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## **Eating up time, eating in time (Chapter 10 in Jackson, P (ed) 2009. Changing Families| Changing Food**

Megan Blake, Jody Mellor, Lucy Crane and Brigitta Osz.

*Eating, apparently a biological matter is actually profoundly social (DeVault 1991:35).*

*Thus discussion around the timing of meals at weekends are not only necessitated by the facts of family living...but they also constitute a family set, a range of people whose projects and timetables need to be taken into consideration (Morgan1996:141).*

The fact that women's role within the family has historically been thought to be that of primary care giver coupled with an increased expectations that women will participate in the labour force has led some commentators to argue that there has arisen a care deficit in today's society (Putnam 2000; Hickman et al 2008). This care deficit is being held responsible for any number of perceived social ills including rises in obesity and the decline of the traditional family due to women's lack of time and therefore inability to produce "proper meals". This narrative can easily be critiqued along a number of dimensions. For example family is understood as a fixed category within which certain individuals (e.g., mother, father, child) are responsible for certain roles rather than considering the family as a sets of individuals engaged in a particular set of social practices (DeVault 1991). Likewise, care is expressed as an outcome rather than as the basis or motivation for engaging with a particular set of practices (See Schatzki 2002 for more on emotion, motivation and practice).

Many scholars have pointed out the usefulness of examining social relationships through food. For example Deborah Lupton (1996:1) tells us:

*Food consumption habits are not simply tied to biological needs but serve to mark boundaries between social classes, geographic regions, Nations, cultures, genders, lifecycle stages, religions and occupations, to distinguish rituals, traditions, festivals, seasons, and times of day.*

While Curtin (1992) tells us that personhood is structured by food. However, the literature concerning family and food tends to overwhelmingly focus on a single and largely mythologized family eating event: the "family meal" (Bell and Valentine 1997:59). This focus means that attention is diverted from other engagements family members have with food at other times of the day that may also offer other, perhaps more practical and more easily accommodated, opportunities for all family members to engage with the work of doing family as well as offer windows into the ways that family members engage with non-family focused practices. Finally, the emphasis on time poverty of dual career household, while acknowledging the constraints of objective time, fail to engage with existential time, which structures social practices (Schatzki 2005).

This chapter takes up these critiques and enlists recent conceptions of social practices as a way to understand how families are created and recreated. Specifically the chapter focuses on the timing and placing of food related activities in the daily life of parents in households. By examining accounts of

food related activities provided by household members in the UK and Hungary we reveal the spatio-temporal contexts of those food activities and consider how food related activities are part of the practices that facilitate family life or are constructed by individuals as something else. The chapter concludes that while eating is an activity done by people every day as they go about their lives at home and at work, certain spatio-temporal contexts mark out food related activities as part of the social practices that make up family life and help to determine what or how much is eaten. When family members consider food related activities that are not contextualised within the specific time-space contexts of family life, food practices take on other meanings which, in turn, influences what and how much is eaten. As a result, the ways that food activities are or are not part of family practice has implications for healthy eating. The chapter also concludes that while there are specific differences in the practices of the UK and Hungarian examples, there are also a number of important similarities that point to ways family members all engage with the care work that helps to constitute families. Understanding food practices as they are situated within and outside of family practices should also contribute to ongoing European and National level policy efforts aimed at improving diets in two countries where there are high rates of diet related illnesses and obesity (UK adult obesity is 24 percent and in Hungary the rate is 18 percent (WHO 2002)<sup>i</sup>.

Schatzki (2002) defines social practices as an organized nexus of actions that are made up of doings and sayings that hang together in what he refers to as an assemblage. The elements that help structure both the organization of actions within an assemblage and the practice itself are (1) a shared notion of the ends or projects that should be pursued according to some socially recognizable set of rules and norms (e.g. the family or the family meal); (2) a practical understanding of how to achieve these ends (e.g., the ability to not just do the tasks but also an understanding of when it makes sense to do so); (3) the spatial and temporal context within which the ends are being pursued; and (4) a willingness and desire on the part of the person to pursue a particular set of ends (see also Hagerstrand's (1982) concept of "thereness"; Simonsen 2007 for a discussion of emotion; and Rouse (2007) for more on normativity). Not only are practices embedded, constrained, and enabled by the space and time within which they are enacted, but individual projects themselves are similarly embedded, constrained, and enabled by time and space. Hagerstrand (1982) argues that project realization involves not only human time, but also a corresponding appropriation of things and room or space within which to complete them and as a result, interdependencies arise between the person pursuing the project and the things, including other people, required to pursue this project. The materiality of this means that to pursue a project a person must be co-present with the tools and so forth needed to pursue that project. The broader social context within which the project is being pursued will help to structure more specifically how an individual will choose to pursue that project (Hagerstrand 1982; Schatzki 2002). For example in one time and place meals may be cooked over an open fire (e.g., in the modern day while camping for example, or in a prior era because no other technology was available for cooking), while in another they may be cooked on a state of the art range cooker. What this also means is that as changes in circumstances occur, the ways that people pursue projects will also change over time and across space

(Haggerstrand 1982). Two further points should be clarified regarding social practices: firstly time should be considered as both as an objective measure (e.g., sequential time) and as the experience of past, present and future (e.g., existential time) as it relates to family practice.

According to Schatzki (2005) the two broad concepts of time that matter to the way we can conceptualize and understand social practices are objective time and existential time. Objective time concerns before and after or succession and can be considered in absolute terms (e.g., time of day, year) or relative terms (e.g., before the Roman Empire or after the stock market crash). This conception of time, while it can be rooted in human understanding, is independent of any one particular human and has a degree of uniformity in that it shares a similar relationship across group members (e.g., clock time). The second concept of time, existential time, is rooted in human experience of being in the world and is centered on the way that individuals make decisions about what course of action to take now based upon their own understanding of the past coupled with their intentions for the future. This time is profoundly human time as it is rooted in human experience and existence and shape human being in the world (Heidegger 1962). This second form of time as it is located in the materiality of everyday life (in space and place) are key axes around which family processes should be developed, past relationships shape and influence future relationships (Morgan 1996). Likewise Devault (1991) points out that family practices are rhythmic, in that they required a repeated performance day in and day out. This repetition provides the basis for establishing and maintaining families as it creates opportunities for mutual recognition by combining both the existential time of the actor with the more shared objective form of time that is conjured up through the regularity and predictability of this action (Simonsen 2007, see also Lefebvre 2004). While there is some research concerning the role that memory has in giving meaning to food (e.g. Sutton 2001), and a ready acknowledgement of evidence that people feel they have little time for cooking and eating in a modern world (Devault 1991), there is actually relatively little research that explores these two interconnecting dimension of time as they pertain to eating and feeding.

### **Feeding and eating in and beyond the family in Hungary and the UK**

This following discussion derives from research conducted with families in both Hungary and in the UK. Between 2006 and 2007 we conducted repeat interviews with all female partners in eight households in both contexts. We also conducted interviews with five male householders in Hungary and three male householders in the UK. In Hungary participants lived in a small city located along the southern border of the country, while in the UK participants lived in a town in Yorkshire located on the edge of two cities. These locations were chosen because they and the participants were known to at least one member of the team. Extensive everyday knowledge of the study sites was important as it enabled a greater level of contextual knowledge than would have been possible otherwise. Familiarity with participants enabled a trusting relationship early in the research process (See Blake 2007 for a discussion of friendship and its relevance to ethics in this research), that proved to be particularly useful in the Hungarian context. However, the unfamiliarity of other team members with the both the contexts and the participants, enabled a fresh perspective on the

“familiar” and offered a degree of triangulation regarding our observations of everyday life. Households were selected based on where they were positioned in the lifecycle, and included a younger family with no children, younger families with small children, middle aged partners with older children and households where the children were now adults. In all the households, both Hungarian and UK, both female and male partners are employed, or if they are retired, they had been employed.

Each participant was interviewed over two or three meetings and interviews covered topics such as regular and favourite foods, the pattern of food in daily life, entertaining, and special meals, provisioning, and if it was completed by the participant a food diary (all the Hungarian and about half of the UK participants completed food diaries). It is evident from the accounts of both the Hungarian and British participants that the timing of food is an important component of how they relate to food. Our participants conceptualised food time in a myriad of ways including duration, volume, frequency, biological time, immediacy, remembered time, and cycles, and the importance of this timing is linked to how individuals conceptualise the eating episode in the first instance. So, for example, is this food moment concerned with feeding the family, or is it just feeding oneself, or perhaps entertaining others. To illustrate these points and the ways that time and time-space help structure food and family life the following discussion is drawn primarily from two families, both of whom are dual career households with middle-aged parents and primary school aged children. These two families were selected on the basis of their demographic similarity, but this case study approach also provides the concrete and context-dependent knowledge necessary for understanding practices in everyday life (for a review of the value of case study research see Flyvbjerg 2006; for the need for context dependent knowledge see Hagerstrand 1982 and Schatzki 2002). Both partners in both households participated in the interviews. First we introduce each family and provide a discussion of eating and cooking by household members. The discussion then turns to examine how food projects are also family project by paying careful attention to the ways that adult family members perform feeding work. What is striking about these two cases is that while there are distinct differences in the detail of the accounts, there are some strong similarities in the household narratives that include the importance of feeding healthy meals to family members, which involves careful timing in terms of not just sequencing but also existential time. Indeed, it is this temporal contextualisation provided by existential time that helps to give definition to family feeding and which is also often missing from individual eating. In each account we consider the relationships between time and food as they are situated within family eating and feeding and then how these relationships between time and food are reconfigured when eating does not concern family. We then turn to the idea of the family meal, something expressed in both accounts, but performed in ways that are different from an idealized, but Nationally specific construction of the family meal.

#### *The Hungarian family*

Tamas (aged 40) and his wife Kati (also 40) have two children, Lesco (aged 10) and Dora (aged 6). Both Tamas and his wife Kati work full time. Kati works at the University, while Tamas has a job that frequently takes him out of the city where

they live, but still enables him to be home in the evening. Both children attend school. Lesco goes to primary school and Dora attends the Kindergarten near the primary school (5 minutes walk away), both of which are very near Kati's workplace. This family, like many urban Hungarians, live in a flat.

This family provided a lot of description regarding their regular household pattern. The parents arise at about six-thirty in the morning. Kati makes breakfast and they eat together, then Kati does the washing up. While Kati makes the drinks (both tea and coffee for both the adults and hot chocolate for the children) and assembles the breakfast; which includes toast and ham or liver paste, some red pepper or tomato, plus an additional half slice of bread with jam, Tamas gets the children up and ready for the day. The whole family leave the house at about seven-forty-five. The children are dropped at their respective schools at about eight in the morning. Kati arrives at work shortly after and Tamas goes onto his work.

During the working day, Tamas will eat lunch usually in a restaurant either having a cooked meal. The children eat three pre-paid meals at their respective schools: Elevensies, lunch, and afternoon tea. Elevenses and tea involve bread, a yogurt drink, and something else such as a piece of fruit, and a piece of cake. Lunch, traditionally the main meal in Hungary, is a larger hot meal that is supplied to the schools by a catering company who supplies all the school meals in the city. Kati says that the children are beginning to request foods that they eat at school be also prepared at home, which means she is having to learn new dishes such as how to cook lentils and kolrabi. Despite the fact that Kati grew up in a family where lunch was the most important meal, unlike Tamas whose family gave equal importance to both lunch and dinner, Kati does not usually eat lunch. Instead she will grab a pastry and eat it at her desk or forgo lunch altogether as she is often busy and she finds lunch becomes sidelined.

*I don't have lunch regularly, as we have a cooked meal for dinner at home. That is why I just rush out to the shop or to the bakery and I buy something for myself...Mainly I have lunch at the department and I eat my pastry sitting in front of the computer. I prefer eating with company than alone, but that takes one hour and if I eat by myself then I can eat in only a few minutes. I keep postponing, I delay it. (I say) I'll just do that before it and it is half two or three in the afternoon and I notice I am so hungry that I am close to having a headache. However I don't go then (to get lunch) because I leave my workplace around four or four-fifteen.*

As this quote illustrates, unless there is some social purpose to her eating, it can easily become sidelined. During her workday, Kati's time is a resource to be used wisely. She must complete her work and as a result her working schedule is constrained by the demands of her family.

After work Kati meets the children at school and is either collected in the car by Tamas or, if Tamas cannot collect them, they either take the bus or tram home or take a taxi, arriving home just before five. Kati then goes to the gym for exercise between five and six in the evening. If Tamas is home he watches the children, if he is not then they relax and watch TV for the hour she is away. Between five and eight or eight thirty Tamas works at home in his office typing reports or talking on the telephone. Three days a week he will go for a run while Kati is at the gym. During this late afternoon early evening period, Lesco and Dora may have a piece of fruit with a small sweet such as a turorudi, which is a

chocolate coated cheese finger, that Kati keeps for them to eat. There is also a bowl of sweets for the children to help themselves to. Kati described the children's snacking in the following way:

*If I offer them fruit, they don't consume that as self-service. They only eat fruit if I wash it and if I slice or peel it. They don't eat fruits spontaneously, I have to give it to them in their hands. Sweets, including Turorudi they consume in a self-service way. They ask for the Turorudi but they help themselves to the candy from the bowl. They can control themselves and I know this because I can see how quickly the bowl becomes empty.*

While the more healthy snacking requires an obvious expenditure of time for Kati as she must prepare and then put the food "in their hands" even the self-service food demands her time and attention as she must make sure it is available and also monitor how quickly it is eaten.

At about seven or seven-thirty the children have their evening meal, which if it is the beginning of the week are leftovers from the food Kati, like the other Hungarian women we spoke to, prepared on the weekend for their main meal at lunchtime on Sunday. If no leftovers are available she cooks what she called "fast dishes" such as scrambled eggs with onions and salami and a bit of ketchup with thin sliced ham on the side and raw vegetables such as pepper, tomato, cucumber and onion and cheese or sausages with raw vegetables and cheese. Occasionally they may have chicken nuggets. They never have ready meals because, according to Kati they take too long to prepare. While the children are bathing Kati and Tamas will eat a light meal of salad with a yoghurt dressing and more of what the children have had. They also have a beer with their dinner, which is poured into a glass.

In the later evening, after the children have gone to bed Tamas will then watch television or play on the computer, while Kati cleans up the dishes from the evening meal and prepares for the next morning's breakfast by getting the cutlery and breakfast plates out and getting the coffee and tea ready. Once the children are in bed, Kati starts some laundry and Tamas gets everything ready for his work the next day. Sometimes they will have a sweet snack before bathing and going to bed, but not always. At about ten in the evening they go to bed and read or watch a film together before falling asleep at about eleven or twelve.

Before moving on to discuss our Yorkshire family we would like to highlight how objective and existential time figure importantly in this family's narrative as elements that help to make this family. What is evident from this account is the amount of time-specific effort required from Kati to feed this family during the week, when she has also had a full workday to contend with as well. Not only does it take time to prepare the two meals that she takes responsibility for, but she must provision for these meals, usually on Saturday and she must cook extensively on Sunday to provide the leftovers that are eaten on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. However by cooking extra food at the weekend, she is able to make time for herself to go to the gym, which she values. There is also a careful sequencing of feeding events that have a rhythm and regularity to them which operate at both a daily scale but also at the scale of the week. This ordinary family feeding ordered and structured by the planning, provisioning, and cooking activities that she performs. One must not assume, however that she is doing this performance on her own and in isolation. While

Kati does the vast majority of the practical feeding work in this family, certain elements are facilitated by Tamas. For example while she is preparing the breakfast, he takes responsibility for getting the children ready for the day and makes the beds. Moreover, in order for these feeding events to be successful, they require the co-presence of the other family members.

Existential time is also very evident in this narrative. Food is clearly a key aspect of the family work that Kati does. Kati's actions are the result of her and Tamas's shared desire to produce and maintain their family in a way that is healthy so these actions are intentional and directed at others and are shared. They also are linked to their own past experiences of family, but do not slavishly replicated these past traditions. Instead new traditions, such as the family breakfast, are forged. Family food traditions serve two key purposes. Firstly, they help to produce the boundaries between what constitutes this family and previous families experienced separately by the adults. Secondly, this ritualised eating provides the order to daily life while at the same time ritualised meals like this family's breakfast helps to produce what Sutton (2001) refers to as "prospective memories". Prospective memories are future memories to be recalled by Tamas and Kati after their children have left the home, but they will also be remembered by Lesco and Dora as they start their own families. This memory work helps to create family continuity over time and through changes in household composition (Morgan 1996).

Kati also talked about the enjoyment of cooking for her family in ways that combine both objective and existential time. Kati said she loved eating but doesn't enjoy having guests as she feels compelled to cook more elaborate and traditional food that she is less confident making and which requires more time than she feels she has. She does however, enjoy cooking for her family.

*If I have time I like to stay in the kitchen. I can say the kitchen is my favourite place in the flat. If I had more time I might like having guests more. I am happy if somebody likes my dishes. I have to say, I enjoy feeding the family.*

Kati gets satisfaction from making food that she knows her family enjoys and will eat and is willing to accommodate their preferences and desires. This may involve making food she knows they like such as the scrambled eggs describe above. Her egg dish, which she refers to as "my mother's method" differs from what her children referred to as the "simple style" of just scrambled eggs that they are not so enthusiastic about. She is willing to cook hot meals at dinner time, which is not her tradition but instead is more the experience and preference of her husband. She is also willing to compress her time getting ready for work in the morning in order to facilitate Tamas's desire for a family meal at breakfast, a tradition she does not indulge when Tamas is away from home.

Finally, Kati and Tamas's accounts of their working days are telling. Kati's rather limited engagements with food are in stark contrast to her intensive engagements with food at home. Her daily time-space rhythms move her into and out of family life. While her work day is bracketed by caring activities concerning her family, her focus while she is at work is not on her family. As feeding work is not an important or regular part of that effort, it holds little of her attention. As a result she often grabs something quickly or eats nothing at all, both of which are not ideal from a health point of view, but understandable given that her ordinary relationship with food is one concerned with maintaining

others and when these others are absent food is also largely absent. Tamas, on the other hand always eats a hot lunch. Tamas has very clear ideas about food and feeding and his preferences are for the traditional meat stews that his father cooked when he was young<sup>i</sup>. He does no cooking and is instead used to being fed regularly by either his parents or Kati and as both lunch and dinner were important meals in his family, he continues to eat a cooked lunch from a restaurant, or if he is pressed for time he has two grilled chicken salads at McDonalds. Thus for both Tamas and Kati, their roles within the family help to structure their eating when they are not at home.

### *The Yorkshire family*

In the Burgess household there are five family members: Lucy and David (both in their lower 40's) and Sally (10), James (7), and Will (4). David works part-time as a senior executive director for a telecommunications firm, which means Tuesday and Wednesday he is in Paris, Friday day he is in the nearby city, and Monday and Thursday he is a stay at home dad. Lucy has recently finished a health professional degree at university and works in a nearby town on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday.

In contrast to our Hungarian family, eating within this household is managed around the various home-work schedules of both partners and includes direct contributions from each. This sharing of responsibility introduces quite a bit of variation within the week, but this pattern is consistent from week to week and it is the weekly cycle that both Lucy and David tended to describe when we asked them about their "normal day". David takes responsibility for the household evening cooking on Monday and Thursday and shopping on Monday, while Lucy cooks on Tuesday, Wednesday and the weekend days. Lucy's mother lives about a half hour away and quite often comes on Tuesday to be with the children and cooks a meal for them as this is the day that both David and Lucy work. Friday they have "Pizza Night" which involves making three pizzas: cheese and tomato, mushroom, and pepperoni. David likes the pepperoni, Lucy likes the mushroom and the children tend to eat tomato and cheese, although the eldest child will also eat pepperoni. There is also a salad and a wine for the adults. Importantly, while a ritual meal in this household, it is not necessarily eaten together.

*I have it on Friday night so it (marks) the end of the working week, a bit of a treat. I like having it at home, sitting at my kitchen table. We've had pizza on Friday night for years. We do it now with the children and they also like to have pizza on a Friday night. They complain if they don't get it. Sometimes I like to get the children into bed and then when everything is quiet, just to have it then...it is like a ritual (David).*

For David this meal is a treat to celebrate the end of the working week and he views it as a way to recreate the idea of home as respite from the world (for more on home as respite see Johnston and Valentine 1995).

While both Lucy and David say they try to eat together with the children during the week, the breakfast meal is the one that is most consistently eaten as a family as David only misses the family breakfast on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, when he is away. The evening meals tend to be less collective either out of choice as described in relation to "Pizza Night", or because of both partners' work schedules. David eats in restaurants on Tuesday when he is Paris

and on Wednesday he has a late meal that Lucy has left for him in the microwave. Likewise he often prepares a plate for Lucy to eat on Thursday after she returns from work. With the exception of Friday, either parent will eat with the children if they are at home between five and six, which is when the children eat.

*I like to cook when I have got time. When I have not got time I find it a chore. It's better now, we try and all eat together, as much as we can. Whereas when the children used to eat earlier and then David and I would eat later and it did become a real chore and I just felt I spent the entire evening cooking. But now we eat together, and perhaps we don't have as many exotic things like we used to have because I know the children don't particularly like them. It is easier because we only have to do one meal and we all eat it. This is partly a conscious decision because it means less cooking but partly because I do like us to all sit down together as a family. I think it's quite important (Lucy).*

David is less enthusiastic about sharing the evening family meal than he is about the shared breakfast as he preferred it when he and Lucy ate later in the evenings. He says he also finds the timing of shared family dinner to be too early in the day as he feels it "runs into" lunch. This running into he puts down to the way the children's schedules structure the time in the afternoon.

*I make my lunch (about 1pm)... and then the children will come home from school (3pm) and then we will have a drink and a biscuit when they get in and then before you know it, by the time I've persuaded somebody to do their times tables or spellings then it is time to make the tea (David).*

For David, the early meal means that not only is there no time to do other activities in the afternoon, which makes him feel as though his day is shortened to just the morning. Likewise, the early meal means that he gets hungry at about eight in the evening, and as there is no formal meal scheduled at that time he finds that he eats biscuits rather than something more healthy, which he then feels guilty about.

For both Lucy and David, lunch is shaped by both their working schedules and home. When they are both at home (together or separately), they will fix a light meal such as a sandwich and a piece of fruit. When at work, Lucy will go to the nearby Morrisons and buy a salad or sandwich for lunch. She feels she has enough time for this because lunch time is scheduled into her working day at the hospital and is taken by all the staff in her unit. David's work is task focused, rather than scheduled like Lucy's. As a result, he has a certain amount of work to complete each week while he is in Paris if he wants to avoid extending his working week beyond the three days he is paid to do.

*I'm working extremely hard because I do a full time job fundamentally in three days. I have to manage it and it is a real balance. I start early and finish late to get everything done to catch up with everybody else who's been in for five days...I'm trying to cram so much work into three days it's very unlikely that I will have lunch at all or I will nip to the machine and buy myself a can of Coke and a little bag of tiny cakes. If I am really busy I won't have anything at all. I don't eat with the others because I object to the time it takes to walk six or seven minutes to the canteen and then you sit or queue up and before you know it you've lost an hour. I know that will put pressure on another part of my day and then the potential for spill-over into days when I am not at work is even greater.*

Like Kati, David forgoes lunch because it is not particularly facilitated by his employment and it has little purpose in his life. Instead, he views lunch at work as something that has the potential to interfere with his home-life.

There are some particular, time related differences in the feeding and eating activities of this UK family that distinguish them from the Hungarians. For instance they cook on a daily schedule in order to introduce variety and as a result there is a reluctance to use leftovers as a way to save time. There is greater involvement of the male householder's time in the actual provisioning and cooking work of the household than was the case in the Hungarian family. But, there are also some striking similarities. Feeding work is viewed in both households as important to family life as it helps to create the parameters or boundaries of the family as well contribute to the memory work that helps family to endure. Individual feeding of adults is given time if there is enough and after everything else has finished. Children, while often framed in the food and family literature as either powerless recipients or active agents in determining what is eaten through their refusal to eat certain foods or their demands for certain items, but as both households' narrations show children also have agency by their very co-presence as their needs and schedules are accommodated by and within their parents own understandings of what a family is. It is this understanding and these parent's willingness to act on them that are expressions of care making food practices the outcome of the intention to care.

#### *Family meals in the UK and Hungary*

For quite some time researchers have argued that the "family meal" is something that has achieved mythic proportions in the public consciousness (e.g., Devault 1991; Murcott 1995; Jackson et al this volume). Indeed, this normative ideal is promoted in the public consciousness through the efforts of advertisers while at the same time government officials lament its decline. Murcott (1995) likewise points out that the "family meal" is something researchers have taken for granted when trying to understand recent declines in social cohesion and children's health, while at the same time there is little evidence that family meals have been the most prevalent form of eating since industrialisation (Jackson et al. this volume). What is apparent is that the idea of a family meal, whether practiced in actuality or not, has strong currency in the public consciousness and sets the parameters for what counts as family eating as well as what families should strive to do as illustrated in Lucy's comments concerning the importance she gives to eating together (Devault 1991).

In our study the spectre of the family meal was present in the Hungarian and British households where there were children living at home. In both geographical settings commonly held conceptualization of an idealised notion of the family meal involved a particular form of food. In the UK and Hungary the family meal involves serving "proper food" that is hot, cooked food. However, while in the UK the traditional discourse of the cooked meal resembles the description provided by Mary Douglas's (1972) account of a meat and two sides, in Hungary the proper meal involves three courses starting with a hearty soup followed by a meat dish with accompaniments (salad, pickled vegetables), or a vegetable dish accompanied by meat or meat stew, or goulash followed by a dumpling dish. The third course is cake and/or fruit. The meat dish can be something similar to what one might find in the UK such as a roast ham with

roasted vegetable, but it also equally might be some organ meat (liver, tripe, lung, heart, brain) with a hearty vegetable sauce. According to Kati these sauces are quite time consuming to make and she only makes them during holidays when she has “four or five days to cook”.

These understandings of the proper meal also carried with them very definite notions about how the food should be prepared and served. David provides a discussion of this preparation.

*The idea that you put in the effort in order to make something nice particularly for the children... not so much for your wife I suppose... (laughter) but nevertheless, you'd like to think that you're giving them a good meal and healthy food and that sort of thing and so... so I think that's part of it as well. And so there's a sense of, you know, if you do that you do, you're playing your part in doing a good job for them and looking after them.*

For David, cooking food for children ideally involves not just throwing something together quickly, but taking time and care over the act of preparation. Likewise Kati revealed that the table must be laid with cutlery. In her household, when a “proper meal is prepared—usually at the weekend—this main meal will generally involve two courses initially—soup followed by a main dish—then after the table as been cleared and the dishes washed coffee and cakes are served. Coffee for the adults, and cakes for both the children and the adults. In Hungary the “proper” or main meal is thought to be traditionally served at lunch time, with a lighter, cold meal served at dinner time (although as Tamas and Kati’s account shows a hot meal may also be served at dinner).

While there are clear shared notions about a proper family meal in both the UK and in Hungary, each geographical context has its own particular variation. What is also shared across these two contexts however is that the ideologically “proper” meal is not necessarily produced regularly. In Hungary, almost none of our families produced these “proper” meals during the working week as most did not eat lunch at home. If parents ate, they ate at work, while children also tended to eat their lunch at school. Likewise, our UK families frequently found that the various schedules of household members made it difficult to produce the time-intensive dishes that comprise a proper meal at times other than on the weekend. David even went so far as to describe how this roast meal was prepared while he was growing up, but then argued that in his family “such a production” was not necessary or even desirable.

*Despite the fact that we both came from families where Sunday Lunch was the norm, there was something about knowing the effort and the complaints of your mother who had made it and did nothing on Sunday but cook as far as we could make out.*

Learning about Sunday lunch is not just what the ideal is, but also the time involved in the production of that ideal and recognising that it could be rejected. This rejection does not represent a lack of care, but quite the contrary, it is an expression of the care David has for Lucy. While Kati does make the Hungarian equivalent of the Sunday lunch, it also serves the time saving job of producing leftovers that are then eaten through the week. Our two accounts also show that a family meal may be more easily accommodated within household schedules if it is the breakfast meal because that is the meal most easily accommodated into the complex of family time schedules. David and Kati both illustrate that a

certain amount of ambivalence can arise toward an the requirement of co-presence at family meals that must be scheduled early enough to accommodate children's daily routines or which cuts into the limited time available to get ready for the day.

### **Concluding thoughts**

In this chapter we have drawn on practice theory and its particular sensitivity to the ways that individuals have intentions about the activities that they pursue, which are rooted in context specific normative understandings about how those practices should be pursued. We have argued that while these normative understandings are socially recognisable individuals also engage with these normatives in ways that are practical for their own circumstances. Thus individuals may not act in ways that replicate exactly these normative understandings, but which are intended to achieve similar ends. Key to this understanding is a dual conceptualisation of time that encompasses objective and existential time.

Specifically, in the chapter we have examined the ways that parents in two dual-career household in two differing geographical contexts engage in two types of food engagements. The first type, concerned with the ordinary feeding of the family, is readily identifiable as a project in that they are purposeful (Hagerstrand 1982). The accounts of these projects demonstrated how food and feeding are used intentionally by parents to create future memories of family, demonstrate family cohesiveness and caring relationships, and also to define a particular group of individuals into a specific family that is recognisably separate from other groups organised as families. The motivation of our participants to engage with the specific and time intensive family food practices that were part of their regular routines was their care for their children and sometimes their spouse. The second type of food engagements concerned lunchtime at work. It was apparent from the accounts that participant's attachments to these engagements as projects was much less and is demonstrated by their willingness to forgo lunch if it was inconvenient or impinged upon other activities such as work or even future family engagements.

What is clear from this is that initiatives aimed at reducing diet related health problems should consider how eating is attached to particular projects in ways that include not just the purpose of a particular food project, but the strength of that relationship. Linking healthy eating to caring, for example may improve the ways that parents feed their children (and was expressed as such by our households), but without enabling a conceptual link between food and for example, success at work or that healthy eating by adults contributes to healthy families, there is likely to be little change in the eating practices of adults when they are not engaged with doing the family.

Finally, we considered how participants engaged with the normative of a proper family meal. In both geographical concepts, the notion of a proper meal, to be fed to family members was clearly defined and readily identifiable, although it was configured differently in each context. Despite this clear definition, in all our households and as described by our two cases, family meals are practically practiced in ways that do not always resemble this trope. In our two families, for example, breakfast was more easily accommodated into their schedules. This meal, rather than the Sunday lunch, became the ritualised

representation of the family and enabled the regular identification work involved in creating and maintaining these two families. If family circumstances change such that it makes it difficult to accommodate this particular meal it may be abandoned because of the embeddedness of this meal in the daily schedules of household members and its relationship to practicality. It is likely, however, that another solution will be provided as the shared meal is held as being important by parents. What this tells us, is that while it may appear that there is a “care deficit” that is measurable in the decline of the traditional “family meal” in truth as long as parents continue to care for their children and for each other they will endeavour to invent ways of practicing family that are suitable to their situation because of the importance of ritual in this process. Thus, efforts aimed at low income families should focus less on reproducing normative notions of eating and feeding and emphasise instead the ways that family cohesion and care may fit within the specific conditions of each family’s circumstances.

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<sup>i</sup> In a recent report the World Health Organisation (2002) argues that there needs to be a coordinated European health policy that integrates a range of social policies concerning the production, availability, and selling of food to consumers. This report, in focusing on production rather than where food is consumed.

<sup>ii</sup> Tamas's father's cooking is not unusual in Hungarian Culture. Traditionally the goulashes and meat stews were prepared by herdsmen who tended the livestock. Recipes are handed down from father to son. It is only more recently that women have started to cook these dishes but the job of tasting and seasoning is left to male householders.