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## "Growing your own herbs" and "cooking from scratch": Contemporary discourses around good mothering, food, and class-related identities

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'Growing your own herbs' and 'cooking from scratch': Contemporary discourses

around good mothering, food and class-related identities

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**Abstract**

In a cultural climate of 'intensive parenting' and concerns about the 'obesity epidemic', parents are expected to take responsibility for their children's health, particularly through the provision of a 'healthy' diet. This study involved inter-generational dyad interviews with both middle-class and working-class mothers and daughters from the UK. Analysing the data using discourse analysis informed by feminist poststructuralist theory, we found that mothers were positioned as having prime responsibility for the nurturing of family members, including the provision of a healthy diet. However, providing a healthy diet alone was insufficient; mothers needed to demonstrate that time and effort had been taken in the preparation of meals using fresh ingredients. Those who failed to do so were positioned as 'lazy', thus inviting the blaming of mothers for any current or future health problems encountered by family members (especially children). However, talk from some of the working-class mothers pointed to the unattainable and 'classed' ideals that are set by such cultural expectations.

Keywords: Mothering; foodwork; social class; discourses; mother-blame; feminist poststructuralist theory

**Introduction**

Within the established tradition of scholarship concerned with women's household labour and their roles in family life, both 'family foodwork' (food-related activities within a family context – see Wright, Maher & Tanner, 2015) and the cultural phenomenon of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) have gained attention. In turn, contemporary concerns about the 'global epidemic of obesity' (Hill, 2002, p. 460) and in particular, 'childhood obesity' (Coveney, 2008) are argued to have responsibilised mothers in particular for the eating habits and health status of their children (Wright et al., 2015).

Intensive mothering, neoliberalism and the management of risk

Mothers must navigate and negotiate a complex discursive and ideological terrain in order to secure and maintain a 'good mother' identity. One such aspect of this terrain coming to prominence in recent decades is that of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996). 'Intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) refers to a child-centred approach to child rearing where mothers must invest extensive time and resources into all aspects of their children's lives (Lee, Macvarish & Bristow, 2010) and can be argued to be part of a broader neoliberal project. Neoliberalism can be regarded as a form of governmentality whereby everyday practices and subjectivities have become shaped by more formal political agendas and ideologies that responsibilise individuals who are encouraged to self-regulate (Foucault, 1994). In relation to parenting, Katz notes that this neoliberal downloading of responsibility onto the individual demands 'the increasingly individualised production of children' (2008, p. 10). Here, it is mothers in particular who are positioned as the primary guardians responsible for fostering the child's financial, moral, educational, psychological and physical potential in order to ensure future collective prosperity (Blum, 2007).

The 'micromanagement' of children's lives characteristic of intensive mothering is deemed necessary within contemporary cultural environments that are purportedly saturated with risks (Hoffman, 2010). In the contemporary context of healthism in particular in which "health consciousness has become increasingly unavoidable" (Crawford, 1980, p. 415), it has become a moral responsibility for individuals to actively avoid health risks and promote their own health and that of future generations (MacGregor, Petersen & Parker, 2018). Public concern about the risk to children has been 'ramping up' in recent years (e.g. Gulberg, 2009).

This has acquired a new intensity in the context of highly-charged, moral panics about the childhood 'obesity epidemic' (McNaughton, 2011). Here, discourses have located mothers as responsible for children's 'unhealthy' food practices and are drawn upon in everyday talk by mothers and of mothers. For instance, Madden and Chamberlain (2010) found that mothers, in talk about their dietary choices and mothering practices, interpellate themselves in this manner, positioning themselves as primarily responsible for children's nutritional needs and the feeding of children has become a site of scrutiny, surveillance and debate and a salient measure of 'good' mothering (Cook, 2009).

Intensive mothering, family foodwork and social class

Parenting and family foodwork are not only sites where gender ideals are played out and reproduced. These are also classed, encompassing privileged ideals of childrearing and feeding (Vair, 2013). Although parenting and health promotion ideologies are widely recognised and accounts of the neoliberal subject often construe this as 'classless subjectivity', the standards set are not equally attainable by all social groups (Cairns, Johnston & MacKendrick, 2013). For example, according to Shirani, Henwood & Coltart, (2012), the emphasis within intensive parenting/mothering ideology on the 'concerted cultivation' of one's children (Lareau, 2011) is enabled by the social, cultural and financial resources available to middle-class parents. Lareau (2011) points out that middle-class parents have better access and respond more promptly than poor and working-class parents to guidance from professionals with regards to child-rearing, the latest health risks and how to avoid these. So in addition to having greater access to economic and material resources, the middle-class have access to 'the right kind of knowledge' and 'a certainty that they are doing it right' (Skeggs, 1997, p. 90), a form of cultural capital that is often unavailable to the working-class. Mothers on a low income have often been positioned as failing to provide a healthy diet to their children due to lack of knowledge and/or an ability to do so (Hernandez, Thompson, Cheng & Serwint, 2012) and there is increasing critical interrogation of the links that have been drawn between social class positioning, styles of mothering and the 'crisis' of childhood obesity (e.g. Broom & Warin, 2011). It is therefore apparent that social class can have a powerful impact on daily family life, health-related practices and identities in ways that signify social positioning and status and work to reinforce class boundaries (Bambra,

2016). In sum, as Christopher (2012, p. 77) argues, '…ideologies intersect with the material realities in mothers'…lives' and therefore we are cognizant of the material and psychological advantages that differential class positioning affords some mothers.

Class is a contested concept within the social sciences with ongoing disagreement and debate as to how this might be defined, especially in light of post-industrialisation and the changing nature of labour markets (Tyler, 2013). However, it is largely accepted that this continues to be a significant indicator of social inequalities and power differentials (e.g. Bottero & Irwin, 2003). Following Bourdieu (1986), we regard class as an interplay between structure and symbolic (or discursive) relations. For example, there is a relation between an individual's economic and occupational standing and their practices as mediated by their habitus. Habitus is expressed through a variety of consumptive preferences and practices (e.g. around food and diet) which cohere symbolically to form a particular mode of existence and social collectivities by establishing symbolic boundaries between individuals occupying different locations in the class structure (Bourdieu, 1986). As such, although researchers have found that in contemporary societies class often tends not to be discussed in overt and explicit ways (e.g. Holt & Griffin, 2005), class is often implied by particular cultural practices which reproduce hierarchical relations (Bottero & Irwin 2003). In addition, social class is often invoked in less direct ways in everyday talk to construct differences between 'them' and 'us' (e.g. Holt & Griffin, 2005). Here, we explore how class ideologies are mobilised in mothers' talk around parenting, foodwork and diet and how class as an organising principle constitutes the practices and identities of the participants in the study.

Given this discursive landscape, we were interested in the discourses that mothers and daughters draw upon in relation to maternal food practices, health and risk. Our concern was not with identifying which types of practices yield the greatest health benefits or the most effective protection from risk, and we were keen not to reproduce discourses which position mothers as primarily responsible and blameworthy for problems. Rather, we sought to explore how understandings of the aforementioned constructs are discursively constituted and the possibilities and limitations created by available discourses in relation to everyday practices such as the dietary 'choices' that mothers make. Following a feminist poststructuralist perspective (e.g. Cairns & Johnston, 2015), we were also interested in how

the identities or subjectivities of mothers are constructed and negotiated in the context of gendered, classed and neoliberal discourses around caring, health and foodwork. Finally, we were concerned to explore any strategies that might be employed to resist dominant discourses and cultural expectations, especially when deemed problematic or oppressive.

**Methodology**

This particular study, part of a broader project investigating mothers' and daughters' discourses around femininities, food, eating and the body, involved in-depth, intergenerational dyad interviews with mothers and their teenage daughters in order to examine the co-construction of the aforementioned themes within the context of the motherdaughter relationship. After receiving approval from an ethics committee at (name of institution), ten mother-daughter dyads were recruited for the study.

Participants

The daughters ranged in age from 14 to 17 years and were in full time education. The mothers ranged from 30 to 49 years (mean = 41.1 years). Three of the mothers were 'single parents' and the other seven made reference to their co-habiting partners or husbands. Nine of the mothers described themselves as 'White British' and one as 'Arab'. Eight of the daughters also described themselves as 'White British', one as 'Arab and African Caribbean' and one as 'White British and Pakistani'.

In terms of the social class positionings of the participants, we regarded five of the mother-daughter dyads as working-class and five as middle-class. Classifying participants in this way was based partly upon more 'traditional' indicators of social class such as occupation, level of education, housing and locale (e.g. Maxwell & Aggleton, 2009). However, in addition, during the process of data analysis, we paid close attention to the ways in which participants positioned themselves and others when drawing on classed discourse, for example, through processes of 'Othering' and/or identification. This was particularly important given that, as previously argued (e.g. Holt & Griffin, 2005), talk around social class in the UK is often coded rather than referred to explicitly. As such, we were interested in participants' discourse around social class and how this served to reproduce class relations and boundaries, rather than merely treating this in terms of rigid and static social categories.

INSERT TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS HERE

Data collection

The interviews ranged in duration from 50 minutes to 1 hour and 16 minutes and were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule designed to elicit talk around gender, food, health and the family diet (e.g. 'Can you tell me about what kinds of things you like to eat?'). All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim into Word documents using a modified version of the Jefferson system of transcription conventions (e.g. Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). The transcripts were then analyzed using a Foucauldian style of discourse analysis informed by feminist poststructuralist theory (e.g. Weedon, 1987). Foucauldian discourse analysis refers to the incorporation of poststructuralist ideas such as those of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, into discourse analytic methods of enquiry. This form of discourse analysis entails an examination of how phenomena are constituted in and through discourse, and what conditions make this possible (Parker, 1997). Therefore there is a requirement to see the text within a wider socio-political, cultural and historical framework in an attempt to make sense of how particular parts of discourse are born and shaped (Parker, 1997).

Data Analysis

In terms of the analytic steps, we followed those provided by Willott and Griffin (1997). To summarise, this involves moving from the identification of a number of descriptive themes (e.g. 'junk'; 'traditional'; 'routine' were some of the themes related to 'food') through to the identification of broader, overarching discursive patterns, in consultation with existing literature. For example, one way of talking about the consumption of junk food in our data was as something to be monitored by mothers; this was deemed to be part of a broader hetero-patriarchal and neoliberalist discourse which positions mothers as responsible for the health of their children. The following section of the paper outlines and discusses two key overarching discursive patterns that were identified. For purposes here, with our particular interest in mothering practices and identities, we focus more on the talk of mothers than that of the daughters.

Findings

The first discursive pattern identified pertained to the importance of providing a healthy diet for the family and drew on notions of 'cooking from scratch' and avoiding convenience foods, a discourse which, as shall be discussed, is arguably infused with middle-class values and serves as a means of reinforcing class boundaries. In contrast and counter to this, the second discursive pattern questioned the desirability and/or practicality of investing the required time and resources for 'cooking from scratch' and in doing so exposed the gendered and classed dimensions of such food practices.

'Cooking from scratch': Classed and gendered ideals

The provision of food for family members was predominantly constructed in terms of the need for this to be 'healthy'. However, when explored a little further, it seemed that 'healthy' was less about the nutritional content of food, and more about who prepared the meals (all but one of the mothers said that they did most or all of the food shopping and cooking) and how meals were produced. The ideal meal was 'cooked from scratch'. In other words there was an imperative for mothers to demonstrate that time, effort and care had been taken in the preparation of meals:

(name of author): but what kind of (.) would constitute healthy to you?

Fran (M = Mother): well (.) I do make as many meals myself as I can

Janet (M): un I mean such as (.) sort of (.) I mean I know a lot of people at work un they'll say 'make a cheese sauce? No (.) get a packet' (1.0) un we've started (.) well not just started (.) we always make our own

Abi (D = Daughter): cauliflower cheese (.) we make (.) un it's so easy to make

Susan (M): yeah sometimes I've just got in from work mi'self un (.) it's a bit difficult (.) but I (.) I won't be lazy un say "Oh well we'll just have this tonight" I still will do (.) I want to cook

Susan (M): [commenting on 'overweight' children] or I think it's laziness (.) I think there's a lot of laziness in parents (.) it's just an easy way round [giving children convenience food]

Carol (M): I like to cook (.) I like to cook from fresh (.) but I 'ant always got time to do that (.) erm I 'ant always got time to do that so we do have a few convenience meals or I might (.) batch (.) I sometimes batch a lot don't I? [seeking confirmation from her

daughter]

In the extracts above, 'good mothers' are depicted as those who make meals themselves, 'from scratch', rather than relying on 'packets' or pre-prepared meals. Those mothers who do not prepare food 'from scratch' are implied as 'lazy' (Susan: 'I think there's a lot of laziness in parents') and such 'laziness' is held responsible for problems such as childhood obesity. Failing to make meals for the family 'from scratch' is a problem located at the level of the individual; it is lazy parents who fail to provide the 'right' sort of meals for the family. In the first extract, 'healthy' meals are constituted as those made by the mother ('I do make as many meals myself as I can') and therefore 'healthy' food is not just about the ingredients, but also who prepares the meal and, it is implied, the time and effort put into making it. Indeed, elsewhere in the interview Fran said that she took sole responsibility for the food shopping and cooking. In the second extract, 'Janet' and 'Abi' describe the practice of cooking together. By cooking together in this way, the daughter ('Abi') is arguably being taught, not just how to make cheese sauce, but the special gendered work of producing home and family (Brenton, 2017). Practices with those 'people at work' who advocate getting 'a packet' are contrasted: 'it's so easy to make' (Abi) suggesting that it requires little effort or skill and therefore there is no reasonable justification for failing to make a sauce from scratch, thus closing down alternative explanations such as lack of time, personal preference and so forth. In the third extract, Susan suggests that it is difficult to come home and cook after a day at work, yet to do any other (e.g. have something that takes less time and effort) would be the lazy option. In the final extract, Carol emphasises her preference for cooking 'from fresh' or 'batch' cooking, but admits that time is sometimes a barrier to this and results in relying on convenience meals.

Madden and Chamberlain (2004) found that although mothers reported feeling guilty and 'feel[ing] like I'm not a good Mum' (Madden & Chamberlain, 2004, p. 300) if they did not cook from scratch with fresh ingredients, they simultaneously said that convenience foods made their lives easier. However, the use of convenience foods is said to have fallen out of fashion somewhat with bourgeois sections of society and is associated not just with unhealthy lifestyles, but with working-class consumers (e.g. Guthman, 2003). Indeed, the use of

inexpensive, processed food products was often disparaged during the interviews or their consumption was referred to in a somewhat 'confessional' tone. Moisio, Arnould and Price (2004) note the countervailing movements that promote 'slow cooking' and wholesome, home cooked food in opposition to fast and convenience foods. Such movements, they argue, are highly value-laden and morally prescriptive, encompassing images of women devoting their lives to cooking and other domestic duties, thus encouraging them to limit their ambitions and activities in public life. Although such cultural trends (e.g. 'cooking from scratch') are often presented in 'class-neutral' ways, they develop from the interests and situations of dominant social groups and can be regarded as 'good middle-class practices' (see Backett-Milburn, Wills, Roberts & Lawton , 2010). Practices such as 'cooking from scratch' with home or locally grown produce are historically associated with the workingclass and those living in pre-industrial agrarian societies but, as Roberts (1999) notes, many

such working-class practices (e.g. in 1950s Britain) were condemned by middle-class observers only now to be advocated by health professionals and variously taken up by the middle-classes. What we are arguing here is not that it is only middle-class mothers who engage in such practices (indeed, 'Susan' and 'Carol' quoted above are working-class women), but that such practices can be regarded as 'class markers' which illustrate certain classed values. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of class distinction via habitus is useful here. Bourdieu argued that class habitus is expressed through a variety of preferences and practices, particularly in the domain of consumption. However, these classed practices are not merely different from one another but rather are socially ranked and the status of such practices will be judged according to their (dis)similarity to the prevailing hegemonic culture. Further, what is deemed as legitimate is constantly in flux (e.g. convenience food vs. meals cooked 'from scratch') and is therefore the object of a perpetual struggle (Bourdieu, 1986).

'Who's growing their own herbs in their God damn back garden?': Being placed outside of cultural values and privileged social locations

Yet, some of the mothers attempted to challenge this cultural expectation either through questioning the value of freshly prepared food cooked by mother, emphasising the difficulties presented by the conflicting demands of employment outside the home and carrying out family and domestic activities, and suggesting that such expectations can be unrealistic and

place mothers under significant pressure. Such resistance was more evident from the working-class mothers who articulated a more pragmatic and 'no-nonsense' approach to family foodwork (see also Wright et al., 2015). For example, 'Asha', a working-class married mother of two who described herself as 'Arab', provided the following account of mealtimes in her household:

Asha (M): it's difficult because like (.) Paul [husband] will be on (.) he (.) he does alternate shifts (.) like one week he'll be on 'earlies' un one week he'll be on 'lates' (.) so there'll be every other week (.) Marella's [daughter] home at four, I finish at four so I'm home about ten past four (.) so (.) there'll just be me un Marella so we'll (.) I'll cook (.) un I'll have to cook for like (.) an hour after I'm in (.) un sometimes I'll just cook for Marella un then I'll eat later (.) sometimes it can be really awkward actually 'cos I'll cook about three different things in one night (.) erm (.) un other times it's like (.) you either eat it or you don't eat [laughs] that kind of thing 'cos otherwise it's just too much messing about (.) erm (.) un on those weeks sometimes we do end up with a lot of takeaways don't we? 'Cos it's just a bit easier (.) un we shouldn't but (1.0) but we do (.) un weekends we kind of

In the extract above, 'Asha' constructs 'family meals' and 'family life' as an often complicated affair. Previous research (e.g. Bowen, Elliott & Brenton, 2014) has similarly found that different family members often have different schedules, arriving home from school and work at different times, which makes attaining the cultural ideal of sitting down to eat together as a family difficult. Indeed, Bowen et al., (2014) noted that very few of the families observed in their ethnographic research regularly ate together. Therefore the households studied rarely fit the pattern of some 'ideal' family. The difficulties that these different schedules pose is described by Asha here as being 'difficult', 'awkward' and 'too much messing about', and that as a result they sometimes 'end up with a lot of takeaways'. However, although she says that having the takeaways is 'just a bit easier', she also adds that 'we shouldn't', thus suggesting a discursive tension between doing what is practical and realistic, and that which is culturally expected. Given that 'takeaways' are not normally associated with good nutrition (Lupton, 1996), are prepared outside of the home, and the

cultural expectation that it is mothers who should prepare nourishing meals for their family (Bowen et al., 2014), it is unsurprising that Asha states that 'we shouldn't' (have a lot of takeaways). In doing so she is able to position herself as 'knowledgeable but having no choice' rather than as an 'ignorant and irresponsible mother'. The discursive effort that is occurring here to account for and justify the failure to eat together as a family can be understood in the context of arguments that the 'family meal' is an expectation which all mothers are expected to fulfil (Bowen et al., 2014) yet is "moralistic, and rather elitist, instead of a realistic vision of cooking today" (Bowen et al., 2014, p. 25). The time and effort required to co-ordinate or accommodate multiple schedules is most easily accomplished when there is someone at home full-time to devote to the task (DeVault, 1991). Taken together, this means that certain kinds of families (i.e. middle-class with a mother who does not work outside the home) are positioned as more legitimate, 'proper' families (Brenton, 2017). However, according to DeVault (1991), the work required to achieve this (usually carried out by and seen as the responsibility of women) often remains invisible, producing the illusion that this form of life is 'natural'.

Some mothers questioned and challenged such cultural ideals more directly:

Diane (M): yeah completely, I think if you've (.) if you do a Sunday dinner un you've made a lot of effort un it's taking you forever un you've had this joint of beef in all day or whatever (.) un they [the kids] don't eat it (.) you do think 'why did I bother?' (.) I could have made beans on toast in five minutes

Diane (M): well they [TV cookery programmes] piss me off because who (.) who's growing their own herbs in their God damn back garden un got all day to stand baking un cooking un marinating something for seventy-five hours when you've (.) been at work all day un you've got kids to look after on your own un a house un (.) you want something quick un easy un (1.0) just no hassle un for me (2.0) you know, Nigella Lawson (.) she (.) she deserves a good hiding (.) yeah, yer posh love un you don't have to go to work un you can stay at home (.) messing about all day

In the first extract above, 'Diane' (a white, working-class, single mother of two) challenges the idea of spending lots of time and effort cooking 'Sunday dinner' when the kids might not

even eat it, and she could have just 'made beans on toast in five minutes'. Here, Diane seems to be suggesting that the effort and time spent cooking is disproportionate to benefits to be gained; in other words, it simply isn't logical to spend a lot of time and effort on cooking. Similarly, in their study of maternal foodwork, Bowen et al., (2014) found that many of the mothers invested precious time into preparing meals only to be met with complaints, rejection or disinterest from family members. As with Diane in the first extract above, this led some of the mothers to question the value of investing lots of time and resources into cooking when that time could have been spent doing other things and in some cases prompted feelings of anger, frustration and resentment.

Diane then continues in the extract following this to construct the expectations placed on women (as represented in TV cookery programmes) as anger provoking ('they piss me off') and completely unrealistic for many women ('who's...got all day to stand baking un cooking un marinating something for seventy-five hours'). Diane contrasts the lives of mothers who are employed outside the home with those such as 'Nigella Lawson' (a British 'celebrity' cook) whom she depicts as 'posh' and doesn't 'have to go to work', suggesting that the domestic and cooking activities promoted by those such as Nigella Lawson are completely unrealistic for employed and/or single mothers and place unfair expectations on them. Wright et al., (2015) and Wills, Backett-Milburn, Roberts and Lawton (2011) found in their studies that working-class mothers' experiences of surveillance and expectation were often construed as externally imposed (e.g. by health professionals). Similarly, here, Diane is referring explicitly to media messages/pressures, exposing and challenging the classed nature of hegemonic discourse around femininity and motherhood through which prescriptions for 'good/normal' mothering are built upon the values, social and economic circumstances associated with (white and married) middle-class mothers (Elliott, Powell & Brenton, 2015). Mothers (e.g. single mothers and working-class mothers) who do not fit within this 'model' of motherhood are constructed as 'other' (Elliott et al., 2015).

Although explicit resistance was more notable in the talk of working-class mothers, middle-class mothers also sometimes described how they felt placed outside of ideals with regards to family foodwork. For example, 'Vera', a white, middle-class, married mother of

four, made the following remarks:

Vera (M): I think what it is (.) I see cooking (.) when I say the word 'cooking' I think of mi' Mum making a big meat un potato pie (.) or Grandma used to do a big stew or something (.) you know un peeling potatoes un peeling sprouts un doing the cross on the end (.) I don't (.) cooking, to me that's cooking (.) mine's a bag of veg, hot water (.) boiling water

Betty (D): mm (.) un pasta

Vera: erm

Betty: and fish fingers

Vera: [embarrassed laugh] on a quick day! Erm (.) yeah (.) I kind of don't class it as cooking when you're just like warming things up (2.0) I think in a way it makes you feel a bit inferior when you're erm (1.0) you've got people that cook (1.0) you know, un people like me that make meals from frozen veg un frozen food

This final extract exemplifies a pattern that was notable in the data: when the mothers referred to their own childhoods and the kinds of meals that they had (typically in nostalgic ways), these were always described as being prepared and served by women ('I think of mi' Mum making a big meat un potato pie (.) or Grandma used to do a big stew or something'). It appeared that the participants 'learnt' from female family members what a 'proper' meal should be and what constitutes 'proper' cooking and the connection between womanhood and feeding was strong in the women's talk. However here, 'Vera' contrasts what she construes as 'proper' meals and cooking (e.g. meat and potato pie; stew; peeling vegetables) with her own meals and cooking practices (e.g. fish fingers, pasta, frozen vegetables; 'warming things up'). Furthermore, she constructs people who engage in these different types of practices as belonging to two different groups: 'people that cook' and 'people like me', with the former group talked of as inducing feelings of inferiority in those who don't cook. In doing so, Vera implies that these different types of practices (and the different groups who engage in these) are not merely alternatives of equal merit but rather, stand in hierarchical relation to one another, with 'cooking from scratch' (and those who do this) as being the ideal and a practice to which mothers should aspire. Relatedly, it is noted in the extract that Vera gives an embarrassed laugh when her daughter refers to them eating 'fish fingers'. This embodied

response may be understood as what Skeggs (1997) refers to as a moment of recognition; that is, recognising the value-laden evaluations of 'real and imaginary others'. In other words, Vera is aware that feeding her children fish fingers is something for which she may be judged. Hence, she has to account for her practices by stating: 'on a quick day'. Indeed, the offering of apologetic accounts when the mothers deemed their practices to be 'falling short' of ideal (and in many cases unrealistic) images of family life was recurring across the data set, thus highlighting the oppressive and coercive functions of such discursive constructions.

**Conclusion**

Undoubtedly there have been cultural shifts within the last few decades in the UK in terms of the number of women in paid employment (Institute for Fiscal Studies, n.d.) and the gendered division of labour regarding household tasks, including men's increased involvement in foodwork (Meah, 2014). However, 2015 (UK) data from the Office for National Statistics indicates that women still spend twice as many hours per week than men on cooking (Office for National Statistics, 2016). Among the seven participants in our research who were married or co-habiting, only one of them ('Jo') said that her partner did most of the cooking; all the others reported doing all or most of the food shopping and cooking, except 'Lynne' who said it was shared depending on each other's schedules. Whilst we obviously make no claims to the sample being representative, it does lend support to existing research which suggests that 'everyday' family foodwork is still very much a gendered affair, being bound up with constructions of heteronormative femininity and the 'good mother' identity (e.g. Brenton, 2017; Harman & Cappellini, 2015; Wright et al., 2015). Notable within our data was the general lack of questioning among the mothers regarding their responsibilisation for family food provisioning, implying that this is a 'taken-for-granted'; in other words, 'that's what good mothers do', something that requires no explanation.

However, some of the mothers did make reference to time constraints that hindered their ability to 'cook from scratch', something which was held up as the ideal way of cooking (e.g. see the extracts from 'Carol', 'Asha' and 'Vera'). But, these 'admissions' were often spoken in an apologetic or confessional tone implying that they were well aware of the potency of the practice of 'cooking from scratch' as symbolic of 'good mothering' (Brenton, 2017). In

addition, failing to provide a healthy diet (which was often conflated with 'cooking from scratch') was often implied as an individual failings on the part of 'lazy' mothers, thus inviting the blaming of mothers for any current or future health problems encountered by family members (especially children) such as 'obesity'. This is despite arguments that the decisions that most influence quality of diet are made, not at an individual level, but at the level of public policy and corporate strategy (Albritton, 2009). These findings, we argue, can be read as a deployment of neoliberalist informed discourse which depoliticises the social and cultural context of family diet. This obscures structural inequalities that shape health disparities in relation to class (e.g. Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010) as well as structures that generate and legitimise, for example, 'fat-phobia' (Cairns & Johnston, 2015).

Despite such cultural imperatives, some of the mothers in this research highlighted contemporary discourses and related practices around food/cooking/health (e.g. 'cooking from scratch' and 'growing your own produce') as unrealistic and unachievable and in some cases oppressive and elitist. Such resistance was more likely to be articulated by workingclass mothers who construed such practices as exemplifying the lifestyles of more privileged groups which were alien to them. However, middle-class mothers who worked in paid employment outside the home also discussed the pressures that these cultural expectations placed upon them and a sense of being placed 'outside' of such often unachievable ideals. We therefore argue that the expectation to prepare healthy meals 'cooked from scratch' can be experienced as oppressive by all mothers, but that social class positioning has an impact on the availability of such practices, for example, to mark out class boundaries, upon responsibilisation and upon level of resistance. It seemed that some working-class mothers felt that they were placed so far outside of these ideals by their circumstances and lifestyles that attempting to meet these was futile and illogical.

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Table of participants

| Pseudonym | Ethnic identity | Social class | Marital status |
|---|---|---|---|
| Susan (M) | White British | Working-class | Single |
| Clare (D) | White British | Working class | N/A |
| Fiona (M) | White British | Working-class | Single |
| Nicola (D) | White British | Working-class | N/A |
| Carol (M) | White British | Working-class | Married |
| Sarah (D) | White British | Working-class | N/A |
| Asha (M) | Arab | Working-class | |
| Marella (D) | Arab and African Caribbean | | |

Working-class

Married

N/A

Diane (M)

Zoe (D)

White British

White British

Working-class

Working-class

Single

N/A

Janet (M)

Abi (D)

White British

White British

Middle-class

Middle-class

Married

N/A

Fran (M)

Ellie (D)

White British

White British

Middle-class

Middle-class

Married

N/A

Lynne (M)

Cheryl (D)

White British

White British

Middle-class

Middle-class

Co-habiting

N/A

Jo (M)

Haley (D)

White British

White-British

Middle-class

Middle-class

Married

N/A

Vera (M)

Betty (D)

White British

White British and Pakistani

Middle-class

Middle-class

Co-habiting

N/A