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Food abuse:
Mealtimes, helplines and 'troubled' eating

Sally Wiggins & Alexa Hepburn

Dr Sally Wiggins
Centre for Applied Social Psychology
University of Strathclyde
Graham Hills Building
40 George Street
G1 1QE
Tel: 0141 5484461
Email: sally.wiggins@strath.ac.uk

Dr Alexa Hepburn
Dept of Social Sciences
Loughborough University
Epinal Way
Loughborough
LE11 3TU
Tel: 01509 223364
 Email: A.Hepburn@lboro.ac.uk

Introduction

Feeding children can be one of the most challenging and frustrating aspects of raising a family. This is often exacerbated by conflicting guidelines over what the 'correct' amount of food and 'proper' eating actually entails. The issue becomes muddier still when parents are accused of mistreating their children by not feeding them properly, or when eating becomes troubled in some way. Yet how are parents to 'know' how much food is enough and when their child is 'full'? How is food negotiated on a daily level? In this chapter, we show how discursive psychology can provide a way of understanding these issues that goes beyond guidelines and measurements. It enables us to examine the practices within which food is negotiated and used to hold others accountable. Like the other chapters in this section of the book, eating practices can also be situations in which an asymmetry of competence is produced; where one party is treated as being a less-than-valid person (in the case of family practices, this is often the child). As we shall see later, the asymmetry can also be reversed, where one person (adult or child) can claim to have greater 'access' to concepts such as 'appetite' and 'hunger'. Not only does this help us to understand the complexity of eating practices; it also highlights features of the parent/child relationship[1] and the institutionality of families.

Approaching eating practices in this way rests on certain assumptions that are characteristic of discursive psychology (DP; see chapter 1 of this volume). For instance, we do not claim to prescribe what actually *is* the right amount of food for children to eat, or how parents should exert control (or not) over their child's eating habits. To do so would be to prioritise our own interpretations over those of the participants. Instead, we use DP to examine *how* eating practices are constructed and made relevant in interaction to perform different tasks (e.g. Wiggins, 2001; Wiggins & Potter, 2003). For instance, we can consider how psychological concepts of eating, such as 'tastes' and 'appetite', are constructed and used in everyday practice, as here-and-now, accountable activities. Thus we take a very practical approach to examining eating issues, focusing on how eating is 'achieved' and in particular, how people deal with managing the quantities of food for children's consumption.

We begin our investigation by considering how children's feeding practices have been a concern for developmental psychologists (amongst others), in terms of classifying and interpreting different styles of consumption behaviour and parenting practice. We then use two sets of data to show how DP can help us to examine the subtle negotiations of food between parents, children and those concerned about the possible mistreatment of children. We also consider the institutional business going on in both sets of data – feeding and caring for children, and determining cases of abuse – and how these are interwoven with the management of eating practices. Finally, we close with some notes about the 'usefulness' of this kind of analysis.

<u>Feeding children as a parental concern</u>
Within developmental branches of psychology, parental control of, or influence over, children's consumption has been widely researched (Drucker, Hammer et al. 1999; Carper, Fisher et al. 2000; Cullen, Baranowski et al. 2001). Yet surprisingly little research actually looks at eating in situ (Gable and Lutz 2001; Harvey-Berino and Rourke 2003; Park, Lee et al. 2003). Work that does do so typically uses an approach involving the coding of specific behaviours. For example, (Koivisto, Fellenius et al. 1994) have made use of the BATMAN coding frame ('Bob's and Tom's Method for

Assessing Nutrition', (Klesges, Coates et al. 1983) which classifies behaviour such as 'food request' and 'refusing food'. In a similar way, (Hays, Power et al. 2001) noted the various behavioural strategies used by mothers to encourage their children to eat. This research is important in that it focuses on the specific situations in which food is managed, rather than generalized theories, for example about 'parenting styles' and their influence on children's eating habits (e.g. (Drucker, Hammer et al. 1999; Kremers, Brug et al. 2003). However, the classification of strategies in this way conceals the variety and detail of activities that are managed during a mealtime. It also relies heavily on researchers' interpretations of what 'refusing food' may actually consist of, and does not tell us how such activities are collaboratively produced. We argue, therefore, that a more situated and detailed focus is necessary to begin to understand the complexity of parent-child interaction around food.

The control over the amount of food consumed by children also recurs as an important element in psychological research (e.g. Carper et al., 2000; Robinson, 2000; Tiggemann & Lowes, 2002). For example, Birch (1990) has argued that parents often believe that children would not be able to feed themselves appropriately without parental control. Caregivers are therefore caught between feeding a child *too much* food, which may be treated as unhealthy or as forcing the child to eat, and *not enough* food, which may be treated as equally unhealthy or neglectful. Research by Baughcum and colleagues (Baughcum, Burklow, Deeks, Powers, & Whitaker, 1998) has shown how mothers caught in this dilemma may favour one option over another, believing it to be more acceptable to feed *too much* food, than to be seen as a 'bad parent' by not feeding the child enough[ii]. The related concept of 'failure to thrive', due in part to perceived 'under' feeding, thus becomes an issue bound up with causes and responsible agents (e.g. Kasese-Hara, Wright, & Drewett, 2002). Equally troublesome is the issue of 'force-feeding' a child. As we shall see later in the NSPCC data, this is a particularly delicate issue in relation to potential cases of child abuse.

Negotiating food and 'appetite'
Our concern with the current literature is that while there is a focus on parental behaviour around feeding, little has been done to detail the complexity of these practices as they occur in everyday situations. Parents, health professionals and academics alike are left wondering exactly how theories about food consumption should be put into practice. This involves much more than a simple coding of 'food refusals', for example, as these gloss over the interpretation of these actions. We need to consider how a 'refusal' is produced or resisted. Our focus here is on how is food understood to be 'enough' or 'not enough'? Underlying this research is a concern not with what *is* 'normal' but with how normativity is produced and oriented to within interactions, and the discursive business to which this is attending.

The data are taken from two distinctive settings. The first are from tape-recorded interactions within family mealtimes, collected by the first author. Here, the family members themselves were responsible for recording their meals, as often as possible, according to their usual routine[iii]. Our concerns here are with the ways in which quantities of food are negotiated between parents and children, and with how responsibilities and rights to claim the 'correct amount' of food are managed. This is a setting in which food management is played out in 'real time', and the consequences of such negotiations are immediate. The second source of data came from a corpus of telephone calls to an NSPCC helpline, collected by the second author[iv]. These calls

are taken by child protection officers (CPO) who, amongst other activities, must decide whether the case being reported warrants further action or intervention by social services. That is, they must assess the claims being made and decide whether there is evidence of actual or potential child abuse. Our concern here is with how the reported feeding practices of caregivers might warrant such a claim, focusing in particular on the amount of food that may or may not be being fed to the child. Here, the CPO's are responsible for deciding whether or not there is a case of child abuse (or potential abuse) being reported. Callers must provide evidence or display knowledge to support their case. In both cases, this can involve the construction of feeding as a moral concern, where the 'appropriate' amount of food for a child is bound up with how parents' and children's rights and responsibilities are constructed and oriented to in interaction.

It is important to note that in analyzing the NSPCC data alongside the family mealtimes, we are not suggesting that there is any significant relationship between the two, nor that 'food abuse' is something that can be evidenced by these interactions alone. As D'Cruz (2004) has noted, multidisciplinary practices are used in the evidencing of child maltreatment, and examining the ways in which specific practices are constructed does not undermine their significance. Instead, by examining these two settings in parallel, we hope to illustrate some of the different ways in which food and eating issues are discursively produced for parents and young people. We take each data set in turn.

Family mealtimes
Running through the extracts are recurring issues of *quantity* of food (and how much is enough) and *persuading* (or coercing) a child to eat, and when this might be inappropriate. The first extract is a clear illustration of how these two issues overlap. Here, the mother of the family is talking to her 14-year-old son, Ben, during an evening meal with the rest of the family (two other children aged 10 and 12 years, and the father)[v]. This fragment is taken from near the end of the meal.

Extract 1

```
1.  Mum:   >do you want anything ↑else or have you had enough<
2.         (0.6)
3.  Ben:   mm::, (.) >ahm okay.<
4.         (1.0)
5.  Mum:   you: (.) >don' want< °cake then.°
6.         (1.0)
7.  Ben:   ohh (0.2) that's different (0.2) (alri' then)
8.         (1.2)
9.  Ben:   are these little cakes: °or° whate:ver
10.        (0.4)
11. Mum:   well there's: (0.2) a var↑iety of °things°
12. Ben:   °can::: (.) you show them to me please°
13.        (3.2)
```

'Have you had enough'
A broad gloss of this extract might code this as 'acceptance' of more food by Ben, or of 'persuasion' or 'food offer' by Mum. By considering it in closer detail, however, we can see that there are more subtle activities going on. Note first the distinction made in the opening line, between 'want' and 'had', partially used again in line 5.

This is produced in speeded up talk, indicating that this is a straightforward question, and it builds Mum's role as food provider. Since Ben responds to this as being a legitimate question (i.e. that she is a position to ask him whether he needs or wants any more food; he doesn't challenge her question), we can start to see some of the asymmetry of the situation being produced here. However, the distinction between 'want' and 'had' suggests that Ben's fullness is not just an issue of not needing any more, but is also about his tastes or desires for food. This separation of desires versus needs subsequently allows Ben to negotiate the amount of food he takes. His elongated 'mm::,′ (line 3) suggests a more lengthy consideration of the question 'have you had enough', which might display lack of certainty, and allow room for him to retract his 'okay' later on (which he does on line 7).

Mum's opening turn 'do you want anything ↑else or have you had en<u>ough</u>' also manages the sensitive issue of 'forcing' or coercing someone to eat. It doesn't directly tell Ben to take more, or to say how much he should take; the amounts that are being talked about here are descriptively vague: 'anything ↑else' and 'en<u>ough</u>'. They don't specify exactly what 'else' might be required, or desired, despite the mention of cake in Mum's next turn (line 5). These terms also allow for a negotiation of exactly how much is enough. For instance, having had 'enough' suggests that there are limits to one's capacity to eat food, and that the individuals themselves would *know* what this limit is. So here, Ben is treated as having greater 'access' to, or knowledge of, his own state regarding satiety or appetite.

'You don' want cake then'
What happens next is that Mum does not treat Ben's '>ahm okay.<′ (line 3) as being a final response on the issue. Rather than ask 'would you like some cake?', Mum appears to be making a statement about Ben's current appetite on the basis of his brief response: 'you: (.) >don' want< °cake then.°' (line 5). The way in which this is phrased performs a number of subtle activities. First, the rather quiet and hesitant way in which this is produced displays an uncertainty on Mum's part; she cannot claim to know exactly what Ben wants (given that she has just deferred the knowledge claim to him in the first turn), but can make a guess at it. The 'then' at the end of the turn also suggests that this is a conclusion based on the prior turn. Second, it avoids *directly* offering cake, and thus treating Ben as if he doesn't know his own state of fullness. If she did offer cake directly, he might argue that he has already told her that he is 'okay'. This is important because, as we will see later, rights to issues of satiety or appetite need to be carefully managed. Third, and in relation to the last point, by metaphorically placing 'cake' on the table, Mum attends to concerns that she is providing enough without seeming to 'force' anyone to eat the food. The uptake from Ben in lines 7 to 12 thus make it appear that he has actively asked for the cake, rather than it being offered directly to him. The pressure has come from him, not his Mum. Again, this deals with the sensitive issue of providing food without seeming to force-feed or coerce someone into eating, particularly when asymmetries are at play.

The notion that one might have had 'enough' of one food (say, the main course) but not of another (dessert) is also noted in the psychology of eating literature, albeit from a physiological, rather than a discursive, perspective. For instance, 'sensory-specific satiety' has been noted in the work of Barbara Rolls, amongst others (see Rolls, 1986), where individuals may be sated on one food but able to eat more food if provided with a wider selection. When we consider this notion from a discursive

psychological perspective, we can examine how it is constructed, used and resisted in interaction, without needing to make any claims about its putative existence as a physiological or cognitive phenomenon. In the extract below, for example, we can see how Nick explicitly orients to being 'full', unless pudding is available. Also at issue here is the dilemma of how one can *know* another person's physiological state. There are three children in this family: Adam (12 years old), Nick (8 years old) and Daisy (4 years old). This extract is taken, again, from near the end of the family evening meal. There are dishes of food on the table and some passing and serving of the remainder of the food is going on at this time.

Extract 2
```
1.   Dad:    scuse ↓me (0.6) why hasn't anybody eat these
2.           (0.8)
3.   Mum:    they 'ave, (0.2) >look<
4.           (2.0)
5.   Mum:    >I didn't give< Daisy ↓any (0.2) >°I° thought
6.           she got enough.<
7.           (0.4)
8.   Mum:    Adam could 'ave some more=
9.   Adam:   =wha:t
10.          (1.8) ((sound of scraping cutlery on plates))
11.  Mum:    'stead of comin' >lookin' for< more fo:od after.
12.          (0.4)
13.  Mum:    ↑I'll >'ave a bit< more cabbage (.)
14.          °if there is some please°
15.          (1.8)
16.  Dad:    >°(little bit)°<
17.          (5.2) ((sound of dish being banged lightly))
18.  Mum:    °'k you°
19.  Dad:    °(2 syllables)°
20.          (1.8)
21.  Mum:    °°(might as well)°° °>finish it off<° (.) does
22.          Daisy want >any more< cabbage?
23.          (0.8)
24.  Nick:   <I'm ↑full up un[less there's any more: pudd:ing.>
25.  Mum:                    [mm?
26.          (0.2)
27.  Mum:    put yer knife n fork straight.
28.          (3.8)
29.  Mum:    might find you some if you si[t nice.
30.  Daisy:                               [°wha:t°
```

'I thought she got enough'
As we noted earlier, eating is often treated as an individual activity involving physiological states that can only be 'accessed' by the speakers themselves. For the parent, then, they are caught between assuming responsibility for another's eating behaviour, but without the privileged 'knowledge' of what that person needs or wants. In lines 5 to 6 above, Mum accounts for her actions ('>I didn't give< Daisy ↓any') by using a speculative claim to what Daisy had already eaten: '>°I° thought she got enough.<'. In this way, Mum can build up her entitlement to know about Daisy's physiological state without claiming it to be a fact (Potter, 1996). As with extract 1, Mum also displays attention to providing food without coercing the children to eat. Note, for example, the softened use of: 'Adam could 'ave' (line 8) and 'does Daisy want' (line 21-22). In a similar way, the quantities of food being negotiated here are

also dealt with rather delicately. Again, as in extract 1, having 'enough' or 'more' is not explicated in any detail. Thus, Mum's orientations to more food treat the children as having a greater right to know, and decide, what to eat, even if the situation is not quite so simple. For instance, as we see below, the children may be held accountable if they display hunger later in the evening.

'I'm full up unless there's any more pudding'
The issue of quantities of food is combined with that of eating enough *now* so that the children don't go '>lookin' for< more fo:od after' (line 11). How much one eats (or doesn't eat) is therefore accountable later on as well. However, by stating that he is full 'un<u>le</u>ss there's any more: <u>pudd</u>:ing', Nick constructs the notion that one has different satiety levels for different kinds of food (in a similar way to Ben in extract 1). He can also claim to know directly how much food (and what type) he needs. By stating this claim when Mum is offering and serving more food, Nick displays an orientation to who this claim is relevant to. That is, who *needs to know* that he is 'full up unless there's any more pudding'. Note that Mum doesn't dispute his claim (compare this with Ben's more hesitant reply and his Mum's indirect 'offer', extract 1) and rather attends to behavioural requirements instead (lines 27 and 29). So in this extract we see further management of the asymmetries involved in eating practices: who has greater knowledge of/access to one's 'appetite' and who has greater responsibility for attending to the implications of this. These are issues that are collaboratively managed by the family members themselves.

The issue of being 'full' is considered again in the final mealtime extract. Chloe and Emily are the children in this family, aged 13 and 12 years respectively. This fragment is taken from halfway through the family evening meal, when Dad asks Chloe why she doesn't want the rest of her food. This fragment provides a more explicit example of family members managing their eating patterns, in which being 'full' is itself treated as an accountable matter. But how can one hold someone accountable in this way, when speakers apparently have privileged 'access' to their appetite?

Extract 3

```
 1.   Dad:     >why don't you want this< Chloe?
 2.            (1.0)
 3.   Chloe:   °I'm ↑fu:ll°
 4.            (2.0)
 5.   Dad:     ↑wh*y are you always full you two.
 6.            (1.8)
 7.   Dad:     I ca:n't underst:and at your a[ge(.)
 8.   Emily:                                 [na-
 9.   Dad:     I used to be eat↓ing,
10.            (0.6)
11.   Emily:   haven't got very big ↑appetites=
12.   Chloe:   =E-↑Emmie's no:t (.) tha::t (0.8) ↓f:ull all the
13.            time but [my-
14.   Dad:              [but you keep ea:ting things in
15.            be[twe:e]n ↑meals
16.   Chloe:     [look-]
17.   Chloe:   Mum, (0.2) can you tell him <my appetites gone.>
18.            (2.4)
19.   Emily:   °you've just said it°
```

```
20.                 (1.4)
21.   Chloe:    >no but< she's been ↓here so she can ↑pro:ve it
22.                 (1.8)
23.   Mum:      it has ↓gone (0.2) but on that basis you shouldn't
24.             eat bi:scuits or a:nything between meals.
25.                 (5.0)
```

'Why are you always full you two'
The extract starts with a fairly typical question over why some food hasn't been eaten, and Chloe's claim that she's full (line 3). Note, however, how this claim is produced quietly and with rising intonation, as if questioning whether this is an appropriate or adequate response. What happens next is that this 'fullness' isn't challenged directly, but rather is treated as a pervasive state ('always full', line 5) and one that applies to both children ('you two.', line 5). This is a particularly interesting turn; note the rising intonation and 'squeaky voice' on the 'why', providing emphasis and displaying a sense of disbelief. Appetite and being 'full' is brought into the wider context of recurring practices and age related expectations ('at your age (.) I used to be eat↓ing,', lines 7 and 9). Mum and Dad are then left with the situation of managing this potential problem and rather than challenge whether Chloe (or Emily) is 'really' full, they question the practices that might have resulted in this fullness (lines 23-4).

'She's been here so she can prove it'
Following a softening of the account ('E-↑Emmie's no:t (.) tha::t (0.8) ↓f:ull all the time' lines 12-3), Chloe claims an independent witness as evidence for her declining appetite. So her claim about an 'internal state' (appetite) is constructed as observable by an external source (Mum). Indeed, Mum's turn, 'it has ↓gone' (line 23), states this as if it were a fact, with an emphasised turn shape. The implication of this is that another person can then provide 'proof' (line 21) of someone else's physiological state by simply observing their eating habits; thus, the private becomes public. This is a particularly neat way of managing one's accountability for their appetite; if it is observable, then it can be more easily evidenced. Moreover, by focusing on her own appetite (not Emily's), Chloe resists the implication that their 'fullness' is due to collaboration or a planned, joint activity (note how Dad seems to suggest this on line 5). Losing one's appetite is hereby constructed as an individual concern, and based on physiological (and therefore less controllable) factors. It is not so much that she is 'always full', but that her appetite has 'gone' (note the temporal shift here; if it has 'gone', it must have been there before). She thus cannot be held accountable for such uncontrollable factors, and indeed the focus then shifts to what she *can* control (eating biscuits, etc).

In this section, then, we have begun to examine the negotiation of quantities of food between parents and children in everyday settings. The sorts of issues at stake are the distinction between 'needing' and 'desiring' food, which is related to the construction of what psychologists have termed sensory-specific satiety. There is also a need to manage ownership of physiological states, and who has the rights to know one's fullness or appetite. It is not simply the case that parents have the rights and responsibilities to provide food for their children, and for children to eat this food, but that these rights are negotiated and delicately managed within interaction. So far, then, we can begin to see how psychological states and concepts relating to eating practices are played out in everyday interaction as public and accountable concerns.

NSPCC helpline interaction

We now move on to consider how issues of food quantity and coercing/persuading children to eat are raised in NSPCC helpline interaction. In this setting, the implications of poor feeding practices may be more serious, as calls may result in action being taken to protect a child from neglect or mistreatment. Unlike family mealtimes, food is not present here, so speakers are discussing retrospectively the eating habits of children and/or their parents. The concerns thus raised are whether these habits are appropriate or indicative of abuse. The way in which these are *evidenced* is thus more important; speakers must account explicitly for their concerns.

The following extract is taken from a call where the issue to be established is the mistreatment of a 3 year old girl at a day care centre. The claim from the mother in an earlier call is that the child spat food into the face of one of the staff, who then smacked the child. NSPCC requested that the father, the current caller, phone in and give more information, as he is the one who usually picks the daughter up from the centre and interacts with the staff. We are still in the initial stages of the call, and the father recounts the problem his daughter is having with eating. To some extent this issue is peripheral to the main reason for call (whether the child was smacked at the nursery), but we have chosen it as it illustrates quite starkly some of the features of parenting and control over eating that appeared in our first data set.

Extract 4

```
 1.   Caller:  Sh:e ↑has been havin problems: eatin there.=an
 2.            we don't know whaddit is,
 3.            (0.5)
 4.   CPO:     Mh[m. ]
 5.   Caller:    [>We]ll-well< when she moved there she was
 6.            alright an then sort've (0.9) within a short
 7.            period.
 8.            (0.6)
 9.            >°or-[or-or°] a period< .hh (0.4) sh:e: was
10.   CPO:          [°Mhm.°]
11.   Caller:  refusing to eat >in the sense of I w'd ask
12.            'er d'ye want sommink to eat< an (0.4) .hh
13.            <she would> cry an say no.
14.            (0.6)
15.   CPO:      Mh[m.]
16.   Caller:    [Er]: when I went to pick 'er up (0.2) on
17.            a:- (0.7) the-the- they were .hh (0.7) saying
18.            'well your daughter hhas cried but we ↑put 'er
19.            food in front of 'er.=she ↑didn't <want: it:.>=
20.            [an some]>times even when we took it away<
21.   CPO:     [ M m :.]
22.   Caller:  (0.2) she would cry.
23.            (0.4)
24.   Caller:  .hh
25.   CPO:     Mm.=
26.   Caller:  =Er::m: (0.6) .hh td.hh (.) >an on ↑one occasion
27.            recently when I was talking to 'er about't they
28.            said 'well we ↑know that she wants ↓it b'cos we
29.            sometimes see 'er- whe-whe-when< .hhh >the other
30.            children around 'er are eatin it< we can see her
31.            face mo:vin.= s[ort've li]ke (.) .hh as if she
32.   CPO:                    [ M m : . ]
```

```
33. Caller:   wants to eat it typa thing.
34. CPO:      Mm.
35.           (0.5)
```

'She was refusing to eat'
The extract begins with the caller's description of his daughter's problem with eating, and the relationship between this eating problem and his daughter's attendance at the nursery (lines 1-11). There is a lot of delicacy around the caller's implication of the nursery in the problem, for example, the timing of the onset of the problem is attended to with some interesting pauses and self-repairs. Prior to changing nurseries the child was 'alright' (line 6) then 'sort've (0.9) within a <u>short</u> <u>period</u>' of moving there, the problems with eating began. Note that the short period is qualified by 'sort've' and a fairly long delay, but is said with some emphasis. But after more delay and hesitation, the caller self-repairs to 'a period<' (line 9). This repair may be attending to the issue of whether it was the *move itself* that may have precipitated the problem, which 'a short period' might imply. Thus the problems with eating are related to the nursery rather than the parents. Note that the caller does not make this link explicitly, rather leaves it for the CPO to infer for herself. Throughout this, as is common in the 'opening narrative' sequences, the CPO provides fairly minimal continuers. So we have a puzzle – a child who has stopped eating shortly (but not too shortly) after moving to a new nursery.

'D'ye want sommink to eat'
The caller constructs his own role in his child's eating problems:

```
Caller:      ..> I w'd ask 'er d'ye want sommink to eat<
             an (0.4) .hh she would> cry an say no.
```

Initially we can note two interesting features of the father's story – active voicing and script formulations. Active voicing, or the use of quotations from others or oneself to present a version of events, often occurs throughout narrative sequences, and as Wooffitt (1992) has shown, are a feature of constructing events as vividly brought to life, or as something that the teller did not expect. Here, the casualness of the caller's actively voiced utterance 'd'ye want sommink to <u>eat</u>' illustrates the father's role as a relaxed provider of whatever food his daughter might like.

A second feature of this utterance is what Edwards (1995) terms a 'script formulation' – an utterance that formulates events as commonplace, or 'what typically happens' – part of the script of everyday life. The use of 'would' is useful in this respect, and as well as being actively voiced, the above utterance is also scripted as an event that 'would' typically happen. So not only is the caller attending to the possible role of the nursery in his daughter's eating problem, but he is also attending to his own role in this. There is also a nice contrast between the father's casual offer of 'sommink to eat', and the daughter's (similarly scripted) response - 'she would> cry an say no'. The problem is not just that the daughter doesn't want to eat; it is that merely being asked about it, even in this casual way, is upsetting. Also, she is not merely upset about being asked to eat; she is also upset by her food being removed (lines 20-22). So the construction of the problem is firstly that the child is confused and upset about eating, and that this puzzling situation is something related more to the nursery than to the feeding practices of the parents. The caller moves on to describe events at the nursery.

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The caller again employs active voicing to illustrate the perspective of the nursery staff (lines 28-33), which starts to paint a picture of a child who is confused about what she wants. The inferences about the child's state of mind are built upon through the report of a specific event at the nursery, where the caller reports that the staff members know that the child wants to eat because they can see her face moving (lines 30-31). Note again how the nursery staff are actively voiced by the caller – 'they said 'well we ↑know that she <u>wants</u> ↓it', allowing a more vivid picture of events to emerge, while also providing footing for the caller, establishing this version of events as very much the nursery staffs' version. The caller is careful to display the delicacy of surmising the mental states of the child on behalf of the staff – 'we can see her <u>face</u> mo:vin.<= sort've like (.) .hh as if <u>she</u> wants to eat it typa thing.' Here the phrase 'she wants to eat it' is heavily qualified and softened by 'sort've', 'like' and 'typa thing' – the caller is careful not to overtly produce the staff as the kind of people who would rush into such a judgment.

This first extract has focused on establishing that something, probably the new nursery, has made the child confused and upset about eating, but that she really wants to eat. The next extract provides various justifications for then forcing her to eat. It follows on directly from the first.

Extract 5: 'You've got to eat it'

```
1    Caller:    Er:m so what they res<u>or</u>ted to an I mean it was
2               with- (0.2) with <u>my</u>: (0.4) >let's say blessing
3               was that well< (0.2) .hh try an be a bit <u>firm</u>er
4               with her.
5               (0.3)
6    CPO:       Mm:.
7               (0.8)
8    Caller:    Because (0.2) .hhhh >we've found that sometimes we
9               say to 'er< (0.2) y'know (0.9) 'd'you <u>want</u> this.'
10              (0.5)
11   CPO:       Mm.=
12   Caller:    =Er:: (0.7) she will sort've say '<u>no</u>' even
13              though she might (0.4) 'n (.) ye know hh if-huh
14   CPO:       [   M m : .    ]
15   Caller:    [w(hh)e s(hh)ay] 'you've got to eat it.'
16   CPO:       .H[ tk .hh    ]
17   Caller:      [She'll <u>eat</u>] it.=so they [have] done
18   CPO:                                        [Mhm,]
19   Caller:    >where they put 'er in a chair an they've
20              sort've< (0.5) ↑not <u>force fed</u> 'er but (0.5)
21              got s- puddit on the s:- s- s:poon >opened 'er
22              mouth an (then they said) 'y'ought to have it'<
23              an closed 'er- an puddit in 'er mouth.
24              (0.4)
25   CPO:       Mm.
26   Caller:    .Hh an:d (0.2) she did actually <u>eat</u> it.='n
27              that happened last Fri:day.=
28   CPO:       =Mm.
```

'Try an be a bit firmer with her'
The caller presents what happens next as something that was 'resorted to' (line 1), and he is careful not to sound as if he is enthusiastically giving permission for the staff to be more forceful; it is something that is qualified and hesitated over - 'an I mean it was with- (0.2) with my: (0.4) >let's say blessing<'. He also actively voices what he did say – 'well (0.2) .hh try an be a bit firmer with her' which itself contains careful qualifications – it starts as a characteristically dispreferred response, with 'well' plus hedging, and suggests that the staff 'try' to be 'a bit' firmer. The action suggested is further accounted for by the caller with an anecdote about what 'we've found':

```
Caller:     sometimes we say to 'er< (0.2) y'know (0.9)
            'd'you want this.'
            (0.5)
CPO:        Mm.=
Caller:     =Er:: (0.7) she will sort've say 'no' even
            though she might
```

Note the switch from 'I' to 'we' here, the responsibility for these actions now lies with the parenting team, not with the father alone. Note also the way what the child 'might' want is formulated as somehow knowable despite her ability to inform people to the contrary – 'she will sort've say 'no' even though she might'. The father is here constructing and orienting to one of the normative requirements of a parent – to know what is best for your child.

'You've got to eat it'
The careful construction of compulsion to eat is continued with interpolated laughter – 'hh if-huh w(hh)e s(hh)ay you've got to eat it. She'll eat it.' (line 15). The laughter softens the impact of the command to eat, lest it be heard as an oppressive command. An interesting feature here is that '=so they have done' is latched onto this, moving seamlessly from the anecdote about the home situation back to the nursery, the moral of the prior anecdote (tell her more forcefully to eat it and she will) then serving as a go ahead from the father to the staff to compel his daughter to eat.

So far we have noted the careful way in which the father has managed both his own responsibility and that of the nursery in the construction of his daughter's eating problem. Part of this involves attending to/carefully constructing the normative requirement that parents know when, and what, their child wants to eat. This then provides a warrant for simply commanding the child to eat, which results in 'success' – the child eats the food.

'She did actually eat it.'
The final section of the extract provides the upshot to the story and is equally carefully formulated. One interesting recurring formulation is 'put 'er in a chair' (line 19) 'puddit on the spoon' (line 21) and 'puddit in 'er mouth' (line 23); 'put' being a fairly neutral description of an action of placing something somewhere, but not forcing or shoving. Indeed, the father also explicitly attends to the content of this story as being hearable as 'force feeding' and discounts this at the outset (line 20). The final 'puddit in 'er mouth' is particularly interesting as it is repaired from 'closed 'er-' which was probably going to be 'closed 'er mouth', which has more of a sense of force and coercion about it, especially coupled with 'opened 'er mouth' (line 21-22). This course of action is then presented as successful – 'she did actually eat it.'

Again this shows a careful attention to the formulation of feeding practices. Evidently forcing a child to eat is not an easy thing to justify or describe, and this is marked by various qualifications, softening, hedging and false starts. As we noted earlier, this issue of feeding practices was part of a broader narrative in which the events a few days later were the main focus. Our interest in it relates to what is produced as normative in terms of the practices that accompany feeding a small child. Although forcing a child to eat is oriented to as unacceptable, being firm with a child who is confused and upset about eating is justifiable. Knowing what a child wants better than they know themselves, in this setting, seems a taken-for-granted feature of parent-child and adult-child interaction, as does possessing the rights to enforce that knowledge. We have looked in detail at how these rights and competences are produced interactionally.

Conclusions

Negotiating quantities of food for children involves a complex range of activities such as managing issues of 'appetite', and who has the rights, and responsibilities, to know or deal with these issues. This is also embedded within insitutional business. In terms of the institution of the family mealtime, the business here is focused on providing appropriate food, displaying acceptable behaviour and consuming the food in appropriate quantities. Exactly what is 'appropriate' or 'acceptable' is managed on a situated level, there-and-then, as the activities of the mealtime unfold. In the examples we showed here, how much was enough was usually left unspecified, and children were treated as being in a position to know what this was. In all three examples, there was a slight emphasis on having *more* rather than having *less*. The institutional business of the NSPCC helpline interaction was more focused on assessing claims about a child's consumption and whether this constitutes evidence of actual or potential child abuse. In the example we showed here, the concern was specifically with whether or not the child had been *forced* to eat. Again, constructions of appetite (whether the child wanted or needed to eat) and how others could 'know' this were used to provide evidence for the father's claims.

Family eating practices are thus an important arena in which asymmetries of competence are produced and resisted, where one party is oriented to as having a better understanding of others' needs. Yet this is troubled; the issue of eating is not simply a matter of deciding specific amounts of food and then presenting these to children. What also need to be managed are issues such as 'fullness' and 'appetite'. These are complex interactional concerns as much as individual ones; they involve negotiating rights to 'know' these things and how one can evidence this knowledge (e.g. by 'being here', extract 3, or by 'seeing her face moving', extract 4). The analysis here has enabled a small insight into how we might understand eating practices as these are embedded within childcare concerns.

There is great potential for this kind of analysis. Firstly, it provides a more thorough account of the *everyday* activities in which food and eating are central concerns, e.g. socialising with friends, reporting in at a 'slimming' group or organising a family party. This is a move away from the kind of research that tends to categorise or generalise eating practices without looking closely at the day-to-day detail of how eating is actually managed. The issues we have discussed in this chapter – such as appetite and satiety – are ones that apply not just to family situations, but to many

occasions involving food. So we know more about how these issues are constructed, used and resisted, and what sorts of business they attend to. This kind of detail is useful in itself; it can inform our own eating practices and help develop research around the 'mundane' issue of meals and eating with others. Eating then is no longer just an individual or psychological concern; it requires a consideration of how seemingly 'private' physiological concepts are part of a delicate web of social and interactional concerns.

Earlier research (Hepburn, 2004; 2005a, b) has also suggested that there can be direct practical relevance of this type of research for the NSPCC helpline. Detailed analyses of this kind can often pinpoint areas of interactional trouble that may be hard for practitioners themselves to identify. It may also be useful in showing what the day-to-day practices of the helpline are, so that good practice becomes more easily identifiable. Often CPOs find it hard to explicate exactly what they do, because it has become second nature, or because it involves subtle features of communication that are not generally focused on. The way that both callers and CPO can be heard as orienting to a set of issues (e.g. the caller's stake in making the call, the CPO's knowledge of child protection) right at the start of calls has also been focused on (Potter and Hepburn, 2003, 2004, forthcoming).

On another level, this type of research could be used by health professionals (see Potter and Hepburn, 2005; Stokoe and Wiggins, 2005). More specifically, our approach to the interactional features of eating may help dietitians, clinical psychologists and those working in eating disorder clinics, to understand more about how food guidelines are used in practice. As noted above, it provides an insight into actual eating practices – and clearly a wider range of practices would help to develop this - and the resources used by parents and children to manage quantities of food. For example, how are claims to being 'full' understood? How can parents encourage their child to eat more (or less) without seeming to force them to eat? These are issues that are not easily resolved, and the more we understand how they work in practice, the better able we will be to pick up on occasions when they become troubled.

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[i] While we are aware of the many differing kinds of caregiver relationship involved in childcare, we use the generic term 'parent' or 'parental' as a short-hand way of referring to such relationships.

[ii] Most research in this area has focused around maternal feeding practices (Baughcum et al., 1998; Cooper, Whelan, Woolgar, Morrell, & Murray, 2004; Hays et al., 2001). A worrying issue here is that the importance of other caregivers is underestimated, and that it is assumed that mothers are the primary individuals responsible for (and thus also accountable for) children's eating practices.

[iii] For details of this data set, see (Wiggins & Potter, 2003)

[iv] For further information about the helpline, and to see prior analytic work related to this see Hepburn, 2004; 2005a,b; Hepburn and Potter (2003); Hepburn and Wiggins (2005); Potter and Hepburn, (2003, 2004).

[v] We use the labels 'Mum' and 'Dad', rather than first-name pseudonyms within the data and analysis to flag up issues of parent-child interaction