of fit between public policy initiatives that emphasise individual choice and the lived reality in which there is often no choice. Indeed, 'choice' is part of an embodied and affective practice that sediments over time, rather than a rational and deliberate act. My research reinforces and highlights these divisions.

In adopting an auto/biographical approach I draw attention to reflexivity in the research process and am sensitive to respondent subjectivities. I set out to be respectful of respondents and to avoid treating them as research objects. I have therefore interwoven my responses and motivations as much as possible.

However, my presence in the text is less obvious in Chapter Seven, when exploring a foodie identity and stronger when reflecting upon maternal identity in Chapter Four and when discussing 'lipoliteracies' and 'fat talk' in Chapter Six.

Hence, an auto/biographical approach is useful as it makes explicit the disjuncture and contradictions inherent in the research process. As an auto/biographical researcher I try to avoid objectifying respondents, however, when distanced from respondent experiences this can be problematic.

I positioned my study as an iterative, unfolding one from the outset. It has therefore been a journey of discovery on many levels. I was interested in what respondents would reveal of themselves through their food stories. I did not anticipate writing about the interplay between gender and class. Individuals explained their motives in terms of a 'common vocabulary' (Mills, 1959) of individuality and this was relational. It utilised specific forms of social, symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and these were embedded in cultural scripts of femininity and masculinity. I engaged in discussions regarding different forms of cultural capital, particularly in terms of cultural practices and values in the fields of mothering and gastronomy.

Respondents' food memories reflected the social and cultural milieu within which they were articulated. Notions of 'choice' continue to be gendered and classed. In effect they are hardly choices at all. In the field of culinary arts the foodie represents a particular gendered habitus in which femininity rarely operates as symbolic capital. However, when feeding the family, aspects associated with intensive mothering are significant and respondents adhered to traditional gender roles. There was little evidence of a negotiated family model (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Hence, whilst women have made inroads into the public sphere, and despite the blurring of the boundaries between work/home, women continued to be excluded from the cultural fields of play where foodies and chowhounds roam. The time and commitment to feeding the family healthy meals cooked from scratch functioned as a symbolic reification and valorisation of a middle class maternal identity. The women in my study distanced themselves from feeding the family the types of convenience food that could be aligned to inappropriate working class family practices. Feeding



the family healthy food was a means of performing, displaying and reproducing a middle class habitus.

I concur with Bennett *et al* (2009:259), who argue that 'good taste' continues to create, mark and consolidate social divisions' in the UK. They claim that 'culture' is not a matter of indifference for the powerful and for some sections of the middle class it remains critical and a source of security. Respondents in my study were mainly middle class and used their food and foodways as a means of positioning themselves as such. The power of cultural representations of appropriate food and foodways impacts upon how individuals represent their families, gender and class positions. The social and cultural milieu is reflected in their accounts and they demonstrate how a particular cultural form of middle class family meal persists despite the government and media discourses regarding its decline (Jackson, 2009; James, 2009b). Elite food and foodways continue to be significant in terms of maintaining status and power. The themes that I have identified reflect current UK political concerns and public policies with regards to the role of the family, healthy eating, eating disorders, 'fat' bodies and elite foodways. Hence, whilst individuals are supposedly free to make rational choices, it is apparent in respondents' narratives that gender and class bind them. An auto/biographical approach to food and foodways is therefore significant in highlighting the interconnectedness of the individual and the social (Morgan, 1998), the micro and the macro, the private and the public.

For example, when considering maternal identities, what it means to be a mother is not answered internally, but can only be addressed by a reflexive awareness of what other 'good' mothers do (Dawson, 2012). Neo-liberal

policies and discourses conceptualise 'good' mothering as a consumer choice, that requires economic capital. In effect middle class mothering practices are presented as the norm and others are pathologised. Class and gender still have the power to determine inequalities regarding access to resources, education, employment and health. They are significant to the individual in providing a sense of ontological security (Dawson, 2012:311). Hence, Dawson (2012:314) argues that a focus on individualism is not a faithful depiction of how people act, but instead illustrates a shift in common vocabulary or how people explain themselves. Indeed, respondents' individual foodways were embedded in family and kinship relations, with family practices (Morgan 1996) considered a source of social, symbolic and cultural capital. Certainly, whilst respondents were indignant at not being treated as individuals within the families of their childhoods, there were limits to the 'right to a life of one's own' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:xxii). Women especially, found negotiating an individualist agenda when responsible for others health and welfare, problematic. It could be argued that the very concept of individualisation is masculine (Lewis, 2007). Hence, the gendered division of labour persists and continues to marginalise and exclude those engaged in family foodwork from the field of culinary cultural capital. The foodie field is elitist and geared towards those with time and money. Similarly, when considering aspirational maternal identities, feeding the family healthy food from scratch could be a form of cultural capital and a means of demonstrating access to time and/or money.

In terms of the inter-related objectives of the study as outlined in Chapter One (1:4. Beginnings – 'our food stories'), an auto/biographical approach is well suited to exploring how relationships with food change over the life course. For

many, life events signalled significant transitions in respondents' relationships with food. This was particularly the case for parents in the study, especially women who had to engage in appropriate maternal identities, despite their own difficult relationships with food. In others, the death of a parent, the end of a relationship, moving from home to boarding school or abroad signalled a re-evaluation of relationships with food. Similarly, when respondents were forced to re-evaluate their food relationships in the context of health, these were considered in terms of biographical disruption (Bury, 1982). Hence, it is appropriate to consider respondents' auto/biographical narratives that document how they negotiate life events as significant contributions in the field.

When considering the usefulness of gendered approaches to understanding food, I argued that gender is a significant factor in explaining relationships with food over the life course. Women conformed to cultural scripts of heteronormative femininity when examining their attitudes to food, the body, health, emotion, mothering and relationships. Women developed a sense of 'lipoliteracy' (reading bodies, from Graham, 2005) and engaged in 'fat talk' (Ambjörnsson, 2005) as a means of doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Men resorted to forms of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1996) when distancing themselves from traditionally feminised practices, such as healthy eating and dieting. Even when espousing a 'foodie' identity, men differentiated their interest in foodways, such as food shopping and cooking from the feminised domestic practices associated with feeding the family (DeVault, 1991). These gendered identities were classed and associated with social, symbolic and cultural capital. Hence, a foodie identity was male and associated with elite cultural status. Maternal identity was similarly associated with

distinction. Feeding the family healthy meals from scratch was an element of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) and as such, was used to demonstrate engagement with middle class cultural norms and values.

The impact of health discourses on foodways was strongest within the women's narratives. The public and media discourses regarding a perceived obesity epidemic fed directly into women's role as the guardians of health, both their own and other peoples. Indeed, women's narratives were infused with concerns regarding health and healthiness. This was occasionally related to weight management, which will be discussed further below. However, health was not a consideration in the men's narratives. If health was mentioned it tended to be couched in terms of a 'hum' in the background (Ian) or because a girlfriend was interested to see if eating healthily made any difference. It did not (Fred). The feminisation of health and the notion that being concerned about one's health is feminine has implications in terms of health policy. The problem of hegemonic masculinities in relation to health behaviour has been well documented in research elsewhere (Gough, 2006, 2007, 2009). The continued government focus on individuals and families to change their behaviour belies the fact that it is women who are charged with this task within families/society. Yet, unless eating healthily or leading a healthy lifestyle are considered masculine or given an elite aspirational status, they are likely to continue to be marginalised as feminine concerns and/or associated with an elite class.

When dietary regimes were used as CAM, men and women used food as a means of treating certain conditions, the avoidance of dairy for example as a route to treating childhood eczema. However, as already noted, being

concerned with health is part of a cultural script of femininity. Hence, it is mainly women who practice CAM. In my study specific dietary management practices were used to treat conditions, notably IBS (Kelly), food intolerances (Queenie) and drug resistant epilepsy in childhood (Faye). Some food culture scholars argue that strict dietary regimes represent a means of imposing restraint in the face of increased normlessness round eating. Fischler (1980, 1988, 2011) for example has long insisted on a kind of gastro-anomy at work, with a decline in the social rules and rituals associated with commensality (eating together). Respondents forced to engage in dietary regimes for health reasons highlighted some of the problems associated with negotiating the social aspects of eating, which indicates its continued significance. Hence, in terms of public policy a focus on individual choice neglects the myriad ways in which individuals negotiate their social identities and these are important.

Overall, I met my research objectives and found that gender was significant when documenting relationships with food over the life course. These gendered identities were classed and respondents were concerned to position themselves with high cultural capital, whether they were foodies or engaged in aspirational parenting practices. The extent to which class and gender continue to influence foodways is significant. This has implications for implementing and developing policies that look to change individual eating/lifestyle behaviours, especially those policy initiatives that focus on individual and family choice without acknowledging wider structural inequalities.

I considered that health discourses would have an impact on foodways and that weight loss and dietary management would be a concern for women. I was

conscious of Warde's (1997) contention that food is a weak marker of identity in terms of consumption and cultural capital. However, as Bourdieu (1984) contends and Friedman (2011) argues cultural capital is a modality of practice, it is not just about consuming something but the manner in which the consumption is expressed. In Friedman's study of comedy taste, he makes clear distinctions between the tastes of those with high cultural capital (HCC), who had to work hard to appreciate their comedy, and those with low cultural capital (LCC) who passively enjoyed a cheap laugh. In Friedman's (2011) study he identifies 'family socialisation' as a means of measuring cultural capital, alongside qualifications and occupational status. Family socialisation refers to the class position of respondents' parents, the assumption being that this would impact on the inculcation of future cultural appreciation practices. I did not set out to gather this kind of data from my respondents so would be unable to give them a cultural capital score. Although, many did explain how their foodways had been inculcated from their parents (Chapter Four), this was neither consistent nor part of the original aims of the study. In future, it may be pertinent to ask respondents for their parent's occupations when they were children, along with the request for other demographic information. What is notable about Friedman's (2011) study is that like the 'foodie' studies I have examined (Johnston and Baumann, 2010, Cairns *et al*, 2010), taste is contextualised as an essential element of a consumer activity and this centres on leisure time or time for leisure. This supposes a clear distinction between work and leisure. It is pertinent that in my study a foodie identity was predominantly male. Indeed, many markers of cultural capital are associated with what might be considered traditionally male leisure activities. It is men who have more time to play.

Bennett *et al* (2009) in their ESRC funded large-scale survey of tastes in the UK between 2003 and 2004 focus mostly on leisure activities as markers of cultural capital. In their focus groups and household interviews they suggested that eating at home scarcely 'figured at all in the working of cultural capital' (*ibid*: 167). Bennett *et al* (2009) found in interviews that respondents could not remember what they had eaten the day before. They concluded that food in a domestic setting was routinized and habitual, it had no symbolic capital. This was certainly not the case for those participating in my study, but then they were invited to participate and would therefore presumably only do so if they had something to say about food.

Of course, the persistence of gender and class could be related to the ages of respondents in my study, as I had none in the 18-25-age range. This may be worth considering in terms of future research. In my study those who had negative working class experiences as children, had been able to lift themselves out of poverty and distanced themselves from the food of their childhoods. The successful middle classes expressed disgust at poor nutrition, poor food and therefore poverty itself. Yet, not everyone escapes a poor background. This has consequences for those trapped in poverty and reinforces the extent to which food and foodways are embedded in class identities.

### **8:3. A 'taste of reflection' and ethics**

The start of my research project was delayed by two months due to the decision of the University Ethics Committee to insist on an exclusion clause regarding those who had an 'eating disorder' (Chapter Three). It took this long because I argued that this was not necessary, particularly in terms of what was meant by an 'eating disorder'. In the end I had to acquiesce to the demands of the

committee in order to begin the research. This raises questions about the power of institutional ethics and the medicalization of 'eating disorders'. Are only medical professionals deemed able to investigate eating disorders? One of the benefits of an auto/biographical approach has been to highlight how problematic foodways do not fit the stereotype of what an eating disorder is presumed to be. It is important to access the voices of respondents outside of medical encounters. Being healthy is more than a healthy weight and yet this is rarely acknowledged in public discourses.

The impact of excluding those who had an eating disorder is of course impossible to measure. That I had to incorporate this exclusion criterion raises issues with regards to what 'weight management' means and why this assumes a focus on disordered eating. In the end three out of the seventy-five respondents identified themselves as having had some kind of eating disorder. This included Sam, who had not had 'his' 'eating disorder of sorts' sanctioned by the medical profession. It is notable that Sam gradually worked his way through his anxiety over eating/not eating. This is not to assume that respondents documented particularly 'ordered' eating practices or foodways. The medicalization of 'eating disorders' and the focus on anorexia and bulimia marginalises these particular 'conditions' within a much wider spectrum of foodways. A commitment to the 'thin ideal' is associated with elite status and high cultural capital (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012). Yet, in some of the narratives being thin was considered an indicator of illness. There is a tension between a health as capital model and aspirational thinness. This was clearly articulated by respondents. An auto/biographical approach is useful in enabling respondents to explore these boundaries. It is unfortunate that my research was



restrained or limited by adherence to such an ambiguous, yet potentially restrictive exclusion criterion.

When I began my research journey I had no concept of how engaged my respondents would be with the notion of contributing their food stories. I have at times been overwhelmed with the richness of their narratives and the intimate glimpses into their private lives. The number of narratives I collected was surprising. This mainly arose because of the time lags involved in asynchronous online interviewing techniques. Respondents would agree to participate and then took time to reply. In the meantime I was sending invitations out to others. The willingness of respondents to participate and the way that they embraced the method was a humbling experience. It was a privilege to receive their narratives and this added to my anxiety about how best to represent them. Again, adopting an auto/biographical approach ensures sensitivity towards respondents and careful consideration about how to reproduce them.

In terms of the research process as an affective practice, in my original proposal I claim:

Like all research, it is acknowledged that respondents may have emotional responses to it. For, Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) it is often this 'emotional danger' or negative feelings induced by the research process that provide a 'greater insight in to the research process' itself and helps to 'generate new levels of understanding'. Emotional responses are part of life and are, therefore not absent from the research process (Gray, 2008).

Yet, it was not necessarily the respondents emotional responses I had to manage, but my own. I have woken in the night on many occasions recounting aspects of my life in response to having read about theirs. Not that there was anything upsetting within the narratives themselves, it was the affective practice

of engaging with others on an emotional level that triggered self-reflection in me. It was this trawling back through my own past that led to feelings of depression at times. I was relieved when the fieldwork was completed. I am not sure if it is possible to counter this and have documented earlier (Chapter Three) how there is little in place to support reflexive researchers. Those engaged in auto/biographical research are vulnerable in a similar way to research participants. This is rarely acknowledged or considered by ethics committees. The researcher role and an auto/biographical approach are important in highlighting the fluidity of boundaries between the researched and the researcher. It can lead to greater sensitivity when reporting findings and may avoid objectification.

#### **8:4. Summary**

In my final analysis I contend that gender and class matter. Taste, on many levels is associated with social stratification and respondents were engaged in positioning themselves within a hierarchy of middle class values. I had set out to explore individualism and the impact this had on foodways. Far from a cacophony of individual tastes and experiences, individuals were constrained by desire. This manifested itself in a desire to belong. Respondents generally complied with a gendered middle class habitus that valued health and self-care or responsible individualism. For the foodies, this encompassed a kind of omnivorousness, and food adventurism. Generally, respondents were not engaged in wider ethical concerns regarding their food and foodways. Instead they provided everyday glimpses into the intimacies of domestic life. Public policy discourses that reinforce individual choice without accommodating or at least acknowledging the role of structural inequalities are doomed to fail. As Singh-Manoux and Marmot (2005) highlight health related and psychosocial

behaviours are never truly voluntary. By adopting an auto/biographical approach I have highlighted how the individual is embedded in a particular social and cultural milieu and this has a significant impact upon identity. In the current climate food and foodways can be used as a means of demonstrating elite status and power. Whilst certain foodways are considered to be part of a middle class habitus they will not have an appeal outside of those social groups. Cultural hostility persists across the boundaries between social groups around appropriate food and foodways.

The auto/biographical approach makes a unique contribution in the field of food studies. It provides in-depth, rich data on individual food journeys through the life course. These include common vocabularies and are relational. I focussed on narratives from men and women. Most of the literature discusses ‘families’ (Jackson, *et al*, 2009) or men in the kitchen (Cairns, *et al*, 2010) or ‘food adventurers’ (Heldke, 2003), who mostly happen to be male, or individuals not tasked with feeding the family. To me it seems as if women are being written out of the foodscape. Somehow their contribution has been so naturalised, so taken for granted that they no longer need to be mentioned. My study goes some way to redressing this imbalance.

### **8:5. What next?**

In terms of influences and impact, I continue to consider the gender imbalance inherent within cultural approaches to foodways. As a member of a number of food networks, I recently received notification of yet another book on ‘foodie’ identity that examines what foodies do and why they do it (DeSolier, 2013). I consider the narratives from respondents in my study a useful means of countering the marginalisation of women’s foodwork in a field that values men’s

foodplay. I will continue to deliver papers at conferences around the themes of my thesis and will be submitting a book proposal that has appeal beyond a purely academic audience. I am looking to publish in a number of associated, food, sociology, health and methods journals.

In terms of methodological considerations, I have already completed a pilot study that utilised CMC as a research tool. My experiences in conducting CMC research and the writing up of this thesis have therefore proved invaluable in this regard. However, the University Ethics Committees' insistence on exclusion criteria regarding eating disorders had repercussions for the pilot project as well and meant those who 'overate' felt that they could not participate, despite having valuable and significant insights. I am still not convinced that this exclusion criterion actually benefits respondents, other than adding to their distress when contemplating whether they might have an eating disorder or not. This pilot project will feed into bids for further research funding in the areas of 'obesity', diabetes and weight loss surgery. I am also supervising a third year sociology dissertation student on the motivations that lie behind weight loss that utilises an Auto/Biographical research approach. Overall, I continue to be committed to a democratic and open account of research that considers research participants as equals in the process of research. I would like to think that they are able to decide for themselves whether they can participate or not and am not comfortable with a paternalistic, medical model of social research.

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## Appendices

### 10:1. University Ethics Proposal

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH  
FACULTY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK



Human Ethics Sub-Committee  
APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

**Title of research:**

**Food Choice and Identity. Exploring the role of food in everyday 'life histories', using an auto/biography research approach.**

**1. Nature of approval sought (Please tick relevant box)**

(a) PROJECT\*:  (b) PROGRAMME\*:

*If (a) then please indicate which category:*

- Funded research project
- MPhil/PhD project
- Other (please specify):

**2. Investigators/Supervisors**

Principal Investigator (post graduate student)

Julie Parsons, School of Social Science and Social Work, T: +44 (0) 1752 585820  
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Director of Studies:

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Second Supervisor:

Prof. Gayle Letherby, Acting Head of School, School of Social Science and Social Work, T: +44 (0)1752 585799 E: [gayle.letherby@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:gayle.letherby@plymouth.ac.uk)

**3. Funding body (if any) and duration of project/programme with dates\*:**

80% of the fees will be paid by my employer, The University of Plymouth, as a full time contracted member of staff

**4. Research Outline:**

*Please provide an outline of the proposed research. Information should be given on the background, aims, objectives or questions raised by the research; include information regarding recruitment process and methods used.*

**Working Title: - Food Choice and Identity: Beyond a Gender Binary.**

**Exploring the role of food in everyday 'life histories'**

**Primary Aim: To investigate the relationship between individuals and their food choice using an auto/biographical research approach.**

**Objectives**

1. To explore how an individual's relationship with food may have changed over time.
2. To consider how useful is it to see food choice as a gendered experience.
3. To contribute to current sociological understanding of 'food culture(s)' and the impact of health discourse(s) upon food choice.
4. To consider the extent to which individual food histories are related to issues of weight management if at all.

### **Background**

Research on food choice carried out towards the end of the last century, tended to explore food choice within the context of social roles (Charles and Kerr 1988, Murcott 1998, Warde 1997). And were heavily influenced by gender and social class. There was also a feminist literature that explored women's relationship to food choice specifically (Lupton 1998, Bordo 2003). This was particularly expressed in terms of the dissatisfaction with the body and the desire to please which it was argued encouraged women to participate in dietary and weight management practices. More recently, within a discourse of individualization food choice is no longer fixed by the meta-narratives of modernity, nor constrained by price or availability, but instead men and women have complete freedom, regardless of traditional social structures, such as gender and class to eat whatever and whenever they want. For Rozin *et al* (2006), in secularised protestant countries such as the UK and US, some of the more traditional cultural expectations relating to food choice have been eroded and replaced by more highly individualised attitudes. Here, food choice is clearly articulated in relation to bio medical models of health and fitness.

### **Recruitment and Methods**

The research will focus on the role of food in individual life histories/narratives. The data will be gathered through in depth, on-line, asynchronous e-mail interviews with an opportunity (convenience) and purposive sample of 60 people (30 men and 30 women). Following the work of Lupton (2005) whose 'researchers recruited purposively from their social network'. Individual consent to be involved in the research will be sought, a consent form (see attached) will be e-mailed and the research itself will also be carried out in stages, 10 respondents at a time. This will ensure that there are not too many e-mail exchanges at once, protecting the researcher from becoming overwhelmed. The respondents will be reminded that they can withdraw from the study, without explanation and without detriment at any time throughout the research process. The researcher will use a specific, anonymous e-mail address for the duration of the study (ourfoodstories@gmail.com); this will enable the participants to identify correspondence from the researcher in their in-box easily. For Kozinets (2010), asynchronous on line interviews are deemed to have ended once the respondent has stopped replying. However, it would be anticipated that the respondents would provide 3 or 4 e-mail exchanges depending upon the extent to which the respondent wishes to articulate their food (his) stories. It is not anticipated that any other form of correspondence will be entered into, as part of this research project will be also exploring the use of e-mail exchanges as a source of research data. This is a qualitative, unfolding study with many of the themes emerging as the research progresses, as such there will be no rigid or structured schedule for the in depth e-mail interviews. It is hoped that the respondents will provide their own auto/biographical text in relation to their food (his) stories. However, it is anticipated that themes may emerge, perhaps in relation to favourite foods, specific food occasions, changes in eating habits, food preparation, responsibilities for food preparation, shopping, eating out, food beliefs, and what influences food choice (this follows some of the themes identified by Lupton 2000, 2005 and James *et al*, 2009) For Kozinets (2010) it is possible through the e-mail interview to establish a 'sense of intimacy' with respondents. It shares this attribute with correspondence techniques

outlined by Letherby and Zdrodowski (1995), which allow 'a greater degree of confidentiality; the research subjects feel less exposed as people if they write rather than speak to a researcher'. It will also use auto/biography, which is concerned with 'the myriad of everyday and frequently fleeting social practices concerned with the articulation of (often competing, sometimes discontinuous) notions of selves and lives', (Stanley, 2000:40). It will have an explicit 'epistemologically oriented concern with the political ramifications of the shifting boundaries between self and other, past and present in writing and reading, fact and fiction...(with) the researcher and author very much alive as agents actively at work in the textual production process', Auto/Biography Study Group 1995 (Stanley, 2000:41). The subject of this study is not a sensitive topic, nor does it target vulnerable groups. The focus of this research is not on 'eating disorders' but on the everyday experiences of eating within a changing social and cultural context. Like all research though, it is acknowledged that respondents may have emotional responses to it. For, Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) it is often this 'emotional danger' or negative feelings induced by the research process that provide a 'greater insight in to the research process' itself and helps to 'generate new levels of understanding'. Emotional responses are part of life and are, therefore not absent from the research process (Gray, 2008). These will be treated carefully and sensitively and when needed the respondent will be directed to appropriate support networks, such as B-eat, which is a well-established on-line eating disorder charity.

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- 5. Where you are providing information sheets for participants please enclose a copy here. The information should usually include, in lay language, the nature and purpose of the research and participants right to withdraw:**

Please see attached participant information sheet

**6. Ethical Protocol:**

**(a) Informed consent:**

All respondents will be sent an e-mail outlining the research as attached, before any interview will be conducted. The respondents will consent to participate by replying to the e-mail. All participation will be on a voluntary basis. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time at any time without providing an explanation and without detriment. Continuous and negotiated permission to continue with the interview will also take place throughout.

**(b) Openness and honesty:**

The researcher will maintain an open and honest approach to the study, participants and research aims at all times. This is not a covert study.

**(c) Right to withdraw:**

All participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing an explanation and without detriment.

**(d) Protection from harm:**

Participants needs take precedence over the actual process of the research, while the success of the study depends upon the willingness of individuals to participate, if at any time such participation places individuals at risk or cause undue stress, participation will not be pursued.

*Does this research involve:*

*Please tick*

<i>Vulnerable groups</i>	
<i>Sensitive topics</i>	
<i>Permission of a gatekeeper for initial access</i>	
<i>Deception or research which is conducted without full and informed consent</i>	
<i>Research that will induce psychological stress, anxiety or humiliation or cause minimal pain</i>	
<i>Intrusive intervention (e.g., the administration of drugs, vigorous physical exercise or hypnotherapy)</i>	

**(e) Debriefing:**

All participants will be debriefed at the end of the interview process

**(f) Confidentiality:**

The anonymity and privacy of those who participate will be respected. Personal information will be confidential. Raw data and transcripts will be stored securely for the appropriate period of time according to the requirements of the University of Plymouth's Health Research Ethics Committee.

To protect confidentiality, actual participant names will not appear in any publications. They will be assigned a pseudonym that will be used instead to disguise participation. The data will be kept private and stored anonymously. It will be stored on a password protected University computer and password protected laptop, with password encryption package 'Truecrypt' that would prevent data being accessed if the laptop was stolen. Only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to the dataset. This will be kept in line with the University of Plymouth Regulations.

**(g) Professional bodies whose ethical policies apply to this research:**

British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice March 2003 (Appendix updated May 2004)

**7. Dissemination Strategy**

The information obtained throughout the study will be used for my PhD, presentations



## 10:2. Conference Papers:

Parsons, J. (2013) 'I was a Fat B... I went from Almost 110 kg to 79 kg, but People Were asking how the Treatment was going?' An Exploration of Gendered Responses to Dietary and Weight Management Practices. 45th BSA Medical Sociology Group Annual Conference, York University. 11th – 13th September 2013,

Parsons, J. (2013) 'My Food Story' or 'ourfoodstories@e-mail.com, snapshots of the self and others within a shifting foodscape. 22nd Auto/Biography Conference, La Caixa Forum, Barcelona. 11th – 13th July 2013.

Parsons, J. (2013) 'Until we shed the ingrained belief that thin is beautiful, I fear we are lost!' - An exploration of the role of 'fat' talk and how the affective sedimentation of heteronormative practices of femininity can contribute to weight based stigma. Weight and Stigma Conference, University of Birmingham. 16th May 2013.

Parsons, J. (2013) 'Longing' within the Heroic Middle Ground: Lipoliteracy and the Emotional Appetite for the Thin Ideal. BSA Annual Conference, Connaught Rooms, London. 3rd – 5th April 2013

Parsons, J. (2012) 'Food therapy? Conceptualizing food as treats and food as treatment'. 44th BSA Medical Sociology Group Annual Conference, University of Leicester. 5th – 7th September 2012

Parsons, J. (2012) 'P.S. A sugar sandwich hasn't passed my lips since 1982', an exploration of taste and 'distaste' within individual food narratives. Place to Plate: New Connections in Food Research, Glamorgan Building, Cardiff University, Cardiff. 2nd April 2012.

Parsons, J. (2012) 'A Piece of cake': from Proust and his madeleine to cheese on toast in front of the telly'. What is a taste of home and how is it conceptualized? A Taste of Home. Food, identity, place and memory in Europe

from a historical perspective (19th-20th centuries), Vrije Universiteit Brussel – FOST, Brussels, 9-10 February 2012.

Parsons, J. (2011) 'Jamie became famous and food and cooking became trendy' an exploration of the role of celebrity chefs in food auto/biographical accounts'. BSA, Auto/Biography Study Group Christmas Conference, The British Library Conference Centre, London, UK. 16th December 2011,

Parsons, J. (2011) 'I love bread, but it doesn't love me, an exploration of emotional and gendered responses to food choice. British Sociological Association Medical Sociology Conference, University of Chester 14th – 16th September 2011.

Parsons, J. (2011) Hungry; nourishing hunger and a hunger for love in hidden food histories. 20th British Sociological Association Auto/Biography Summer Conference, University of Reading 7th – 9th July 2011

Parsons, J. (2011) A Picnic in the Field; negotiating the presentation of the self in researcher/respondent relationships during asynchronous on-line interviews about food – a reflexive and auto/biographical account. Methodological Innovations Conference, Plymouth University, 19th-20th May 2011

Parsons, J. (2011) 'From a piece of cake to Rhubarb and Custard', food choice and identity; investigating food choice using an auto/biographical research approach. Made In Plymouth Event, Plymouth University, 15th April 2011



### 10:3. Invitation to Participate and Consent Form

You are being asked to be a participant/volunteer in a research study for my PhD

Food choice and Identity: To investigate the relationship between individuals and their food choice using an auto/biographical research approach.

The purpose of this research is to examine the role of food in individual life histories. The study will involve a series of e-mail 'interviews' between the researcher and respondent. This may take place over a number of days or weeks, depending on your availability to participate. In the first instance the research will form part of my PhD. I may also publish findings from the study in academic journal(s) and present them at academic conferences.

If you decide to be part of this study, your participation will involve:-

- Consenting to be interviewed by way of an exchange of e-mails.
- The interview will consist of an e-mail exchange over a timescale to suit.
- The interview will focus upon your individual life history and personal experiences relating to food and eating both past and present.
- You will be encouraged to identify themes around food and eating that are of interest to you.
- The e-mail interview will be saved anonymously for future reference as part of my PhD and academic purposes as above.
  
- The following procedures will be followed in order to keep your personal information confidential:

To protect your confidentiality, your name will not appear in any publications. You will be asked to assign yourself a pseudonym (a fake name) that will be used instead of your real name in order to disguise your participation from the beginning.

The data that I collect about you will be kept private. The data will be stored anonymously. It will be stored on a password protected University of Plymouth

computer and password protected laptop, with password encryption package 'Truecrypt' that would prevent data being accessed if the laptop was stolen. Only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to the dataset. This will be kept in line with University of Plymouth Regulations.

To make sure that the research is being conducted in the proper way, the University of Plymouth's Faculty of Health's Research Ethics Committee have access to the research records. This study has been approved by the University of Plymouth, Faculty of Health Research Ethics Committee. If you wish you can request an executive summary of the research when completed and the opportunity to read the full version if requested.

- Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate in this study.
- You have the right to change your mind and leave the study at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty, upon which all personal information will be immediately destroyed.
- Any new information that might make you change your mind about being in the study will be provided to you.
- If you have an eating disorder you are advised not to participate in this research.

If you consent to participate in this research then please reply to this e-mail.

All our future e-mail correspondence will be done through a specific e-mail address [ourfoodstories@gmail.com](mailto:ourfoodstories@gmail.com).

## 10:4. Questions to Respondents

Food/eating: -

1. Please tell me some of your memories of food and eating
2. Do you remember taking responsibility for your own food consumption? - how and when did this happen?
3. Do you have any likes and dislikes regarding food and how did these develop?
4. How do you decide what to eat....
  - (i) At home?
  - (ii) At work/outside the home?
  - (iii) In a restaurant?
5. Have you ever been on a diet and/or changed your eating habits for any reason?
  - (i) Why and what happened?
6. How conscious are you of what you eat on a day-to-day basis?
  - (i) Could you recall what you ate yesterday? - please list
  - (ii) Or today for example? - please list
7. Do you have a regular eating pattern and how would you describe this?
8. How would you describe your relationship with food?

Cooking/shopping

1. How and when did you learn to cook?
2. How do you decide what to cook?
3. Are you responsible for shopping for food for people other than yourself - please explain who and perhaps how this might influence your food shopping/cooking?
4. How would you describe your cooking skills and have these changed?
5. Are you conscious of food fashions and trends - if so please explain what these might be?
6. How would you describe a taste of home?

P.S. Please feel free to expand upon or relay any other food related issues that this exercise brings up for you.

Personal Details

Please tell me your age, occupation, highest qualification and nationality

## 10:5. I-Poems

### Ophelia i-poem (3<sup>rd</sup> and final e-mail)

I feel  
I have never tried to harm my body  
I have high expectations  
I think  
I have a strong body  
I feel fit  
I am proud of my body  
I'm just

I don't get it  
I'd like  
I think a lot  
I had lots of problems  
I was breast-feeding  
I got an abscess  
I had to carry on  
I believe

I think  
I have a pretty healthy body  
I just don't like the way it looks  
I am aging  
I am at that point  
I am about to  
I don't want to  
I feel lucky  
I have looked after it  
I haven't been to the gym  
I have taken care of myself  
I have friends  
I don't  
I wake up  
I don't drink much  
I hardly drink at all  
I have a sensitive system  
I listen to it  
I can  
I don't like the alternative  
I want to feel well

I think energy  
I am describing someone young  
I think  
We associate health with youth  
I am not sure  
We don't see them  
I guess they  
We all know what

We should be eating  
I think body and mind  
you  
You feel about yourself  
I have seen

I fear  
We are lost!

### **Lola i-poem**

I am going  
I will add, when  
I think of it  
I do remember  
I was doing  
I was sporty  
We had everything deep fat fried  
I never really worried  
I recall

I got to Sussex  
I was horrified  
I was waitressing  
I did try it  
I read  
I remember  
I was eating  
I couldn't believe  
I lived with  
I wasn't partial  
I felt the pressure

I had a very thin longhaired boyfriend  
I thought 'God'  
I must look/feel chubby  
I hated the tyranny  
I kind of accepted  
I think I was lucky  
I was 18  
I didn't acquire an eating disorder

I just got stoned

I do also remember  
I could have been  
I should lose some weight  
I would look better  
I wish  
I had told him

I was a kid  
I remember faddy diets  
We didn't eat  
We would invariably be given a chocolate bar  
I think she was worried if  
We didn't eat  
We would expire

We went to see family psychologists  
We were little

I have reflected  
I think  
I came across  
I remember

I made pasta for lunch  
I am

I thought that was outrageous

I liked about

I learned to cook  
I went to university  
I fucking hated it  
I got to Uni  
I found it relatively easy  
I was vegetarian  
I ate fish  
We boycotted MacDonald's

### **Faye Diet i-poem**

We were admitted  
We lived for several weeks

We were re-admitted  
We were told  
We were strong parents  
We should take her home  
Enjoy her for as long as  
We had her

We learned from  
I had written

I approached  
You have to eat packets and packets  
I told her  
I didn't care what

You had to eat  
We wanted to try

I ran the diet

We initially started the diet in hospital  
We noticed a positive difference

We came home  
We had a very creative dietician – not!  
I cried buckets because of what  
I was forced to feed her

I took it into our own hands  
We only used  
We got home

We soon devised  
We began to see  
We continued weaning  
We had won the lottery

We always reminded ourselves  
We had the easy part  
We had prepared for her  
I find it very difficult now  
I don't know why  
I should find this  
I do  
I suppose

We got to meet the daughter  
We had longed for  
I truly believe

I believe

### **Molly i-poem**

I have  
I couldn't  
I could cook  
I was working  
I wanted to do it  
I found it very difficult  
I knew that  
I had been  
You would have thought  
I was making things  
I realized

I'd make everything

I chose that path  
I knew it would be difficult  
I wanted to make everything  
I got the bug  
I want to make everything  
I even struggle to eat baked beans  
I can't even eat organic  
I actually physically can't  
I don't like going

I went to a friends  
I wouldn't eat certain things  
I couldn't just pick  
I panicked  
I worry  
I'm a bit weird  
How far could I take it  
I went to the supermarket  
I didn't like the pack of rolls  
I suppose  
I don't know  
I've taken it too far  
I can't help it  
It was just that  
I do know  
I am like it

I've had to buy frozen pizzas  
I used to only  
We couldn't make arrangements  
I have to cook  
I have realized  
I didn't used to be like it  
I used to buy MandS  
I know  
I can make it  
I have done  
I'd rather not go out  
I had steak  
I sent it back  
I'm not going

I have a regular eating pattern  
I graze all day  
I don't graze after  
I've eaten my soup  
I eat all day really  
I hate processed  
I like fruit  
I eat lots of fruit  
I love salad  
I love salad



I can sit here

I'm back on it again  
I stopped eating wheat  
I stopped eating dairy and meat  
I feel cleaner  
I'd given up meat and cheese  
I have cheated  
I've stuck with it  
I wanted to cut down  
I didn't have any  
I never say  
I am going to turn  
I ate meat for a while  
I used to eat  
I eat it now  
I don't like  
I'm not saying  
I am never going to eat  
I tend to eat it  
I don't like the fat  
I feel

I had a fry up  
I love food  
I do have periodic binges  
I get my period  
I suppose  
I have to eat lots of chocolate  
I eat a lot  
I am a big eater  
I have to really watch what  
I eat  
I didn't used to be like that

I know what is in fashion  
I like it  
I'll eat it  
I wouldn't not buy it

I like tart raspberries  
I like sour things  
I realized  
I was particular  
I wouldn't eat breakfast  
I was about eight years old, if  
I had money  
I would buy bags of carrots  
I learned

**Ollie – i-poem**

I definitely remember being freaked out  
I vividly remember the Primary school

I remember seeing that film  
I think  
I was convinced  
I used to look out for specs in my food  
I would put them to one side  
I haven't thought of this for years  
You'll probably think  
I need a psychiatrist now!  
I ate a lot of meat

I'm definitely more of a savory person  
I grew up  
I loved sweets  
We have a dinner party  
I cook the starter and main  
I was never that fussy  
I only got into mushrooms fairly recently  
I still don't really like  
I don't like  
I can eat it, but  
I don't see the point  
I have always absolutely loved cheese  
I remember  
I grew up nibbling  
I was brought up by rats  
I was quite proud of that  
I'd still rather have a cheese plate

I eat fish  
I don't feel great  
I justify it  
I have recently caught  
I felt  
I should  
I'm still eating fish  
I saw it die  
I'll eat prawns  
I don't like eating  
I only became a veggie  
I was 24  
I pondered over  
I was probably eating cow testicles  
I prefer not to  
I am also keen on cows  
I think they are cute  
I definitely like  
I despise the way  
I have recently  
I can handle meat

I will cook it

I did all the cooking  
I enjoy cooking  
We have fallen into a bit of a routine  
I'm not that excited  
We watch  
I am amazed  
I can skip meals  
I've stopped smoking  
I definitely snack more  
I was always skinny  
I reckon  
I'm the least fat  
I probably eat too much  
I have been getting those calcium spot things near my eyes  
I like the nutty, crispy salad  
I feel that  
I feel that  
I could benefit

I eat out much more than  
I used to  
I always thought it was a waste of drinking time  
I enjoy it now  
I couldn't get my head round  
I suppose  
We do as a family

I always make sandwiches  
I try to eat lots of fruit  
We get a veg box  
I love  
I like that  
I would never normally  
I do get a bit bored  
I can't eat much  
I love  
I'll add

I'll start  
I have eaten  
I've just scoffed  
I might have  
I stay up  
I drink or not

I do  
I have said

I love cooking  
I can get excited

I do tend  
I could  
I also really like  
I like making a long list  
I'm strangely happy

I feel  
I have almost no connection  
I had as a kid  
I mentioned earlier  
I actually remember  
I was fascinated  
I remember

We eat lots of pasta  
I have a vivid memory  
We called cowboy stew  
I think