

**Nourishing, nurturing and controlling:
exploring structure-agency interactions in children's
food practices across family and school contexts**

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Summary

Widespread concerns about obesity and overweight, have led to a focus on children's diets, with government responses emphasising family responsibility for the provision of healthy food and for nurturing independent food choices. In parallel, the health promoting school approach attempts to reinforce messages within communities and families.

Despite the potential for promoting consistent messages across settings, understanding the interface between families and schools remains limited, with a failure to appreciate the way in which food is embedded within social relationships and contexts.

This study aimed to explore the family-school interface. It focused on the recursive interplay between agency and structure, employing 'practices' as a way of exploring how agency transforms structure, while also attending to taken-for-granted meanings of food as expressions of the structure.

Case study methodology was employed with eleven families across three communities in South Wales to explore the perspectives of parents (n=18) and children (n=18). Audio-diaries together with interviews unpacked tacit understandings behind food practices, which are often difficult to articulate. Interviews with primary school heads and teachers (n=5) explored schools' experiences of family-school interactions.

This thesis adds new understandings of the family-school interface, illustrating shifting discourses of control as individuals occupy multiple contexts at different times. These revealed dilemmas in the accomplishment of control: providing children with a balanced diet alongside the practicalities of parental-work, while attending to individualised food preferences. Structure-agency perspectives also uncovered multiple layers of meaning attached to food, emphasising the need to take account of the social context within which control is navigated.

Targeted recommendations are considered. For schools, suggestions include improved partnership working with children and parents in order to overcome existing inherent tensions. For families, recommendations acknowledge the wider significance of food beyond nutrition, appreciating the contexts and constraints of family life. Policy recommendations relate to food availability, affordability, and changes to employment structures.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Policy and research context

The restructuring of the public realm, and the shifting focus from the morality of the family unit towards the welfare and concern of the child, has resulted in a stronger reference to ‘parental responsibility’, and according to Wyness (2014), this has become a central feature of political rhetoric in England and Wales over the last twenty years. Parental responsibility extends to the physical, emotional and social integrity of children within the family, and against a backdrop of concerns about overweight and obesity, the notion of the responsible parent also encompasses children’s dietary health (Foresight 2007; Stamatakis 2010).

Alongside a focus on families, efforts to facilitate dietary health improvement amongst children have been directed towards schools due to the capacity of such approaches to reach large numbers of children simultaneously and shape habitual behaviours (Parcel et al. 2000; Bonell et al. 2013; Langford et al. 2014). The potential of improving children’s health through interventions which link families and schools has also been posited (Denman 1998; Lister-Sharp et al. 1999; Shaya et al. 2008; Waters E et al. 2011). Initiatives such as the health promoting school adopt a holistic approach to health improvement and links with families have been identified as key to this approach with schools viewed as one of many domains of influence on children’s health (Langford et al. 2014; Welsh Assembly Government 2014). Despite some promising approaches, there is a need for more effective mechanisms for linking schools and families and further work is needed to develop understandings of the family-school interface (Metcalf et al. 2008; Sormunen et al. 2013; Wyness 2014).

This thesis examines the shortcomings of approaches to link families and schools around food by addressing four interrelated areas of enquiry: how families respond to policy discourses related to families and food; understanding the family-school interface around food with particular reference to power relations and allocations of responsibilities; explorations of the role of food in family life, taking account of negotiations, priorities and meanings; and, elucidating patterns of interaction

between parents and children in relation to food in the family and school contexts. Existing research for each of these areas is summarised below identifying gaps which this study aims to address.

Firstly, there is a need for further research into how families respond to policy discourses around food. Public health policies have been criticised for the way they emphasise parental (especially maternal) responsibility through medicalised discourses (Murphy 2003; O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010). This forms part of a broader critique of neo-liberal shifts towards increasing responsabilisation and individualisation, invoking notions of the state's relationship with the public, a relationship which has received considerable attention from within the public health field and more widely (Bell 1996; Gustafsson 2002; Asato 2004; Halpern and Bates 2004; Stewart-Brown 2005; Lewis 2007; Alvarez-Rosete 2008; Reeves 2009; Bednarek 2011; Hemming 2011).

Studies of responsabilisation have mainly focussed on the way in which such discourses are framed by policy and media, and there have been few attempts to consider individual's interpretation and response (Gillies 2005; Roy 2008). One of the aims of this study is to examine how families positioned themselves in relation to these policy discourses and their response is examined in terms of what it reveals about the nature of their relationship with the state, and also what function it serves in terms of producing and reproducing everyday food practices.

The second main area of inquiry for this study relates to power dynamics between schools and families and there is a history of researchers considering these issues in relation to food and education more broadly (Alldred et al. 2002; Metcalfe 2006; Metcalfe et al. 2008; Pike 2008; Pike and Colquhoun 2009; Pike 2010; Metcalfe et al. 2011). The potential benefits of linking schools and families for education and health need to be understood against this backdrop of tensions and power imbalances which sometimes sees the school emerge as a dominant player (Gustafsson 2002; Daniel and Gustafsson 2010). A further level of complexity which needs to be explored is the tri-partite relationship between the state, schools and families with questions around how schools respond to policy directives to improve children's dietary health. Researchers have considered the awkward relationships between

children, parents, schools and the state in the case of school meals (Gustafsson 2002), but there is scope to add to these debates around the shifting boundaries between families and schools, and how this relates to other family-school interactions around food.

The third main area of inquiry relates to the lived experiences of family food and family life. There is a well-established literature on the place of food in everyday lives and this has gone some way to locate family food within its broader context – in terms of political, cultural and sociological dimensions (Devine et al. 2003; Lawton et al. 2008; Delormier et al. 2009; Curtis et al. 2010). Focussing on lived experiences includes looking beyond the logic of top-down policies and interventions to consider the implications at the family level – ‘bottom-up’ responses which are ‘often informed by quite different social perceptions, practices and assumptions’ (Willis 2003, p. 390). Assumptions at the family level are beginning to be explored, drawing on the important perspectives of children and young people (Wills et al. 2008; Backett-Milburn et al. 2010a; Backett-Milburn et al. 2010b; Wills et al. 2011). This study develops this literature by looking at the lived experiences of doing food in families where there are younger children. More specifically it shifts away from looking at food behaviour to consider food practices and also considers agency (the power people have to change) as well as context (relationships with others, everyday activities and different settings), (Frohlich et al. 2001; Delormier et al. 2009).

The final area of inquiry relates to exploring parent-child interactions around food and understanding the rationales and meanings behind these interactions. Contemporary family food policy overlooks the way in which parent-child relations are imbued with meaning beyond nutrition, and instead it makes assumptions about hierarchical and unidirectional parent-child relations (Curtis 2011). Research on parent-child relationships has seen a shift in interest from unilateral transmission (what is passed from parents to children) towards an interest in reciprocal processes (how children influence parents) (Fine and Norris 1989), which builds on developments around the role of the ‘mediating child’ and the concept of ‘child as social agent’ able to influence those around them (Wyness 2014, p. 66). With a specific focus on food, research has started to take account of the changing nature of

families and the shift away from traditional parent-child hierarchies, with recognition of the process of co-consumption between parents and children (O'Connell and Brannen 2014). This emphasis on negotiation between parents and children in different contexts and at different times deserves further exploration, paying attention to what lies beneath parent-child interactions including socio-economic differences and different parental ideas and values about food and childhood.

1.2 Research aims

In response to these research challenges and building on existing research around families and food, this study aims to understand how families interact with schools in terms of food and eating, taking account of the perspectives of children and parents, and seeking to understand how food and eating is managed in the flow of everyday life. The overall study aim is to understand the pattern and rationale for food practices in families with children aged six to eleven years, and how this interacts with children's experiences in primary school. The main research aims are as follows and further details, as well as more specific objectives, are described at the end of the literature chapters (Chapter Three):

- 1. to understand how family food practices are discursively displayed and framed in relation to state and society;**
- 2. to understand how family-school relationships mediate broader state-public relationships;**
- 3. to explore the main aspects of the lived experiences of family food including challenges and constraints encountered; and**
- 4. to understand patterns of interaction between parents and children in relation to food in the family and the school.**

1.3 Thesis structure

The first two chapters which follow this introduction (Chapters Two and Three), provide a review of the literature which informed the development of the research questions. This is followed by a chapter on research methods including the overall methodological approach (Chapter Four). The empirical results are detailed in four

chapters (Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight), and the conclusions are presented in Chapter Nine. This includes a discussion of the results in the context of the literature initially identified, as well as implications for policy and practice and suggestions for future research. Supporting information can be found in the Appendices which are referenced throughout the text.

The aim of **Chapter Two** is to assess the policy focus on families in response to public health problems relating to children's dietary health. The chapter considers strengths and weaknesses of policy approaches and examines the concept of 'family practices' as a way forward. Such a conceptual lens acknowledges the changing nature of contemporary family life and the need to understand more about 'doing' family rather than its structure and function. The politicised nature of families is also explored, particularly the way in which approaches to children's dietary health are framed within neo-liberal policy discourses, with an emphasis on individualism and responsibilisation.

Overall, this chapter makes a case for considering the perspectives of families in responding to policy approaches, and how this relates to broader relationships between the public and the state. As a way of overcoming an emphasis on behavioural approaches a more contextualised approach to families is put forward, which considers a range of influences through a socio-ecological framework.

In **Chapter Three** broader relations between the state and the public are considered with a focus on how these relations are mediated through the school. The chapter begins by exploring the concept of the health promoting school and the way in which children's dietary health has been addressed within this. The potential and challenges of linking families and schools around food are then explored in terms of how this forms part of the broader challenges of adopting a settings approach to health promotion.

The chapter concludes by drawing on theoretical understandings of the relationship between structure, agency and practices as a way forward for investigating family approaches to food and eating. This 'collective lifestyles' approach aims to understand how food practices are socially constructed, focussing on the taken-for-

granted meanings behind practices and the values and priorities that influence these (Frohlich et al. 2002a).

Chapter Four begins by making the case for a social constructionist orientation and its merits in drawing out lived experiences alongside more discursive insights into family food. Within this overall approach, case study methodology, drawing on a combination of interview and diary methods, is presented as the approach most suited to the research questions.

The chapter then proceeds to establish the main elements of the study design detailing sampling, recruitment of schools and families, and approach to data collection. It concludes by describing the approach to analysis which included thematic analysis together with elements of mid-range discourse analysis.

Chapter Five, the first empirical chapter, explores how families positioned their food practices in relation to broad social relationships with state and society, which is important for understanding the wider context of families' relationships with food. This includes acknowledging how families framed their food practices with reference to their relationships outside the family and their interactions with social norms and influences. In terms of families' relationship with the state, this chapter looks at the extent to which families accepted the discourse of individual responsibility for health, particularly responsibility for children's dietary health. It also considers how families responded to public health improvement messages exploring patterns of acceptance, resistance and transformation of public health advice.

When presenting accounts of their food practices families also reflected on their relationship with others, and this chapter explores the utility of these social comparisons in terms of the way in which families considered their food practices to be aligned with or distinct from others, and what this adds to our understandings of their own food practices.

This chapter introduces a number of themes which are then developed in later chapters. Whereas this chapter considers families' relationship with food in the broad

context, Chapter Six looks in more detail at their relationships around school food, and relationships with the state in the school context. Accounts about broad social relationships and how families navigate control hints at the sorts of the challenges they face in ‘doing’ family food and these are explored in more detail in Chapter Seven. Whereas the discussion of social relationships in this chapter is at a broad level, more fine-grained explorations (particularly parent-child relationships), are presented in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Six aims to understand how families and schools experience, interact with and make sense of the family-school interface in terms of food and eating practices. This includes an understanding of the context of social tensions, politics and cultures in the family-school relationship, exploring connections and disconnections between food practices at home and at school.

This builds on the previous chapter in two ways. Firstly, it takes forward explorations of families’ relationships with policy and state, building on what the earlier chapter reported about different process of acceptance, resistance and transformation of policy in daily lives. This chapter explores more nuanced insights into the state-family interface focussed around how schools mediate these relationships. Secondly, this chapter adds to the emerging stories about families’ relationships with others, including parent-to-parent relationships via schools.

The findings are organised around three different dimensions of family-school interactions, with each demonstrating slightly different patterns of relationships. The first section highlights the way in which schools tried to control children's food, through a discourse of school as family. The second section gives a sense of how the school was positioned within the community, and attempts to address local issues. Finally, the third section considers parental resistance towards school food approaches in the context of school-parent relationships and parent-to-parent relationships, exploring how this produced a picture of messy socio-spatial relations.

Chapter Seven explores how families negotiated day-to-day challenges involved in constructing food practices. The main challenge to achieving aspirational practices was the nature of parental work (especially shift-work), children's specific food

preferences, and busy family lives (particularly relating to children's after-school activities). In addition to looking at the *range* of structural challenges, the emphasis in this chapter is on the way in which different challenges inter-relate, and how families navigate these challenges. It is this interaction between structures and agency that is the focus of this chapter, looking at the specific context and circumstances around each case study family.

As a way of organising the findings and navigating the varied nature of food and eating that was observed amongst families, three categories are considered: families who ate together most of the time; families where shared mealtimes occurred some of the time; and families where more individualised food practices were the norm. This organisation enables a discussion of the interplay between structures, agency and meanings, illustrating different levels of control and agency across different contexts.

Chapter Eight is the fourth and final empirical chapter and takes forward the findings in the previous chapter by focussing in more detail on family relationships (especially parent-child relationships).

This chapter is organised around three main patterns of parent-child interaction: parental control; child control; and parent-child negotiations. Moving beyond a focus on patterns, explanations for different types and levels of control reveal further dimensions of parent-child relations including the importance of family priorities and histories, as well as reflecting wider socio-cultural discourses about parental responsibilisation. Overall, attention is paid to the specific contexts of each case study and how this shapes the dynamics for parent-child interactions.

This chapter also considers variations in parent and child control between family and school contexts. Chapter Six identified the nature of school food practices and here the focus is on what happens to parental and child agency in the school context – and how it is strengthened, diminished, continued or contradicted.

Earlier chapters signalled the importance of looking at how families frame their food practices in relation to others and wider contexts, and the final part of this chapter

continues this theme by looking at broader family relations beyond the immediate nuclear family. In particular, the influence of grandparents is considered and how their emphasis on expressing love and care through food interacts with parental control to produce more varied patterns of adult-child food negotiations

Chapter Nine is the final chapter drawing out key points for discussion and conclusion. The chapter begins by summarising the principal research findings and highlights similarities and differences with relevant literatures. The main findings are also discussed more broadly identifying the empirical and conceptual contribution the thesis makes to knowledge on: families' complex relationships with food; the challenge of family-school connections; how families navigate contexts and constraints; and the nurturing and nourishing roles associated with caring for children. Reflections on the theoretical approach adopted in the study are considered, followed by a discussion of the policy and practice implications of the main findings, particularly the way in which links between families and schools can be better supported. Reflections on study design include reference to the strengths and limitations of the approach, and overall conclusions are then drawn out.

Chapter 2 Conceptualising food and families

2.1 Introduction

Examining contemporary approaches to family food within a context of the problematisation of children's dietary health highlights how policy and practice has largely focussed on changing individual behaviour. The limitations of behavioural approaches are considered more broadly before suggesting an alternative conceptualisation of health-related activities. As a way forward, the concept of 'family practices' is introduced as an approach for addressing the short-comings of these policy approaches, and the conceptual advantages of this approach are discussed.

Alongside a practices approach, a wider conceptualisation of context, which takes account of influences within and beyond the family, provides a more detailed understanding of the range of influences on family food. Drawing on the socio-ecological framework, policy, societal, community and family influences are discussed in terms of theoretical and empirical developments in the research literature. In particular, the discussion focuses on the way in which family food is embedded within neo-liberalism and how parents are held responsible for children's food.

2.2 Concerns about children's dietary health

Framed within concerns about population level nutrition, and associated increases in obesity and overweight in high-income countries (Foresight 2007; Department of Health 2011), children's dietary health has become problematised (Stamatakis et al. 2010). Particular concern centres around the detrimental effects on physical and social development, behaviour, concentration and school performance (Willett 1994; Griffiths et al. 2010). Conversely, the consequence of improved food consumption has been associated with higher educational attainment and improved levels of concentration (Moore et al. 2007a; Tapper et al. 2007).

Related to this are concerns about obesity levels with 27% of children aged four to ten years in the UK categorised as overweight or obese in 2012, and predictions that

obesity levels will continue to increase (McPherson K et al. 2007; Food Standards Agency and Department of Health 2012). Alongside this are concerns about low levels of fruit and vegetable consumption and failure to meet the recommended ‘five-a-day’ standard (Food Standards Agency and Department of Health 2012). There is also evidence that this advice does not go far enough with the suggestion that people need to aim higher and continue to increase up to at least ‘seven-a-day’ or more (Kypridemos et al. 2014). This is in light of research which shows that those eating seven or more portions of fruit and vegetables each day have the lowest mortality risk from any cause (Oyebode et al. 2014).

Amongst these overall concerns about the nation’s diet are associated health inequalities across the UK, including the marked difference in fruit and vegetable consumption between socio-economic groups (Department of Health 2004) and clear differences in diets according to income and education levels (CEDAR 2014). Contributing to these health inequalities is the increasing scale of food poverty, which has been reported as a huge problem in the UK where around one in three children live in households where income is below half the mean household income, and where the problem is compounded by inequalities in access to food (Dowler and Caraher 2003). The Trussell Trust report that 2012 to 2013 saw the biggest rise in numbers given emergency food since the charity started in 2000, with almost 350,000 people receiving food over the 12 month period, a rise attributed to recession related influences and to changes to the benefits system (The Trussell Trust 2013).

2.3 Children’s dietary health in Wales

In Wales, food poverty is a particular cause for concern with the number of people using community food initiatives on the increase, to the extent that health professionals have expressed concern that food poverty could be the next major health emergency to affect people in Wales (The Guardian 2013). This also has implications for the health of children and young people with one in five children living in food poverty, rising to one in four in the South Wales Valleys (Public Health Wales Observatory 2013).

Compared with the rest of the UK, Wales has particular challenges around children's dietary health. Based on self-reported measures, the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC) reported levels of overweight and obesity amongst 11 year olds as 19% for Wales, 16% for Scotland and 14% for England (Currie et al. 2012). Wales also compares less well than other European countries, for example, by the age of 11, children in Wales eat less fruit than almost all their European counterparts with 39% of girls and 36% of boys eating fruit daily at age 11 years (compared with a European average of 46% and 38% respectively) (Currie et al. 2012).

Drawing on interviewer measurements (rather than self-report), a third (34%) of children aged two to 15 years were classed as overweight or obese in Wales in 2012 (Welsh Government 2013). This corresponds with figures from the first round of the Child Measurement Programme for Wales conducted in 2012, which reported that nearly three out of ten children in Reception Year (aged three to four years) were categorised as overweight or obese (Public Health Wales NHS Trust 2013).

Again the figures for Wales compare less well with the rest of the UK. The prevalence of overweight and obesity in Reception Year in Wales (28%) was higher than that for England (23%) and it was also higher than the English region with the highest prevalence (25% in the North East) (Public Health Wales NHS Trust 2013). Also, (although not directly comparable), data for Scotland suggest that at school entry age, children are less likely to be overweight or obese than in Wales (Public Health Wales NHS Trust 2013). The Child Measurement Programme also points towards inequalities *within* Wales with the prevalence of obesity (12.5% across Wales) highest in the most deprived areas (14.3% in the most deprived fifth) and lowest in the least deprived (9.4% in the least deprived fifth) (Public Health Wales NHS Trust 2013).

Levels of obesity and overweight in Wales (as in other countries) seem to be stabilising as demonstrated by six years of data for children between 2007 and 2013. Over this period there has been little change, with 36% of two to 15 year olds reported as overweight or obese in 2007, compared with 34% in 2012 (Welsh Government 2013). Despite this stabilising trend, children's poor dietary health continues to be high on political agendas and the following section considers the

policy response across the UK, focussing in particular on the policy response in Wales.

2.4 Policy response: making families responsible for food

Amidst concerns about deteriorating nutritional behaviour, and increasingly sedentary lifestyles amongst adults and children, there has been a huge policy focus on improving nutrition and much of this policy rhetoric has focussed on families (Foresight 2007; Department of Health 2011). The consensus is that the causes of poor dietary health are multiple and complex including food supply, price, availability and marketing (Furst et al. 1996; Lobstein and Jackson Leach 2007), as well as environmental influences, which include aspects of the physical or built environments which dis-incentivise healthy eating or physical activity (Swinburn et al. 1999; Reidpath et al. 2002; Story et al. 2002; Jones et al. 2007; Morland and Evenson 2009). Attention has also focussed on the role of advertising (McDermott et al. 2006; Schor and Ford 2007), and media influences also shape the wider context for nutrition and health, contributing towards the UK context being flooded with facts and advice about nutrition from a range of different sources (De Brún et al. 2013).

Overall, there is also an increasing sense of alarm about what people are eating which includes the public health research landscape being saturated with contradictory evidence. Within media discourses sensational headlines of ‘new’ associations between food and disease are becoming almost a daily occurrence, with a particular emphasis on refined sugar emerging as the ‘concealed villain’ resulting in a context which consists of ‘public anxiety and a number of confused politicians’ (Kypridemos et al. 2014, p. 1).

Despite acknowledgements that there are a diverse range of factors influencing children’s eating patterns, much of the public health literature focuses on the importance of the family environment in shaping food preferences (Gibson et al. 1998; Wardle et al. 2005) especially during early and middle childhood (Birch and Davison 2001; Skafida 2013; Gadhoke et al. 2014). Assessments of how families determine children’s food have centred on the physical and social environment,

which includes the availability and accessibility of foods, as well as parental education and time constraints (Patrick and Nicklas 2005).

A raft of studies have emphasised the importance of parents in steering children's food choices and behaviours. Studies have shown that the consumption of unhealthful foods is linked with food availability, thus the role of parents is regarded as paramount as they are held responsible for making certain foods available (Savage et al. 2007; Skafida 2013; Neumark-Sztainer et al. 2014). Related to this are the preferences of parents, and children's knowledge and attitude towards food seems to mirror that of their parents (Patrick and Nicklas 2005). Parental feeding strategies have also been associated with different patterns of consumption in children with repeated taste exposure and modelling found to be effective, and pressuring and restricting seen as less productive (Fisher 2007; Moore et al. 2007b; Moore et al. 2010b). Drawing on the potential of family environments, interventions focussed on families have brought about effective dietary change with reports of increased consumption of low-fat starchy foods, particularly where education about dietary change is accompanied with a more intensive intervention, including practical cooking skills and a personal goal setting strategy for families (Curtis et al. 2012).

The importance of the physical and social dimensions of family life (and of parenting in particular), is demonstrated by the increasing policy emphasis on this domain. As part of England's Public Health Framework, a range of campaigns and strategies have been established to target the family at different stages of the life-course (Department of Health 2010). Within this there is a particular focus on targeting women – before, during and after pregnancy, as well as into motherhood in the early years, with the assumption that this will lay important foundations for healthy lives (Warin et al. 2008). These strategies rely on individuals making healthy choices supported by promotional campaigns and 'nudging' approaches (Bonell et al. 2011a; Bonell et al. 2011b).

A more direct emphasis on the role of parents comes through in government guidance on overweight and obesity. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) produced guidelines on the prevention, identification, assessment and management of overweight and obesity in adults and children, emphasising that

all actions to improve diet should involve parents and carers to help their children achieve a healthy weight (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence 2006). In helping families, the guidance suggests that ‘children should eat regular meals in a pleasant, sociable environment, with parents, with all family members eating the same foods’ (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence 2006, p. 11). There is also more specific guidance aimed at individual families, such as providing feedback on children’s BMI (body mass index) status as assessed through the National Child Measurement Programme (Department of Health 2013). In England three quarters of local areas provided feedback to parents in 2011 which comprised a letter summarising their child’s weight, height and BMI category, together with information on local services (Department of Health 2013). Such approaches emphasise the role of parents and families in taking responsibility for their children’s health with an emphasis on ‘empowering individuals’ through provision of guidance and information (Department of Health 2011, p. 6).

Within this focus on families, there is a specific focus on mothers and maternal responsibility, with concerns about children’s dietary health serving to reinforce women’s roles and responsibilities as carers (Maher et al. 2010). This individualistic approach towards childhood nutrition resonates with broader governmental approaches to public health in England which have been criticised for adopting a narrow conceptualisation of the challenges faced (Bonell et al. 2011a; Bonell et al. 2011b).

The Welsh Government approach to addressing childhood nutrition has also prioritised the importance of families, although there is some recognition of the broader approach needed to shift away from individuals and consider wider contexts and structures. This was evident within the Welsh Government’s public health framework with core aims focussed on ‘reducing inequities in health’ and making ‘health a shared goal’ (Welsh Assembly Government 2009). Recognition of the need to address structural inequalities also extends to child health and in a foreword to the report on the Child Measurement Programme for Wales, the Chief Medical Officer expressed how the Welsh Government is ‘committed to support healthy growth and reduce obesity through a range of actions, particularly on the root causes, such as poverty’ (Public Health Wales NHS Trust 2013, p. 1).

A similar approach to addressing structural inequalities can be recognised with Wales' overall approach to public health as reflected in its proposals (Green Paper) for a Public Health Bill which was welcomed for the way it signalled a more radical approach to tackle health inequalities with its 'health in all policies' approach (Welsh Government 2012; Shareck et al. 2013; Fletcher et al. 2014). These sentiments have continued through to the White Paper proposals ('Listening to you – your health matters') with its emphasis on collective action at the level of the individual and the community (Welsh Government 2014). The White Paper emphasises collective action across all public services in Wales, positioning public health within a broad framework rather than as a stand-alone issue, which continues the notion of 'health is everyone's business' (Welsh Government 2014, p. 7). The White Paper emphasises 'shared responsibility' which consists of government and the public taking on respective roles: 'Government need to deliver on creating the social conditions and environments that are conducive to good health, and providing the services necessary for this. There is a corresponding responsibility on all of us to look after our own health, and access services appropriately when we need to' (Welsh Government 2014, p. 3). This overall approach seems to be informed by a notion of prudent health care where 'risk is redistributed from the state to individuals' (Maher et al. 2010). In terms of policy actions, this has led to attempts to 'intervene at points where there are significant potential long-term benefits from taking action, both in terms of the health of individuals and in seeking to avoid higher long term costs associated with preventable ill health' (Welsh Government 2014, p. 9).

Wales' prioritisation of health inequalities also comes through in its national nutrition strategy which is described as being underpinned by an approach 'linked to wider ecological public health' (Caraher et al. 2009, p. 18). Wales launched its nutrition strategy in 2003 – Food and Wellbeing, Reducing Inequalities through a Nutrition Strategy for Wales (Food Standards Agency and Welsh Assembly Government 2003). Interestingly the name of the policy was changed during the consultation and development phase in order to reflect how inequalities were moving up the political agenda in Wales at this time (Caraher et al. 2009). The strategy consisted of actions covering the whole population, with a specific focus on addressing more vulnerable societal groups including low income groups, infants,

children and young people (Food Standards Agency and Welsh Assembly Government 2003).

This strategy was succeeded by the Welsh Government's Food and Fitness Plan with an emphasis on dealing with obesity-related health issues, again prioritising the challenges related to children and young people (Welsh Assembly Government 2006a). A number of actions for tackling dietary health have been introduced as part of this latest strategy, with a specific focus on families and children.

In 2010, Wales (following England) introduced the Change4Life campaign (National Health Service (NHS) 2009; Welsh Assembly Government 2010) which focussed on families with children aged five to eleven years, encouraging them to achieve and maintain healthy body weights through lifestyle changes related to improved physical activity and diet. One of the main instruments of Change4Life was a high visibility media campaign which offered parents a series of remedies to encourage their children to exercise more and eat well. Although awareness of the campaign has been positive, there have been concerns about: the fact that awareness was not translated into measurable behaviour changes; the absence of an evidence base for this type of approach; the absence of mechanisms for sustaining behaviour change; and it has also been criticised for not being joined up with other policy initiatives such as actions focussed on school meals (Caraher et al. 2009; Wyness and O'Connor 2013).

Under the umbrella of the Food and Fitness Plan, another initiative focussed on families was the all-Wales MEND (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition...Do It!) programme which aimed to tackle obesity amongst children aged seven to 13 years (MEND 2014). This began in 2009 and offered a free ten-week course including practical advice about eating well and exercising more. As with the Change4Life campaign, MEND has also been criticised for focussing too much on downstream individualistic issues rather than a more population-wide public health approach (Caraher et al. 2009). Thus despite the policy rhetoric in Wales suggesting the importance of moving beyond individual behaviours, the ground level strategies suggest that an individualistic approach endures, and the promise of tackling the root causes through a 'health in all policies' approach is not discernible amongst these

sorts of actions. Instead, the actions and approaches seem focussed on persuading people to change their health behaviours and these types of 'behavioural health-promotion strategies tend to assume that people are blank sheets ready to be receptive to health promotion strategies' (Baum and Fisher 2014, p. 215). During a time when the public have become bombarded with health messages from a range of media, governmental and societal sources, there are important questions around why people do not appear to put this information into practice in their daily lives (Adamson and Benelam 2013).

2.5 Beyond changing behaviour

Behavioural approaches dominate wider public health discourses (beyond dietary health), and it is increasingly recognised that although behaviour change interventions play a significant role, interventions which are focussed solely on behaviour change are unlikely to reduce health inequalities or develop sustainable health improvement at the population level. As Hawe and colleagues state, there is a need to reverse current custom and to begin to theorise about 'communities themselves as complex systems and how the health problem or phenomena of interest is recurrently produced by that system' (Hawe et al. 2004, p. 1562). It has also been noted that although there may be recognition of the social determinants of health in the policy rhetoric, governments tend to follow this with actions and strategies based on individual behaviour change (Popay et al. 2010; Baum and Fisher 2014). Popay and others describe this discrepancy as 'lifestyle drift' which is a 'tendency for policy to start off recognising the need for action on upstream social determinants of health inequalities only to drift downstream to focus largely on individual lifestyle factors' (Popay et al. 2010, p. 148).

Governments appear attracted to behavioural approaches, despite the weight of evidence for the social determinants of health, with some commentators arguing that health policies are unlikely to ever address the broader influences (Baum and Fisher 2014). The emphasis on health behaviour infers moral judgements about responsibility and agency, and 'this individualising characteristic can all too easily align itself, and further legitimate, public health and policy strategies that ignore complex structural issues that underpin the political economy of health' (Cohn 2014, p. 160).

Thus, despite the limitations of behavioural approaches, they seem to dominate government public health approaches, and this has been identified as a by-product of a number of factors. This includes: the way in which public health has a history in the field of medicine which has tended to favour behavioural interventions; ideological factors and the shift to neo-liberalism accompanied by an ethos of individualism; practical factors which includes the ‘inherent’ logic of behavioural approaches which may be regarded as easier to implement and evaluate than more complex intersectoral approaches; and finally, the role of corporations lobbying governments to protect their interests has also contributed to the dominance of behavioural health promotion (Baum and Fisher 2014).

The problem with this behavioural conceptualisation is that it overlooks other aspects of health-related activities and fails to grasp the way in which behaviour is related to particular circumstances and contexts, thus suggesting a need to ‘problematised the universality of health promotion messages’ (Warin et al. 2008, p. 97). Crossley argues that rising obesity rates are ‘a social fact’ (Crossley 2004, p. 235). That is, they are not simply a reflection of the body weight of individuals across a society, but rather a fact about society which necessitates an analysis that moves beyond a focus on individual interactions, individual children or food provided by individual families. This view is endorsed by Delormier et al and they argue that ‘the most important limitation of studying eating strictly as a behaviour under the control of an individual, is that it exaggerates the extent to which rational choice drives what people choose to eat, and underestimates the extent to which eating is embedded in the flow of day-to-day life’ (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 217).

In summary, the discussion so far has identified the importance of children’s dietary health as a policy priority, with children in Wales a particular area of concern within the UK (and within Europe). In response to these public health challenges, policy and practice have mainly centred around a behavioural, individualised response, although in Wales there appears to be greater recognition of the role of wider determinants (albeit at a rhetorical level). The next section proceeds to discuss how many of the limitations of a health behaviour approach (with its focus on the individual and its neglect of context) can be overcome by adopting a health *practices*

approach, as this acknowledges the contexts in which actions take place through interactions with others. Such an approach looks towards a broad range of influences, systems and complexities, and importantly notions of 'power and politics' are central features of attempts to bring about change (Cohn 2014, p. 160).

2.6 Family practices

The following sections introduce the concept of 'family practices' which acknowledges the significance of contextual influences, and also takes account of the ways in which families are changing. This is associated with a shift away from structural or functional definitions of family life towards a focus on what families do. As Warde points out, sociological interest in practices focuses on 'both doings and sayings' that is 'the practical activity and its representations' (Warde 2005, p. 134). Structural approaches tend to lead to identifying types of families defined by marriage and parenthood which overlooks the activities family members do together, whereas functional approaches tend to stress the positive benefits of families and what they do to support each other, overlooking questions about why not all families function well. Such critiques of structural and functional approaches paved the way for 'studying the interactions and transactions of family life through the study of family practices' (Christensen 2004, p. 381).

Morgan (2011) has championed the notion of 'family practices' and describes a number of implications for the way families are researched. Firstly, a practices approach offers a way of shifting between the perspective of the researcher and those being researched - although Morgan acknowledges that families do not talk about practices - 'they just do them and live them' (Morgan 2011, p. 5). Secondly, Morgan talks about a sense of the active - 'doing' family and taking account of what appears to be trivial or meaningless. So instead of looking at family roles as static, the emphasis is on doing mothering and doing fathering. The third implication of using a practices approach is the way it provides a sense of the everyday – in terms of that shared by a significant number of people and in terms of the activities that appear mundane and hardly worth mention. Morgan draws a distinction between a family practices approach and a social problems approach which focuses on dysfunction within families. A practices approach looks at commonalities across families and in some ways cuts across differences in ethnicity or class. A final implication of

Morgan's definition of family practices is that it implies a link with history and biography and recognition that such practices are partly shaped by economics and socio-cultural influences.

As well as focussing on lived experiences, the concept of family practices also attends to the question of discourse and how we need to consider these as part of the 'context of constraints' within which family practices are located (Morgan 2011, p. 68). Morgan talks about practices and discourses as being closely intertwined, and discourses are implicated in practices even if families' accounts appear to deny the applicability of these discourses to their own daily lives. Morgan concludes that an examination of family practices cannot overlook discursive considerations as they are both so tightly connected.

Contemporary approaches towards family food would benefit from a family practices approach and this may go some way to developing a more contextual understanding of processes around food, eating and health. Delormier et al provide a pertinent definition of family practices in relation to food, centred on what families do: 'family feeding practices are the set of food-related social practices that take place in social groupings whose enduring practice patterns characterise its participants and their interactions as families' (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 220).

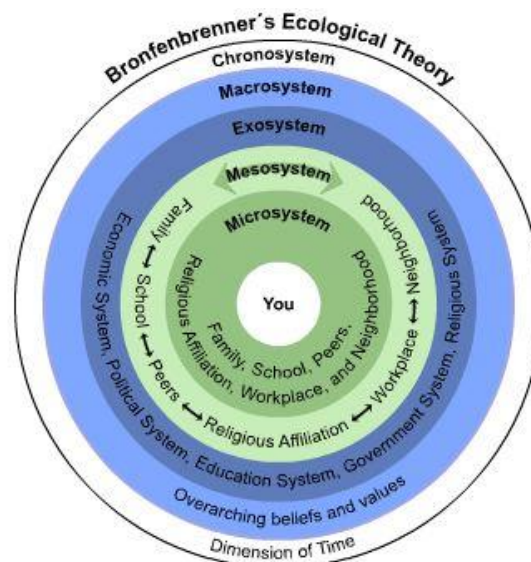
One of the most appealing dimensions of the family practices approach is the way it illuminates these 'interactions' and connections within and outside the family, and these are arguably of significance in understanding the broader lived experience of food. The next section introduces the socio-ecological framework as a perspective for examining these different connections within and beyond the family.

2.7 Socio-ecological perspectives on family food

The socio-ecological approach dates back to associations with Darwinian concepts of the web of life and the role of environmental adaptation (Green et al. 2000), and this was taken forward in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (Figure 1). Bronfenbrenner's contention was that human development takes place in different social settings all of which are interconnected. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory delineated four types of nested systems: the microsystem (such as the family

or classroom); the mesosystem (which is two microsystems in interaction); the exosystem (external environments which directly influence development such as the parental workplace); and the macrosystem (the larger socio-cultural context). Bronfenbrenner later added a fifth system called the chronosystem (the evolution of the external systems over time). Each system contains roles, norms and rules that can powerfully shape development. Whereas earlier versions of human ecology were closely related to biological processes, later interpretations give more credence to the social and cultural aspects of people-environment relations, hence the term socio-ecology is used in more recent applications (Rayner and Lang 2012).

Figure 1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory



Downloaded from: faculty.weber.edu/tlday/1500/systems.jpg

Despite its potential, ecological systems theory has not been used extensively in practice and has been regarded as too complex. The ecological credo of 'everything influences everything else' carried to its logical extreme leaves health practitioners with little basis on which to set priorities' (Green et al. 2000, p. 19). The theory is also criticized for failing to provide specific leverage points to enable health promotion to intervene (Stokols 1992). There have been some attempts to overcome this complexity in order to operationalise the socio-ecological framework and develop an approach to public health which acknowledges multiple simultaneous influences on behaviour. A socio-ecological framework developed by McLeroy

(1988) adapts ecological systems theory to allow for complementary levels of change, approaches and targets which includes higher level policy and institutional influences and lower level influences within and between individuals including norms, roles and networks. McLeroy's model builds on previous work by Bronfenbrenner to present a model of the main determinants of health which together 'reflect the range of strategies currently available for health promotion programming' (McLeroy et al. 1988, p. 355).

Such an approach enables the identification of contextual dimensions relevant for health improvement, and from a theoretical perspective is useful for constructing models of multi-level relationships and processes. With regard to children's dietary health, the application of a socio-ecological perspective has been shown to facilitate a theoretical, methodological and evaluative understanding of the processes involved in relation to children's lunchtime practices in schools (Moore et al. 2011), and in relation to understanding food choice throughout the school day (Townsend and Foster 2011).

With regards to children's dietary health within families, a socio-ecological approach places the family within a complex, interconnected, and multilevel network of social systems or 'ecological milieu' that interact with each other to influence both individual and family level beliefs, values, perceptions and behaviours (Novilla et al. 2006, p. 29). Socio-ecological perspectives on family health have proved useful in examining family food choices (Devine et al. 2006) and food management strategies (Inglis et al. 2005). Christensen (2004) captures the main socio-ecological influences on the family including: policy influences, societal influences (such as social and economic change); community influences (including local relationships and networks and cultures at the community-level); institutional (including school policies and structures); and family influences (including relations between family members, particularly parent-child relations). Contemporary policy approaches to family food seem to have neglected these contextual layers of influence, which are arguably of significance if we are to move beyond individualised behavioural approaches.

At the policy level, state-family relations are considered below in terms of a neo-liberal policy context, followed by a consideration of the societal influences on family food, particularly the context of changing family life and the shift towards the de-regulation of food and eating. Community level influences are then considered, looking at the way in which local relationships influence family food, and in the final section family influences are discussed, particularly parent-child relationships and issues around gender. Whereas policy, societal, community and family influences are considered below, a further dimension of the socio-ecological framework - institutional influences from schools - is discussed in Chapter Three.

2.8 Policy influences: a neo-liberal approach to families and food

The government shift towards neo-liberalism is pivotal to understanding the state's contemporary individualised approach to families and food, and this is linked to the way in which food in Britain has become increasingly politicised, including a series of 'food scares' and crises in the farming industry since the end of the 1980s, which contributed to lowering consumer confidence in the safety and quality of food (Jackson 2009). This section provides a brief overview of the main characteristics of the shift towards neo-liberalism, before focussing on the implications for family food and exploring how families have responded.

The individualistic focus on families as evidenced in food policy approaches, is synonymous with a broader individualistic approach to public policy, the growth of neo-liberalism (following the 1970s) and the decline of the welfare state, which has mainly been discussed in terms of the negative consequences for inequalities and ultimately health (Coburn 2000). As Bauman states, 'the responsibility for resolving the quandaries generated by vexingly volatile and constantly changing circumstances is shifted onto the shoulders of individuals - who are now expected to be "free choosers" and to bear in full the consequences of their choices' (Bauman 2007, pp. 3-4). Thus, the redistribution of responsibility from the state to the individual and the thinning of social relations can be seen in government approaches to public health with a marked rise in preventative medicine, with individuals urged to stop smoking, eat less fat, exercise more and monitor their alcohol intake (Maher et al. 2010). As noted earlier in this chapter, within Wales there is acknowledgement of the need to consider wider contexts and structures but there are difficulties in achieving this,

with the policy emphasis shifting towards collective responsibility between the state and individuals (Welsh Government 2014).

2.8.1 Families' response to neo-liberal approaches

The neo-liberal context of policy shifts towards increasing individualisation, invoke notions of the state's relationship with the public and their relevant responsibilities (Halpern and Bates 2004). Family-state relations have been associated with distinctions between private and public realms, although this dichotomous relationship seems no longer relevant, and instead family structures have become more fragmented, while at the same time the approach to supporting children has been described as more 'individualised' and 'networked' in focus (Wyness 2014, p. 59). In terms of family-state relations, they have become 'more porous and contested, generating more complex networks of relationships between child, family and state' (Wyness 2014, p. 70).

Research has started to explore the ways in which parents (especially mothers), receive and respond to government advice about feeding their children. This emphasis on exploring public perceptions reflects a growing recognition of the way in which the views of the public are changing amidst a growing range of complex societal problems, and the suggestion that public services need to be reformed in order to respond to these challenges (Muir and Parker 2014).

Murphy's study of responsibilisation around infant feeding illustrates how mothers responded to policy-level discourses in terms of their engagement, resistance and refusal (Murphy 2003). Drawing on Foucauldian concepts of technologies of power and the panoptic gaze (Foucault 1991), Murphy illustrates how this sort of government control is executed through mothers' interactions with health professionals. In the case of early infant feeding for example, an emphasis on the benefits of breastfeeding implies that women who do not breastfeed put their own interests first. In this way mothering is rendered as self-monitoring and this starts even before the baby is born, with advice to pregnant mothers, and then continues through advice from mid-wives and health visitors (Murphy 2003).

Women who failed to follow the advice of experts did not merely ignore the advice – they were not ‘unaffected by the quiet coercion of normalising judgements’ and their resistance did not take place in a ‘morally neutral environment’ but instead, ‘the most powerful effect of the medicalised discourse is the attitude of self-policing it engenders in mothers as they let it play upon their self-assessments of their own feeding practices’ (Murphy 2003, p. 442). Although the women essentially resisted the dominant discourses around healthy infant feeding, the way they talked about this made it sound like they were acting responsibly. They were not subservient to the state, but through the process of resistance they were exerting their own control over the situation and forging out alternative, counter-discourses.

Notions of resistance and mistrust towards government advice have been further explored, looking at the meanings behind resistance and refusal, in particular highlighting the importance of family knowledge and expertise. O’Key and Hugh-Jones (2010) conducted a study of mothers’ accounts of the level of trust associated with healthy eating information and identified different and contrasting discursive positions established by mothers, which illustrates how the acceptance of nutritional advice compromised their identities as good mothers. Failure to take up health messages from different sources (government, food manufacturers and media) was associated with a mistrust of information, and this study highlighted the complexity of mistrust and the way in which it reflects underlying power dynamics between the message deliverer and the recipient (in this case the state and the family). O’Key and Hugh-Jones tried to understand this in more detail by looking at the meanings that mothers attached to such government messages, and the moral dimensions of feeding the family emerged as a central theme.

In line with Murphy’s study, mothers in O’Key and Hugh-Jones’ study demonstrated a mistrust of healthy eating information from government but they still adhered to a healthy eating agenda. They seemed to navigate their way through the confusing health information using their own maternal instinct, and were able to make ‘good’ judgements which reflected ‘good’ mothering. Through their talk they positioned themselves and others in the family as reliable and trustworthy sources of information, and they seemed to reject the impersonal, generic health campaigns in favour of their own, individual and lived experiences, which were elevated to a

privileged position. At the same time (and in another effort to validate their own stance), they constructed an out-group of mothers who were unknowing and irresponsible. These mothers were characterised as not having the right knowledge and therefore healthy eating advice was needed for them (O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010).

In light of these explorations, we can better understand why mothers may resist healthy eating advice from the state and how such resistance is closely related to mothering identities. Contemporary policy campaigns around children's food is largely based on an unknowing mother and as this study showed, this is not an acceptable position for those who constructed a good mothering identity.

These research insights provide a useful perspective on how families are responding to state-led discourses of individual responsibility. Future research priorities include: considering the perspectives of children and partners - perspectives which have been underexplored so far; and, moving beyond the rhetoric of how families frame and position their trust and mistrust of government advice, it is important to move towards exploring day-to-day experiences, and how families are enabled and constrained to enact such advice. With particular recognition of the way in which mothers have been held accountable for what and how children eat, there is a need to explore the daily realities around child feeding, and the way in which mothers respond to sustained calls to be both providers and managers of children's food (Maher et al. 2013).

2.9 Societal influences: neo-liberal economies and impacts on family food

Moving on to consider a further level of influence within the socio-ecological framework, this section explores socio-economic changes which are relevant to the study of families and food, in particular: the changing patterns of work brought about through a neo-liberal economy; and the changing social significance of the traditional family meal.

The societal context facing contemporary families includes connections with a deregulated economy and labour force, and the shift away from traditional employment structures and the certainty they provided (Bauman 2007). Changing

patterns of employment by women and men have contributed to changing family and household structures, and in this way de-regulation in employment patterns is linked to changes in family forms (O'Connor et al. 1999).

De-regulation, economic change and the shift towards global capitalism is associated with a culture of working longer hours (due to workplace competition), although there is debate about how much longer hours are a myth rather than reality (Jackson et al. 2009). Other labour force changes have also impacted on family life, including more flexible working hours and a de-regulation of the workplace, which has seen society shift towards more variable working patterns. The impacts of these changes are differentiated by social class with lower socio-economic groups subject to greater employer control. Associated with these sorts of economic and cultural changes are notions of families experiencing a 'time-squeeze' or 'harriedness,' and the difficulty of synchronising different time-space paths (Southerton and Tomlinson 2005).

Although public health has a longstanding interest in employment conditions, this has shifted from a concern about the physical harms related to employment towards a concern about the health consequences of flexible working patterns (Dixon et al. 2013). In particular, what is missing from these new economic regimes is a consideration of how more individualised, flexible, employment leads to health impacts, and it has been contended that such employment patterns threaten public health because of their impact on how time is used and experienced. Based on an Australian study of labour market engagement across three generations, Dixon and colleagues conclude that 'wide variability in individual employment schedules is accompanied by desynchronised social lives and less healthy eating practices' (Dixon et al. 2013, p. 1).

Other societal changes are also cited as contributing towards a 'time-squeeze' including changing patterns of leisure and the links with status and identity, where being busy is symbolic of a 'full' and 'valued' life (Southerton and Tomlinson 2005). In addition to the leisure activities of adults and parents, Brannen et al also explored the interaction of children's leisure activities on scheduling meals, and they refer to the asynchronicity or mismatch between the time patterns of different family members (Brannen et al. 2013). They also acknowledge the range of different

domains that parents try to manage – ‘time for me’, time for friends, study, household chores and so on. These domains intersect, often creating ‘irreconcilable temporal experiences’ (Brannen et al. 2013, p. 419). Thus family food is connected to a range of factors at the societal and family level including children’s involvement in after-school activities, children’s ages (with different eating times required by children at different developmental stages), the co-ordination of different food preferences, and the organisation of the spatial dimensions of eating in the family (Brannen et al. 2013).

As a result of these time-squeeze processes, eating has become more individualised and less structured, and as Gofton suggests families are now finding different ways to interact and spend time with each other, rather than around the dinner table – ‘food has moved from being the focus of household ritual to being an adjunct, or an embellishment, to other kinds of household activities’ (Gofton 1995, p. 175). This declining role of family food is disputed and Warde advocates that despite societal change, eating within families retains its ‘value’ but that it is ‘increasingly difficult to organise because of the de-routinisation of everyday life’ (Warde 1999, p. 520). Warde sums up the tendency towards convenience foods as related to ‘not so much a function of people wanting or liking it, but as a response to a particular configuration of problems in the temporal organisation of daily life. Many people are constrained in the face of more pressing social obligations’ (Warde 1999, p. 525).

This context of constraints includes changes in patterns of work, with more flexible working arrangements leading to a displacement of work time, especially where there is more than one person in a network or household who also has scattered employment responsibilities, which leads to scheduling difficulties. This leads Warde to conclude that ‘the fundamental source of the problem of harriedness is the difficulty of synchronising time-space paths’, rather than decreasing amounts of time overall (Warde 1999, p. 525). The temporal dimension of food practices resonates with broader theorising of time and how considerations of time can help illuminate the different dynamics of social relationships (Adam 1999, p. 4).

Public health approaches towards children’s dietary health, with its individualised lens into families, have so far failed to grapple with this de-regulated societal context

and the implications for food practices. Such approaches appear to have overlooked the way in which ‘employment regimes that are flexible for employers require workers to live flexible or fluid cultural lives, dis-embedded from the temporal structure of previous social rituals, whether culinary, familial or friendship’ (Dixon et al. 2013). The research field is beginning to acknowledge this broader societal context around family food, but what is missing in these debates is the need for more empirical work to examine families' perspectives on the difficulties of scheduling food. This includes considering families' experiences of de-regulation and how public health approaches can be shaped more sympathetically towards issues around time-squeeze and harriedness. It is anticipated that the impact of scheduling food will be more pronounced amongst some social groups, but this needs to be explored and within-group differences examined, in order to uncover how people in similar circumstances adopt diverse strategies because of their different priorities, values and experiences.

Additional research challenges involve unpacking assumptions about the values and meanings attached to food, and how food is managed within a context of changing patterns of work and leisure. As other research has highlighted, people seem to be making adjustments and trade-offs in different arenas of their lives in order to meet obligations in others, with the tendency to prioritise employment over dietary health (Dixon et al. 2013). Further research gaps relate to the implications of these trade-offs for all family members.

2.9.1 The changing social significance of the family meal

Associated with these economic changes in relation to employment conditions and more flexible working are changes relating to how society perceives the importance of feeding the family, particularly the changing social status of the family meal. The family meal has long been upheld as an important daily event, maintaining its potency across generations (Murcott 1983; Blake et al. 2008; James and Curtis 2010). It has been associated with nutritional and psychosocial benefits (Neumark-Sztainer 2005; Fulkerson et al. 2008; Fulkerson et al. 2009), and is advocated as a way of encouraging healthier eating habits amongst children (Ikeda 2007; Skafida 2013). Research has focussed on the spectrum of benefits of family meals (Larson et al. 2006; Blake et al. 2008). While form, function and interaction around mealtimes

has been advocated in terms of social benefits (Larson et al. 2006), the presence of parents at the dinner table has been reported as a key aspect, most closely linked to improved diets in children (Videon and Manning 2003), although research has highlighted that healthy eating in children is most closely linked to eating the *same food* as parents, rather than eating at the *same time* as parents (Skafida 2013). Television viewing is a related factor with regular viewing related to the consumption of fewer fruit and vegetables and more snack-type food, perhaps as a function of television advertising (Patrick and Nicklas 2005; Public Health England 2013).

Although the symbolic importance of the making and eating of the family meal endures, with notions of the ‘happy family meal’ equated with happy family life (Wilk 2010), there are increasing reports of the decline of the traditional family meal, fuelled by media speculation (Ryan 2006; Jackson 2009). Associated with this is a more general decline in the overall structured approach to food, and a shift away from set meals at set times throughout the day, towards more varied practices including informal eating, snacking and grazing (Jackson et al. 2009). Concerns about the decline of the family meal are associated with increases in disordered eating, overweight and obesity amongst children, as well as the break down in the moral fabric of family life (Curtis et al. 2010), with ‘proper meals’ associated with a strong family unit (Murcott 1983; Charles and Kerr 1988). These concerns have fuelled the policy focus on family food and the notion of the family meal has become an idealised image for families to work towards (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence 2006). The focus on family meals resonates with an emphasis on maternal responsibility with ‘the underlying assumption that the provision of the family meal in individual families is the responsibility of mothers’ (Maher et al. 2010, p. 236).

There are alternative perceptions on the family meal and its role in contemporary family life, and commentators note that concerns about the decline of the family meal are framed in terms of a ‘moral panic’, and ‘while the pattern of regular ‘family meals’ may be fragmenting, the overall time that families spend eating together, both inside and outside the home, has remained remarkably constant since the 1970s despite 30 years of social change’ (Jackson et al. 2009, p. 144). Jackson and

colleagues undertook a historical review of family practices and concluded that the sense of the family meal being an integral, universal part of everyday life is ‘one of the myths we live by’ and even in Edwardian times mealtimes were varied and fragmented (Jackson et al. 2009, p. 144). In historical and contemporary debates, the idea of the family meal has been heralded as something which keeps the family together, and those who fail to live up to this standard are represented as failing to do family in the socially-approved way. In contemporary family life there have been further questions raised about the extensiveness of the family meal, with a gap between what people aspire towards and what is achieved in practice (Murcott 1997; Skafida 2013).

Despite these debates over the decline of the family meal and the ambiguity surrounding its current (and historical) significance, there is an on-going need to understand more about how families eat – together and in more individualised forms. Although survey based research has identified parental perceptions of mealtimes (Fulkerson et al. 2008), there are gaps in the knowledge base especially in terms of understanding the everyday experiences of feeding the family, comparing perspectives from adults and children (Backett-Milburn et al. 2006). Important areas for development include exploring more nuanced accounts of mealtimes – where they occur and where they are absent, where they appear in traditional form and where there are alternative forms and functions (Wilk 2010). This includes exploring: the rationales and factors that culminate in family meals taking place and being skipped; the importance attached to family meals alongside other elements of how food gets done; and the wider context and relations within which meals are negotiated.

2.10 Community influences

Related to societal influences, is the community context for food and this is important in terms of how families position their food and eating practices in relation to other families and the communities around them. Studies have identified the influential role of community norms in shaping family food practices, as in the case of Lawton et al’s study of British Indians and Pakistanis (Lawton et al. 2007). They explored the socio-cultural role of food, and this was important in terms of understanding the processes behind failure to strictly adhere to public health

nutrition advice. Respondents recognised the diabetes-related health risks associated with eating South Asian foods but continued these diets because of their cultural ties and the cultural expectation to participate in commensality. This quest for shared experiences and communities of sameness is also linked to more uncertain times, the rise of neo-liberal economies and attempts to overcome the negative consequences for community and society – ‘the new individualism, the fading of human bonds and the wilting of solidarity’ (Bauman 2007, p. 24). The attraction of a ‘community of sameness’ is that of ‘an insurance policy against the risks with which a polyvocal world is fraught’ (Bauman 2007, pp. 87-88).

In addition to examining processes of *alignment* in food practices within communities, other studies have also looked at processes of *difference* and distinction. Wills et al (2011), drew on a social class perspective to understand different food and eating practices amongst middle class and working class families with teenagers. As well as differences between people and places, social divisions are also constructed *within* places. The construction of difference is one way in which people construct a positive identity for themselves - by distancing themselves from people and places, and this social construction of ‘other’ can take many forms. This includes identifying differences with people moving into the area, or focussing on particular sites that are associated with particular types of people (Popay et al. 2003).

With specific reference to comparisons around food, processes of alignment and difference amongst families living in close proximity to each other have been associated with ‘symbolic boundary making’ within multi-ethnic and mono-ethnic neighbourhoods (van Eijk 2011). This work is important to draw on in terms of the way it zooms in on neighbour encounters in order to understand how people construct boundaries and how they experience difference. In van Eijk’s study, food is one way in which community residents draw boundaries between themselves and others. This work draws attention to the way in which people assign identities to their neighbours – not through the exchange of personal information but through categorical markers (things they just happen to see, hear or smell because of close proximity) that are easily observed. The authors conclude that this sort of boundary

making within communities has implications for food and people's perceptions about community norms, and how they might be changed.

Drawing out elements of community context within the socio-ecological framework adds to our understandings of families' perceptions and experiences of food, and the concept of 'display' is key to this as it instructs us to look at the meanings behind community comparisons: 'display is the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute "doing family things" and thereby confirm these relationships are "family" relationships' (Finch 2007, p. 67). Examining how families position their own food in relation to families in the communities around them provides insights into community relations as well as insights into families' own food values and priorities. Thus the emphasis is not only on how families are 'done' but also how they are 'displayed', and the focus is on conveying meanings to others. The ways in which family food practices are intertwined with a sense of place, belonging, sameness and difference warrants further exploration, including how food is framed and positioned in relation to community norms and relationships, and how this interacts with their relationship with the state.

2.11 Family influences

The sections above have considered the context surrounding family food in terms of the role of the state, societal change (especially changes in the labour force) and families' relationships with communities. The changing context *within* families is also important to consider and is identified as another level of influence within the socio-ecological framework. The following section looks at how connections within families are crucial to the framing and social location of family food practices.

2.11.1 Changing family connections

The current government interest in supporting families about how they should feed their children is a reflection of wider concerns about more fragmented family arrangements (Duncan and Phillips 2008). Examining social trends, it can be seen that the nature and structure of family life is changing and families in contemporary Britain take on many varied forms, with an increase in the number of people living alone and living beyond the nuclear family (Jackson 2009). This is evidenced in

statistical indicators of social trends. For example, in 2005 unmarried, cohabiting couples accounted for 25% of adults under 60 (doubling since 1986), and 43% of births were outside marriage compared to 12% in 1980 (Dex and Ward 2007; Duncan and Phillips 2008). The diversity of family life is even more marked when ethnic and geographical differences are taken into account with British-Asian households for example, encompassing multiple generations and extended family members within the same household (Jackson 2009).

Changing social trends also have implications for the way we view the family as a private realm with shifts away from unitary towards more fragmented families and with children negotiating different family spaces and contexts (Wyness 2014). As well as changes to the way families are structured, there have also been shifts in views and attitudes with data from the 2006 British Social Attitudes Survey showing that weddings are seen as celebratory rather than a life-long commitment, divorce is seen as normal, and social independence for partners is widely valued (Duncan and Phillips 2008). Information and communication technologies (ICT) also contribute to the changing nature of families and the extent to which they can be understood as private realms, and this includes children's access to social media placing them in a 'virtual realm' between family and other spaces (Wyness 2014).

There is also complexity and ambiguity within contemporary understandings of family, and set against changing social trends there is uncertainty about how much (and in what ways) families are really changing in terms of their values and priorities. As Duncan and Phillips (2008) note, family life as we know it is changing, but it is also the case that commitment to family life is now being expressed in different ways. For example, they do not dispute that the centrality of marriage within families has diminished but instead marriage-type relations are being expressed less formally through cohabitation and second families – 'marriage as a social institution may have simply been widened more than decentred' (Duncan and Phillips 2008, p. 25). They also note that more traditional family attitudes are maintained, especially where children are concerned – 'children seem to hold a particular, 'morally absolute' position in people's attitudes to family' (Duncan and Phillips 2008, p. 25). This sentiment was echoed in Gabb's study of intimate family life which showed contemporary families working towards non-traditional ideals but

also drawing on more traditional values and principles, particularly with regard to children (Gabb 2008).

Overall then it is suggested that family life in Britain is changing but the idea of negative, dramatic breakdown and individualisation is overstated, and evidence suggests the picture is more varied with a general shift towards diversity and uncertainty. People appear to still value strong relationships, rather than doing things in isolation, and they place emphasis on doing family practices in different ways, with the overall persistence of close ties. As an alternative to individualisation, Smart (2007) argues for a ‘connectedness thesis’ which takes account of more varied forms of family life, with a focus on relationships rather than kinships and an emphasis on emotions and love. Although the archetypal ‘nuclear family’ may no longer dominate, the family remains a powerful image in contemporary society (Jackson 2009).

2.11.2 Parent-child relationships

Alongside conceptual developments in understanding families as a whole, there is also a growing literature on parent-child relationships and levels of control in managing food. Much has been made of the way in which parent-child relationships hold wider significance beyond nutrition, as a means of how adults care for children, with food as ‘something through which adults manage their own feelings and relationships with each other which in turn impact on children’s experiences’ (Punch et al. 2010, p. 227). This growing interest in parent-child relationships has also been intensified as a result of the policy emphasis on parental responsibility and ‘a redefining of parents’ responsibilities as public obligations’ (Wyness 2014, p. 70).

Contemporary family food policy seems to overlook the way in which parent-child relations are imbued with meaning beyond nutrition, and instead policy makes assumptions about the role parents can play in their children’s eating which is based on conceptions of hierarchical and unidirectional parent-child relations (Curtis 2011). It is these assumptions and approaches that have culminated in contemporary food approaches, but a major critique of this approach is that it fails to acknowledge children’s agency and role (O’Connell and Brannen 2014).

Curtis and Fisher (2007) note that parent-centric policy rhetoric is based on a simplified understanding of families that overlooks the complexity and dynamics of family life. Such representations of the family are inadequate, and it is more appropriate to pay attention to the diverse and potentially contradictory positions of different family members. Overall, there are a range of possibilities for generational configurations within a general flattening of the parent-child hierarchy, and this poses challenges for policies which make assumptions about parents' role in controlling and directing children's eating.

Studies have started to take account of the changing nature of families, encompassing a broader approach to the reciprocal relations between parents and children around food. O'Connell and Brannen's study of child-parent food negotiations in children aged two to eleven in England, emphasised considerable variation between families and identified five patterns of control in the data ranging from hierarchical parental control (overt and covert), through to child control and the negotiated order, where they identified a process of co-consumption between parents and children (O'Connell and Brannen 2014). These patterns of control and an emphasis on the negotiation between parents and children in different contexts and at different times, deserves further exploration, examining what underpins these parent-child interactions, including socio-economic differences and different parental ideas and values about food and childhood (Curtis et al. 2010).

2.11.3 Gender relationships

As the discussion so far has highlighted, neo-liberal approaches to family food and children's dietary health are underlined by a targeted approach which focuses responsibility on parents, especially mothers, and thus, a consideration of gender relations are an important element within family-level influences. Contemporary policy approaches suggest a narrow understanding of gendered relations, and problematising children's poor dietary health implies a focus on maternal and child relationships rather than seeing mothering as embedded in broader social and economic structures (Maher et al. 2010).

Tanner and colleagues refer to the distinctly gendered discourses that position mothers as responsible for children's health with the result that the role of fathers has

been overlooked, and there are gaps in our understandings about how fathers fit in with nutritional care work (Tanner et al. 2013). There is also an ongoing challenge to understand the relational dynamics between mothers and fathers which go beyond the static constructions of gender as portrayed in media and public health discourses (Maher et al. 2010). This limited understanding of gendered relations around food resonates with wider confusion about the use of gender theoretical concepts in health research (Hammarström et al. 2013).

A relational view of gender conceptualises these relationships more broadly in a way that explores the dynamics between mothers, father and others (Connell 2009). Rather than focussing on the individual, this shifts the focus onto relations between individuals and also individual's relations within structural arenas such as their involvement in the labour force and with healthcare systems (Hammarström et al. 2013). Adopting a relational view considers gender as one dimension of the lived experiences of feeding the family and how it is implicated in broader relationships between families, the state and society (Zivkovic et al. 2010; Gabb 2011; De Brún et al. 2013).

A relational approach also applies to the gender theoretical concept of embodiment, which considers how the body and environment interact viewing the mind and body as holistic rather than split (Connell 2009). There are a number of ways of conceptualising embodiment including phenomenological, social embodiment and epidemiological approaches. Conceptualising embodiment through a relational perspective pays attention to social processes, considering how people and places are organised within a gender order and how they respond to gendered societal norms (Hammarström et al. 2013). Therefore, this builds on the way in which embodied food practices (and children's bodies in particular), have been researched to date (Paetcher 2006; Rich 2010; Shilling 2010; Rees et al. 2011). Further methodological implications from this existing literature are drawn out in Chapter Four.

2.12 Moving beyond family food

A final dimension of the socio-ecological approach to health improvement is institutional level influences, and with regards to the exploration of family food, the school is an important arena to consider. Morgan's definition of family practices

implies a sense of fluidity which refers to the fuzziness between the boundaries of family and non-family practices which blur into other settings outside the home, such as work and school (Morgan 2011). Such considerations take account of ‘the nature and strengths of connections existing between the family and the various other settings that a young person enters during the first two decades of life’, in particular ‘successive transitions into (and within) day care, peer group, school, and work’ (Bronfenbrenner 1986, p. 734). Schools in particular have emerged as an important sphere of influence on children and young people, and it has been acknowledged that interventions aimed at addressing children's health behaviours will be limited if they do not take account of ‘not only the pattern of interactions between the child and other family members but also the pattern of relationships these members have with other systems, such as the school’ (Soubhi and Potvin 2000, p. 46). With specific reference to food, it has been recognised that ‘the ways in which people feed their families occur in a network of social relationships which involve, and go beyond, the individual and the household’ (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 220). This fluidity of relationships across family and school contexts is endorsed by studies which have considered the eating practices of adolescents and the way in which such practices are embedded in the contexts of home and schools (and of parents and peers) (Backett-Milburn et al. 2010a; Backett-Milburn et al. 2010b). Overall, a ‘consideration of how feeding a family impacts on the health or nutrition of families, or specific family members, must include an exploration of these relationships’, and this provides the focus for the next chapter (Delormier et al. 2009).

2.13 Conclusion

Based on a neo-liberal critique of the underpinnings related to individual behaviour change and maternal responsabilisation, behavioural approaches to addressing children's nutrition have failed to provide meaningful and effective approaches to family food, overlooking the broader contexts facing families.

Moving beyond individualised approaches, the ‘family practices’ concept provides an acknowledgement of: the lived experiences of family life; the taken-for-granted elements of family food; and the importance of moving beyond structural and functional approaches, to focus on social relationships within and beyond the family. Such an approach also draws attention to contextual influences and the socio-

ecological framework enables an examination of different contextual influences from within and beyond the family. At the policy-level, state-family relationships emphasise parental responsabilisation for children's food and although families' response to these influences is beginning to be explored, there is scope for further research in terms of considering the perspectives of children and fathers, to add to a body of research which has focussed on the perspectives of mothers. A further research priority is the need to move beyond how families frame their response to government advice towards how they enact and resist such advice on a day-to-day basis.

Contextual influences at the societal and community levels take account of how families frame their food in relation to societal norms and in relation to other families within neighbourhoods, communities and within extended families. Finally, family-level influences, particularly parent-child relations, have implications for how family food is understood and conceptualised.

Given the significance of schools in shaping children's health improvement, the institutional level of the socio-ecological framework deserves particular attention, elucidating attempts to connect families and schools. The following chapter explores the school-family interface, considering the rationale for current approaches. Building on the literature around tensions and power imbalances between the family and the state, the chapter also examines how these broader tensions are manifest at a more local level, and the extent to which they have been considered as part of the family-school interface around food.

Chapter 3 Food, families and schools

3.1 Introduction

Alongside a focus on family-based approaches, children's dietary health has also been addressed through the health promoting school approach and this is briefly considered below. The potential and challenge of linking families and schools around food are then explored and whereas the broad context for family-state relations has already been introduced in the previous chapter, in this chapter the relations between the state and the public are considered further. Here the focus is on how these relationships are mediated through the school, taking account of the role of different actors including teachers, parents and children.

The challenges of connecting families and schools around food are discussed in terms of power and resistance, and also more broadly in terms of the limitations of a settings approach to health promotion, which can be criticised for adopting a narrow conceptualisation of context. In order to address these shortcomings, the case is made for more contextual understandings of the school-family interface, acknowledging how lived experiences are shaped by a range of contexts as well as the role and perspective of active agents in the school and the family. The final section of this chapter illustrates how theoretical understandings of the relationship between structure, agency and practices, offers a way forward for understanding family interactions with schools, while also attending to the meanings and significance attached to the lived experiences of children's food.

3.2 Addressing children's health improvement through schools

Alongside a focus on family approaches for influencing children's dietary health, approaches have also centred on the school as places where children and young people spend a large proportion of their time and places where there are significant people to influence their health behaviour (Parcel et al. 2000; Spratt et al. 2012). Schools are attended by most children and young people providing 'controlled environments in which children can learn, practice, and be reinforced in making healthful decisions' (Parcel et al. 2000, p. 89). Improving pupil health is also in line with overarching educational objectives with poor health associated with disrupted

learning and lower academic achievement (Bonell et al. 2014). Indeed, Lavin et al (1992) conducted a review of the literature which highlights the inter-relations between education and health, and it has been argued that the main reason schools should become involved in health related interventions is to enhance learning outcomes for pupils (St Leger 2004). Associations between improved health and improved educational attainment have also been evidenced by interventions which have had dual education and health objectives, such as the all-Wales primary school free breakfast initiative and primary school fruit tuck shops (Tapper et al. 2007; Moore and Tapper 2008).

3.2.1 The health promoting schools approach

Rather than addressing health in schools through discrete projects and interventions, the health promoting schools approach positioned schools as ‘an ongoing setting where health is created, supportive environments are built, partnerships made and many skills are learned’ (St Leger 2004, p. 408). This sentiment is echoed in more recent reports about the need for a multi-level approach to addressing school health through an approach which encompasses three core components: the formal curriculum; the school environment; and school-community links (Bonell et al. 2013; Langford et al. 2014).

One particular area of priority for the health promoting school is food and nutrition, and this has long been acknowledged as an area where schools can play a major role through nutrition education and through the provision of healthy options in school canteens (Young 1993; Adamson et al. 2013; Dibleby and Vincent 2013; Spence et al. 2013; Schabas 2014). With specific reference to food and nutrition, schools have been under the spotlight receiving interest from the media, especially in terms of Jamie Oliver's high profile campaign to improve school dinners (Morgan and Sonnino 2008). School food has become a political battleground, and this wider public interest has been paralleled by government interest, with a number of significant developments designed to improve the food served in schools across the UK by implementing increasingly rigorous nutrient based standards and reducing the provision of unhealthy items (Scottish Health Promoting Schools Unit 2004; Welsh Assembly Government 2008a; Department for Education 2014). These measures include restricting the availability of unhealthy foods in schools (House of Commons

2008), although there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of these sort of school-based restrictions (Jaime and Lock 2009), with some suggestions that they may lead to unexpected harmful effects which may exacerbate health inequalities (Fletcher et al. 2014).

In line with the health promoting schools approach, interventions relate to the curriculum as well as food provision. Following the publication of the School Food Plan (Dimbleby and Vincent 2013), the government agreed to implement some of the recommendations such as making cookery a mandatory element of the national curriculum (at Foundation Phase and Key Stages 2 and 3) and by introducing free school meals for all infants in England (Dimbleby and Vincent 2013). However, there is some concern that these proposed changes are not going far enough and there is scope for more to be done around the school environment, which includes involving children and young people in changing their school food environments (Fletcher et al. 2013; Fletcher et al. 2014), and enhancing the role of school meal providers and lunchtime supervisors (Moore et al. 2010a).

3.2.2 Addressing school food in Wales

In Wales, the Welsh Government has developed a number of policies and approaches designed to improve nutrition in schools, and these have been introduced as part of the Food and Fitness Plan (Welsh Assembly Government 2006a). This includes a number of initiatives designed to improve the quality of school food as well as addressing broader issues of diet, nutrition and cooking skills in schools. These initiatives have been facilitated by the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS) whereby schools develop a healthy school scheme with reference to a national framework (Welsh Assembly Government 2014).

The healthy schools movement began with the European Network of Health Promoting Schools (ENHPS) which was created in 1992 as a partnership between the World Health Organisation, the European Commission and the Council of Europe, with the aim of establishing models in each country and sharing experiences. The ENHPS has been succeeded by the Schools for Health in Europe (SHE) network, based in the Netherlands, and now includes 43 member countries across Europe and central Asia (including Wales), and its aims of addressing the health

challenges faced by young people has been identified as a key role (World Health Organisation 2012). Under the umbrella of the WNHSS, a number of school-based developments have been implemented including the all-Wales primary school free breakfast initiative (Moore et al. 2007a), school and parental guidance on packed-lunches (Addis et al. 2009) and school fruit tuck shops (Moore and Tapper 2008). Unlike the situation in England, in Wales, schools' participation in the healthy schools scheme continues to be encouraged, and the Welsh education inspectorate (Estyn) continues to assess how well schools promote students' health and personal development (Estyn 2010; Bonell et al. 2014).

In Wales, the leading policy directive for school food provision is the Appetite for Life Action Plan, which seeks to improve the quality of food provision in schools (Welsh Assembly Government 2008a). The plan sets out the strategy, direction and actions for improving nutrition in schools across Wales and was established following a consultation exercise which included views from children and young people, considering all food and drink available throughout the school day, not only school lunches. Appetite for Life sets out new food standards which school catering services need to meet, but also stresses the importance of addressing food and diet within schools from a 'whole school' perspective, including the teaching of cooking skills to young people.

The Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure means that schools have a statutory obligation to encourage uptake of school meals in order to promote child health (National Assembly for Wales 2013). Local authorities and governing bodies also have to ensure that they promote healthy eating and drinking by pupils in all maintained schools. As part of this, governing bodies now have a duty to report annually on actions taken to promote healthy eating within their schools. This sets out the requirements for food and drink that can and cannot be provided on school premises, and also defines food and nutrient standards for food and drink served during school breakfasts and school lunches.

School food and nutrient-based standards have been shown to play an important role in promoting children's dietary health (Spence et al. 2013), improving nutrition 'beyond the school dining room and the school gate' (Adamson et al. 2013, p. 968).

However, it has been argued that the increasing focus on nutrient-based standards has overlooked other levels of influence within the socio-ecological framework, and this takes the emphasis away from more co-ordinated multi-level actions, encompassing diverse approaches to address the challenge of children's dietary health (Moore et al. 2013). This is supported by reviews which have identified that the most promising interventions consist of multiple components including: school curriculum approaches; improvement in the quality of school food; school environments which are conducive and support healthier eating; support for teachers to implement interventions; and home activities that encourage children to be more active and eat healthier foods (Van Cauwenberghe et al. 2010; Waters E et al. 2011). In further support of the holistic approach are reports that stand-alone interventions, such as approaches which focus solely on school food policies, have resulted in little evidence of effectiveness (Jaime and Lock 2009), with more promising results achieved through approaches which consider pupil involvement (Sallis et al. 2003; Bonell et al. 2013).

3.3 Connecting schools and families

A common theme identified amongst the reviews of school-based health promotion is the importance of involving parents and families. There is recognition that 'health messages promoted at school need to be reinforced within the family and wider community settings if they are to have a significant impact on physical and social exposures and children's behaviours' (Langford et al. 2014, pp. 5-6). With specific reference to nutrition interventions, an earlier systematic review noted that all interventions involving parents - in addition to a school-based component - showed positive outcomes and overall 'these results strongly suggest that the involvement of parents in school healthy eating programmes is important' (Lister-Sharp et al. 1999, p. 64). This is supported by a later review which showed that including parents in short-term school nutrition interventions demonstrated significant increases in nutritional knowledge at home, with long-term interventions (school-parent partnership developed over many years), producing positive statistically significant results in physical activity levels and adiposity (Shaya et al. 2008).

This emphasis on linking schools and families for children's health improvement parallels developments within the education field, where the driver has been the changing role of schools and the increasing importance of the family setting. Educational commentators document the changing relationship between 'the public' and the state education system since the immediate post-war period, noting a shift from a situation where parents and schools were kept at a distance, to the 1960s and 1970s when parental involvement began to be encouraged with schools opening up their facilities to the community, and the emergence of parental involvement in class activities and school governance (Vincent and Tomlinson 1997, p. 363). School-family relationships went through further changes in the 1980s with parents adopting the role of consumer within a more privatised economic context. Although notions of home-school 'partnership' have emerged in the rhetoric, in practice this often equates with attendance at events and receipt of information (Vincent and Tomlinson 1997, p. 367). Under the last Labour government the school emerged as the hub of community life, supported by the 'extended schools' rhetoric which proposed that all schools should offer extended services to children, families and communities (Department for Education and Skills 2006; Cummings et al. 2007). The signing of home-school agreements has also been seen as an important tool in previous and current government approaches, based on the assumption that more effective schooling will flow from good home-school relations (Watson 2011; Department for Education 2013).

In terms of health-related benefits, the main rationale for linking schools and families relates to avoiding contradictory messages (Denman 1998; Denman et al. 2002), and in order to be comprehensive, interventions must address multiple factors across different settings (Shucksmith et al. 2010), drawing on parents as an additional component to endorse messages from the school (Waters E et al. 2011). From the school's perspective, links with families are seen as crucial with schools more likely to be effective if good relationships are developed with parents and carers, together with active parental involvement in school education and school activities. Denman summarises the importance of family-school links in terms of improved health and educational achievement, with parents viewed as 'prior and joint educators' of their children (Denman 1998, p. 56). Furthermore, schools where parents are involved are more likely to be effective organisations (Mawhinney and

Kerchner 1997). Links with parents also feature in the rhetoric of the health promoting school with reference to encouraging responsibility for health at the school, family and community level, and promoting positive relationships between these groups (Denman et al. 2002). This makes a case for moving away from approaches which have focussed solely on schools towards embracing the family context (Campbell and Crawford 2001). Despite the potential of schools it is important to recognize that schools ‘definitely cannot counteract all the stressors and tensions originating in other life spheres...’ and schools cannot achieve health-related goals on their own (Hurrelmann et al. 1995, p. 124).

In Wales, for schools working towards the national quality award (as part of the WNHSS), family and community involvement is one of the criteria related to food and fitness. Firstly, schools are encouraged to ensure that: ‘parents or carers and governors are well informed and understand the importance of policy on good nutrition and physical activity for themselves and the pupils’ (Welsh Assembly Government 2014, p. 14). Secondly, schools are to ‘offer the opportunity for families and the wider community to be involved in, and contribute to activities related to food and fitness’ (Welsh Assembly Government 2014, p. 14).

How well schools work with parents and others to encourage healthy and active lifestyles has also been taken up as an assessment standard for Estyn, the Welsh education inspectorate (Estyn 2010), and a range of approaches have been reported from across schools in Wales. This includes: healthy community barbecues organised by pupils and staff; a focus on healthy packed-lunches (for staff and pupils) which included a healthy lunch week with opportunities to prepare, cook and taste different foods; and school garden projects which involve pupils, staff and local community members (Welsh Assembly Government 2006b).

In the logic model of expected outcomes of the implementation of the WNHSS, reference is made to ‘parents influenced’ as a long-term (ten years plus) outcome (Rothwell et al. 2011, p. 12). However, the review of the WNHSS suggested that schools should do more than this with parents involved, as well as influenced, at an earlier stage in the process. Parental involvement was associated with increased effectiveness of approaches within the school, and was also important for taking health messages into the community.

Despite potential benefits of parental involvement, connecting schools and families has been cited as an ongoing challenge, with a range of barriers related to engagement, and limited insights into parental attitudes towards attempts to engage them (Denman 1998; Shucksmith et al. 2010; Sormunen et al. 2013). This was supported by the review of the WNHSS where encouraging parental participation was seen as a challenge by healthy schools co-ordinators in terms of initiation and maintenance, with particular difficulties reported in Communities First¹ schools, although the issue of engaging parents was felt to be difficult across schools in all areas (Rothwell et al. 2011).

Approaches which have established a partnership between schools and families seem to be more effective in terms of parental engagement and impact. A study in Finland reports on a holistic school health intervention which aimed to strengthen health and collaboration activities between schools and the home (Sormunen et al. 2013). Here the particular emphasis was on making family-school connections more of a partnership rather than a one-off encounter. This acknowledges the scale of the challenges involved in trying to make these relationships effective and meaningful. The Finnish study set about trying to strengthen the home-school partnership around health and introduced components for teachers, pupils and families. This included interactive health homework for parents and children, school health clubs, parent conferences, and they also increased the visibility of health education within the school. Overall they worked to improve the ‘parental involvement ethos’ – including the sense of welcome and ease of contact with the school (Sormunen et al. 2013, p. 179).

Despite some promising approaches, there is a general need for more effective mechanisms for linking schools and families and further work is needed to provide approaches for connecting with families in a way that is sensitive to the diversity of needs of different families. This fits with the wider literature on school-family partnerships which has identified a need to understand the dynamic relationship between home and school, within a political context which has seen parents shift in status from passive observers, to consumers, to partners (Alldred et al. 2002).

¹ Communities First is a community focussed programme that was first introduced in 2001 and it supports the most disadvantaged people in the most deprived areas with the aim of contributing to alleviating persistent poverty.

Reflecting on the discussion in the previous chapter, it is also pertinent to acknowledge the wider political context where families position themselves in relation to the state with health improvement messages resisted and transformed, and it is useful to see how these processes manifest themselves in the school-family relationship. An important set of challenges relate to the way the literature is patterned with discourses of resistance and these challenges are discussed in more detail below.

3.4 School-family-state relations

Tensions between the school and family settings have been well documented in the educational research literature where there is a history of research examining power differentials and the awkward relationships between schools and families (Alldred et al. 2002; Shucksmith et al. 2005). Stories of resistance related to school food come through in media portrayals of family-school interactions. One example is the ‘battle of Rawmarsh school’ where a group of mothers were so outraged by the school’s decision to stop letting children out at lunchtimes that they started pushing food through the school railings (Wainwright 2006). These relationships and tensions fit within a wider literature on spatialities and school food which is mainly talked about in terms of power and domination. This includes work by Pike on the school dining hall and the interaction between children and different adults in the school setting (Pike 2008, 2010). A separate but related area of work by Metcalfe and colleagues focuses on the lunchbox as a vessel which moves between home and school (Metcalfe et al. 2008). What comes through in these studies is the centrality of power in understanding these spatial interactions and the various dynamics between children, teachers and parents. The lunchbox becomes an extension of the family into the school as a means of managing children in a space where they have limited direct control.

This disconnect between schools and families has been identified across the broader educational literature, including work by Willis (2003) which documents the clash of middle-class school culture and working-class community and family culture. Recent work in secondary schools has continued to explore this theme in terms of student perceptions of the way in which middle-class teachers are disconnected from the reality of their day-to-day lives, with students developing their own networks and

'counter-cultures' (Jamal et al. 2013; Fletcher et al. 2014). An on-going research challenge relates to how these school 'counter-cultures' are demonstrated in the primary school setting, where parents are more visible on a daily basis.

As well as appreciating these micro-level tensions between schools and families, it is also pertinent to keep in mind the broader context of how the wider education system structures these relationships. Although the policy context is different in Wales, in secondary schools in England, reference has been made to the league-table driven agenda and the way it has tended to limit teachers' capacity to undertake health improvement actions. This is also linked to the competitive choice driven market around schools which encourages schools to hide their health-related problems (Jamal et al. 2013; Fletcher et al. 2014). Recent studies related to this have highlighted the negative effects on students' health and wellbeing when school staff are focussed on achieving attainment standards to the detriment of more pastoral roles within the school (Bonell et al. 2014; Fletcher et al. 2014). Although the educational and geographical context for this study is different (primary schools in Wales), it is important to keep in mind how schools are implicated in these debates, and what limits and constraints it places on schools and how they link with families.

These discussions point towards a further level of complexity within family-school connections which is the tri-partite relationship between the state, schools and families and questions around the extent to which schools view health improvement as their responsibility. With specific reference to family-school tensions around food, researchers have considered the awkward relationships between children, families and the state with schools caught in the middle as a political battleground, as in the case of school meals (Gustafsson 2002). More recent work in this field has also identified a mismatch between the lunchtime agendas of children and adults in the school context, with current approaches overlooking the notion of school lunchtimes as 'children's spaces' (Daniel and Gustafsson 2010, p. 265).

Related to the tensions between families and schools are the perceptions and experiences of children and young people, especially in terms of how they respond to new developments such as school food restrictions and what food means to young people. Some research is beginning to make in-roads into these perspectives and there are also calls for children to be more involved in designing and guiding

interventions to shape their school food environments and school food provision, which may help make interventions more acceptable and prevent harmful unintended effects (Fletcher et al. 2014; Young et al. 2014).

The potential benefits of linking schools and families for educational and health benefits need to be understood against this backdrop of tensions and power imbalances. There is scope to add to these debates around the shifting boundaries between families and schools and explore the family perspective in more detail. What does partnership and participation mean in reality for families? Are families willing targets of school health promotion, and how does involvement with food and nutrition relate to other aspects of involvement with the school? Further work is needed to understand families' experiences of connecting with schools around food, considering these areas of tension and resistance.

3.5 Limitations of a settings approach

A further challenge to connecting schools and families around food relates to the way in which schools have been conceptualised as part of a settings approach to health promotion, with a focus on schools as places where children spend a significant proportion of time (Parcel et al. 2000; Campbell and Crawford 2001; Bonell et al. 2013).

The origins of the settings approach can be traced alongside developments in health promotion which was initially grounded in preventative medicine and education in Canada, with the publication of the 'Lalonde Report' on 'A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians' (Lalonde 1974). This marked the first use of the term 'health promotion' and as Green et al point out, this had significance outside Canada: 'globally, the Lalonde Report marked the first time a national government policy document identified health promotion as a key strategy for improving the health of a population' (Green et al. 2000, p. 2).

The sentiments of this publication were endorsed at the First International Conference on Health Promotion in 1986, which led to the issue of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion which focused on creating supportive environments for health. This significant development, together with associated public health rhetoric,

mainly from the World Health Organisation, provided a 'legitimising discourse' for modern health promotion which marked a shift in emphasis from preventing disease to an approach which utilises both individual and structural strategies (World Health Organisation 1986). The settings approach became 'a central feature of efforts to promote health that recognise the significance of context' and the short-comings of individualistic approaches (Whitelaw et al. 2001, p. 339). Commentators agree that the emphasis on settings within the Ottawa Charter provided the initial impetus for the settings approach, with its shift in emphasis from problems based on behaviours of at-risk groups, to concerns about environments and associated concepts of positive health (Dooris et al. 1998; Green et al. 2000; Shareck et al. 2013).

Despite this potential, the limitations of a settings approach have also been remarked upon, and in particular there are calls for settings to be 'conceptualized as complex, dynamic and open systems composed of individuals, structures and the relations between them' (Shareck et al. 2013, p. 40). This suggests that complexity needs to be considered at three levels.

Firstly, there needs to be a greater appreciation of the inter-relations between settings, and recognition that settings have 'permeable boundaries' (Shareck et al. 2013, p. 40). As Poland points out - 'we know little about relationships between settings: how people move across settings in their daily routines, interactions between settings, and the role that relationships and discontinuities play in health' (Poland et al. 2000, p. 350). Similarly, Whitelaw and colleagues highlight the importance of overcoming the 'fragmented nature of settings based work', with a need for more cross-settings partnerships and action (Whitelaw et al. 2001, p. 347). Contemporary strategies to link schools and families fall short of fully embracing the permeable nature of settings, and further work is needed to explore how children and parents move across settings and what barriers and facilitators play a role.

Secondly, there needs to be a greater understanding of what settings mean to people, how people interact with settings and how they shape and are shaped by settings. The settings approach overlooks reciprocity between people and settings and how 'individuals, through their actions (intentionally or otherwise), assist in shaping and reproducing the organizational structures of the setting' (Green et al. 2000, p. 27). The need to more closely examine the inter-relations between people and settings is

also associated with the issue of stakeholder conflict and power relations within settings, which have been generally overlooked despite the rhetoric around empowerment (Tones and Tilford 2001). Shareck and colleagues suggest that stakeholder involvement could be facilitated ‘if the actual lived experience of people found within a setting, as well as existing power relations, were considered’ (Shareck et al. 2013, p. 45).

Inter-relations between people and settings have been largely overlooked in attempts to link schools and families. The role of social actors in the school and family all have important (and different) agencies, driven by their own priorities, values and experiences. In schools, studies have focussed on the role of pupils in forming their own networks which in some cases work to undermine well intentioned public health strategies (Fletcher et al. 2014). The agency of teachers is also a factor and in some cases their role is limited by constraints related to skills and knowledge in the field of health promotion (Jamal et al. 2013). The educational literature has cited the pertinent role of parent power and it is likely that this also needs to be taken into account around families, schools and food, (Aldred et al. 2002).

Strategies to link schools and families are to some extent based on assumptions about how families interact with schools, but these processes need to be further interrogated. What meaning do families attach to schools and their particular role in health promotion? How do families influence and how are they influenced by school based practices related to food and eating?

Finally, a reconsideration of the settings approach needs to take account of how settings interact with wider contexts (Green et al. 2000; Shareck et al. 2013). This re-emphasises the ecological roots of the settings approach, and as Green et al observe, ‘in addition to the pragmatic aspects of a focus on settings, and the legitimating rhetoric of the Ottawa Charter, one of the key factors behind the increased interest in the settings approach has been the ecological perspective on health promotion, demanding that individuals not be treated in isolation from the larger social units in which they lived, worked and played’ (Green et al. 2000, p. 12). Relatedly, Shareck and colleagues suggest guiding principles for a settings approach which includes ‘adopting an ecological and whole systems perspective’, alongside ‘rooting practice in the social context of settings’ (Shareck et al. 2013, p. 46).

The settings approach has not fully embraced these wider ecological contexts, and to some extent this level of complexity seems to have been overlooked in current attempts to link schools and families, with clear benefits to be gained from a more contextualised approach. The previous chapter identified the significance of the wider state context which framed parental responsabilisation for children's dietary health, but there are further questions about the family-school interface in terms of how families in different contexts respond to health promotion approaches from the school, and how such approaches can be developed in order to support families in more disadvantaged contexts.

In order to overcome the shortcomings of the settings approach and limitations of previous attempts to link schools and families for dietary health improvement, there is a need to investigate these elements of social context, agency and structure in a way that progresses our understanding of how these different dimensions interact, and in a way which furthers our understanding about food and eating as part of everyday lived experiences.

3.6 Theorising the relationship between structure, agency and practices

The discussion has highlighted the importance of acknowledging context, the need for a better understanding of the complexities of context, and how people and different settings interact. This conceptual challenge is addressed by Frohlich and colleagues through their 'collective lifestyles' approach to the relationship between structure, agency and practices in a way which looks at 'not just the behaviours that people engage in', but 'the relationship between people's social conditions and their social practices' (Frohlich et al. 2001, p. 776).

Although the socio-ecological model provides a framework for attending to the elements of context and the inter-relations between environments and individuals, the collective lifestyles approach presents environment and individuals in a more recursive relationship (Delormier et al. 2009; Hargreaves et al. 2010). Approaches which target both environments and individuals could build on theoretically based approaches like the collective lifestyles approach, 'that explicitly identifies the relationship between context and food choice practices. Efforts aimed at environments and individuals would thus go a step further, and conceive individuals

and environments in a recursive relationship' (Delormier et al 2009 p 224). This emphasis on recursivity comes through in Frohlich et al's initial application of collective lifestyles to youth smoking practices – 'smoking practices are not simply viewed as reactions to the social structure, but as both a re-creation and reaction to the rules and resources' (Frohlich et al. 2002a, p. 1404).

In considering the collective lifestyles approach, it is useful to explore the three main theoretical standpoints on which it is based: Bourdieu's theory of habitus, Sen's capability theory, and Giddens' structuration theory. Each of these influential theories is considered below in terms of how they feed into the definitions of practices, agency and structure. In each section the theoretical origins are considered alongside an assessment of how they are relevant to the study of families, schools and food.

3.6.1 Practices

Inherent within the collective lifestyles framework is the notion of social practices and this builds on Morgan's concept of family practices introduced in Chapter Two. As with Morgan, Frohlich and colleagues' make a conceptual leap towards the term 'practices' rather than 'behaviours' (Frohlich et al. 2001). In this case social practices are defined as 'the situated activities of social actors which happen in the flow of daily life or in context' (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 218). In particular, the interest is in 'routinised social practices' or 'the enduring patterns of social practices that constitute social systems' (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 218).

Frohlich and colleagues' attention to social practices reminds us of the origins of the concept within Bourdieu's work on habitus, and the way in which individuals' routine practices are influenced by structures, and the practices themselves maintain those structures (Bourdieu 1990). Bourdieu's work around habitus is drawn on in other work on the lived experience of food practices amongst different family groups (Backett-Milburn et al, 2010), and as a means of understanding the gendered and classed based dimensions of embodiment (Warin et al. 2008). Bourdieu defines habitus as: 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to operate as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their

outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the conditions necessary in order to attain them' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53).

Bourdieu's theory of habitus is an important contribution to the theorising of practices in the way it draws attention to the 'systems of schemes that generate practices and schemes of perceptions and tastes that together result in lifestyle' (Frohlich et al. 2001, p. 789). However, despite its contribution, it is also important to steer around the determinism implied by habitus and the way it serves as a template which defines individual practices. As Frohlich and colleagues point out, 'Bourdieu is rather deterministic in his philosophy; lifestyles are somehow predetermined by habitus' (Frohlich et al. 2001, p. 790). Thus they suggest a more recursive conceptualisation of structure and agency which focuses on 'a shared way of relating and acting in a given environment' (Frohlich, Corin et al, 2001: 791). Furthering the recursive elements of a practice-based approach, Delormier et al refer to the 'interplay' between agency and social structure and note that 'individuals while oriented to act in ways that are practical and appropriate, do not just react to social structural constraints, but interact via their agency, in a range of socially constructed conditions' (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 219).

3.6.2 Agency

Amartya Sen's contribution to the collective lifestyles approach is to stress the importance of agency as the intentions people have in doing things and their capability to do those things. Sen's theory provides an important perspectives on agency, particularly from an inequalities perspective, as it shifts the discussion away from who has the ability to make change to where there might be opportunities for social and cultural change, in recognition of the way in which the most deprived are the least likely or capable of changing their practices (Frohlich and Abel 2014). This is an important dimension of agency as it acknowledges the way in which people have unequal opportunities to act or instigate change, and this is in line with calls to shift debates away from inequalities in health outcomes towards inequities in contexts and conditions (Frohlich and Abel 2014).

Sen's capability theory has two main principles – functionings and capabilities. 'Functionings represent parts of the state of a person...some functionings are very elementary, such as being nourished...others may be more complex such as

achieving self-respect' (Nussbaum and Sen 1993, p. 31). For Sen, 'the capability of a person reflects the alternative combinations of functionings the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose one collection' (Nussbaum and Sen 1993, p. 31). Instead of assuming there will be differences on the basis of socio-economic status, personal views, experiences and priorities may also be of significance in determining how people respond, which highlights the role of choice and how this mediates the link between available resources and outcomes – 'we must examine the choices structured by the situation that an individual is in,' which will lead to different assessments and different choices (Frohlich et al. 2001, p. 787).

As discussed above, the settings approach (including the way in which family-school interactions have been conceived of to date), would benefit from a greater appreciation of these different dimensions of agency and capability, and what settings mean to people. Delormier adds further anchor points for examining agency in relation to understanding food and families. This includes, understanding more about the dynamics involved in daily routines such as the decision-making power about what and when family members eat, and the interplay between what Delormier defines as 'authoritative resources' (such as the organisation of time and space) and 'allocative resources' (such as money to buy food and access to grocery stores) (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 222). An understanding of the lived realities of family life helps uncover some of these dynamics, and provides an understanding of how agency is enabled for some and constrained for others.

A further dimension of agency that is pertinent to exploring families and food is children's agency and how children instigate and resist different food practices, with family relationships playing an important role in shaping these dynamics (Curtis and Fisher 2007). One particular family based mechanism which warrants further exploration is the notion of children as instigators of change and associated concepts such as the child as 'health promoting actor' (Christensen 2004). The main proposition behind these concepts is that interventions may not only influence child health but also the dietary habits of other family members (Basdevant et al. 1999). A key assumption here is that parents are willing to learn from their children and involve them in decision-making (Onyango-Ouma et al. 2005). Further work is needed to understand the notion of children as agents of change, including issues surrounding power differentials between children and parents and the competing

demands of time and resources, taking account of the different views of family members, and exploring more about the processes and pathways by which children act as change agents within different cultural contexts (Patten et al. 2004; Gadhoke et al. 2014). Power differentials between parents and children and between other family members are intrinsic to understandings of agency which can be thought of as ‘the ability to produce an effect, and thus, to exert power’ (Frohlich et al. 2002a, p. 1404).

There are also research gaps around the agency and role of other family members, with a tendency to base family research around food and eating on empirical studies with single informants - usually women - who are regarded as having the main responsibility for food preparation in the household (Kaufman and Karpati 2007). Research gaps include the need to explore men’s health beliefs in relation to family life (McKie et al. 2004; Williams 2007), and there are also questions around the role of grandparents and other extended family members, together with how this interacts with the agency of parents and children (Jingxiong et al. 2007).

3.6.3 Structure

Related to theoretical developments around agency is the way in which Frohlich et al's theoretical approach utilises Giddens’ theory of structuration, which considers the way in which systems are produced and reproduced by agents drawing upon rules and resources (Giddens 1984). The basis for Giddens’ theory of structuration is the recursive dependency between structure and agency and the concept of ‘routinisation’ where everyday activities are continually produced and reproduced – operating at the level of the individual and the collective level of institutions (Frohlich et al. 2001, p. 788).

Structuration is particularly important given the way in which the previous chapter and the above discussion have highlighted the influence of structures and systems within families and schools. As well as looking at the duality of structure and agency interactions, in this study structuration provides a means of examining the ways in which structures related to the school and family enable and constrain food practices, together with the ways in which different local agents (teachers, parents and

children) have their own capacity and resources to shape and reconstitute their practices.

When considering structuration and the relevance to families, schools and food it is also important to reference the broader neo-liberal context and the way this has contributed towards a more uncertain world where community and society are in decline. This has implications for how we define structures, in a society which is 'increasingly viewed and treated as a "network" rather than a "structure" (let alone a solid totality)' (Bauman 2007, p. 3). Bauman's focus on connections and disconnections within a 'network' rather than a 'structure' is important in considering links between schools and families, and reminds us to take account of the formal and informal links which mediate schools - including pupil networks, teacher-parent networks and community networks.

A final dimension of structuration is the importance of understanding the meanings attributed to structures. This focus on meanings and assumptions is central to structuration: 'an essential element of the theory, in distinction from traditional structural/functionalists is the emphasis given to "practical consciousness," an individual's tacit understanding of the "goings on" in the context of social life' (Frohlich et al. 2001, p. 788). Frohlich and colleagues drew on this theoretical approach in their analysis of pre-adolescent smoking initiation in Canada, and whereas they initially focussed on more traditional concepts of context and place (such as aggregate socio-economic status), they also drew on young people's narratives, collected through focus-groups, to investigate the meaning attached to local contexts through an analysis of smoking-related social practices (Frohlich et al. 2002b). Overall, this study showed that 'people's social practices are not always the direct reflection of the social structure, suggesting that people have different ways of interacting with and interpreting the social structure...' (Frohlich et al. 2002a, p. 1413).

A similar emphasis on meanings was adopted by Delormier et al (2009) in relation to young people's food practices. Taking the findings from a study of youth eating practices in schools (Wills et al. 2005), they reframed influences by looking at the meanings attached to eating practices and the way this varied according to gender

and peer group norms. These examples suggest moving beyond assumptions about what may facilitate or inhibit food practices, and instead indicate the need to start with families' own perspectives in order to draw out the meanings which families attach to the structures around them, which includes taking account of the way in which power struggles structure the relationship between families and schools. This approach also takes account of multiple meanings, presented by different families within the same or similar social structures, thus acknowledging that families may respond differently or connect with schools in different ways even though they may be in similar economic and cultural circumstances (Frohlich et al. 2002b).

Understanding meanings provides a deeper analysis revealing the 'invisible nature of family feeding' or the second nature activities involved in the 'ongoing planning and organisation of family food', together with the values and priorities that influence these (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 220). Others have noted that this 'understanding at the level of meaning' must be integral to the sociological analysis, not just tagged on as an afterthought (Williams 2003, p. 144).

3.7 Conclusion and research aims

School-based approaches have targeted children's dietary health through school food provision and through the curriculum, but there is also recognition of the value in approaches which connect schools and families, with benefits flowing from promoting consistent messages across these domains (Langford et al. 2014). Hindered by poor mechanisms of engaging parents and a lack of understanding of possible mechanisms of change, attempts to connect families and schools around food have been limited in effectiveness. Two main challenges persist: recognising the power struggles between schools and families (which echoes broader resistance between families and the state); and the need for a better understanding of how schools and families interact with each other and wider contexts.

Drawing on theoretical understandings of the relationship between structure, agency and practices is instructive for understanding family-school relations within a dynamic context, taking account of tensions between different actors. The collective lifestyles approach also acknowledges the importance of understanding the meaning

behind practices and the taken-for-granted elements of decisions around food (Frohlich et al. 2001).

The study aims to conduct a qualitative in-depth exploration of family food practices, examining the interplay of structure and agency across a range of socio-ecological domains, focussing on how families interact with schools. This reflects a need to understand the dynamic relationship between family and schools, acknowledging the wider political context where families position themselves in relation to the state, whilst taking into account tensions and power imbalances, which resonate with broader tensions between the state and the public in a neo-liberal context. In summary, the research aims and objectives for this study are as follows:

Research aim one focuses on relationships and processes at the state and societal level and is: **to understand how family food practices are discursively displayed and framed in relation to state and society**. Its objectives are:

- to explore how families position their food practices in relation to contemporary discourses of food, eating and the family;
- to understand the way in which families accept, resist and transform policy discourses; and
- to assess what this response to policy reveals about the nature of their relationship with the state.

Research aim two focuses on relationships and processes at the institutional level, between families and schools and is: **to understand how family-school relationships mediate broader state-public relationships**. Its objectives are:

- to identify the nature of the interface between families and schools relating to food;
- to identify how families respond to school-food interventions; and
- to explore how families manage school influences in relation to parenting and how to feed the family.

Research aim three focuses on the lived experiences of family food and is: **to explore the main aspects of the lived experiences of family food including challenges and constraints encountered.** Its objectives are:

- to identify challenges and facilitators to daily food practices;
- to understand how families negotiate challenges and constraints relating to their socio-economic position and different family forms; and
- to explore how their lived experiences of food confirm and contradict wider discourses around food.

Research aim four focuses on relationships within families and is: **to understand patterns of interaction between parents and children in relation to food in the family and the school.** Its objectives are:

- to identify the range of interactions which take place between children and parents;
- to explore the underlying rationales and meanings behind these interactions; and
- to explore how these interactions extend beyond the nuclear family to include the negotiation of school food.

Chapter 4 Methods

4.1 Introduction

Having examined the policy-practice disconnect around children's dietary health, and by identifying the need to examine how children's experiences in the family interacts with their experiences in school, this chapter makes the case for a social constructionist approach in order to address these research challenges. Rather than examining family food practices in isolation, the focus here is on practices as socially constructed through structures, contexts and agency. The chapter begins by describing the overall methodological approach and sets out the rationale for the diary-interview method, framed within a case study approach, with details about the selection of areas and recruitment of families.

The discussion then addresses how these guiding concepts and theorisations translate into the range of themes explored with schools and families, and the different modes of questioning, (with specific reference to how these methods were adapted for children). The penultimate section details the approach to analysis identifying how thematic analysis, incorporating elements of discursive analysis, moved beyond the surface of accounts to explore underlying meanings and significance, which link what people said to broader structures and contexts. The final sections consider: reflexivity and how the researcher's own experiences influenced interactions with participants and the data generated; and a guide to the empirical chapters of the thesis.

4.2 Methodological approach

The literature review chapters highlighted the importance of taking account of the lived experiences of family food, while at the same time exploring the meanings and priorities attached to food, viewing food as playing more than a functional and nutritional role within family lives (Warin et al. 2008). Lived experiences can be viewed as activities which give meaning to everyday life (DeVault 1991), and with specific reference to food, Delormier et al consider 'the examination of daily food-related activities such as procuring food for the family, preparing food, making meals and cleaning up' (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 220).

This focus on meanings attends to the question of discourses which are important as they form part of the context of constraints within which family practices are located, and as discussed in Chapter Two, discourses are closely connected with family practices (Morgan 2011).

Discourse can be defined as a process of meaning-making or as ‘a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events’ (Burr 2003, p. 64). Definitions of discourse can be quite broad encompassing body language, gestures and facial expressions, but this study drew on a more focussed definition relating to ‘the practical (formal and informal) realm of language in action’ including talk, conversations and stories which are ‘patterned within the everyday activities of social life’ (Wetherell 2012, p. 52). Discourses include comparisons with others and other contexts, and by understanding how families are positioned within such discourses we can better understand what practices are possible for them to adopt, thus recognising the power of discursive constructions to constrain and enable behaviour.

This dual focus on discourse and lived experiences positions this study within a social constructionist orientation which adopts a critical and problematic perspective on the taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life, or what Nettleton et al (1995) refer to as the ‘problematisation of reality’. The implication is that family food is not regarded as a straightforward event, but is seen as the product of social reasoning, interactions and other factors which shape family food including priorities, values and world-views. In epistemological terms, a social constructionist stance posits that knowledge is constructed through daily interactions and leads us to examine how and in what ways families attach meaning to these interactions, going beyond assumptions about what enables and constrains decisions around food.

A social constructionist stance also takes forward debates around agency and structure building on the discussion in the previous chapter, and leading on from this perspective the main conundrum revolves around the direction of influence. Macro social constructionism (with its focus on higher level discursive structures) represents a top-down, structural determinism, while micro social constructionism

represents the importance of bottom-up influences, especially individual agency. This has led to calls for social constructionism ‘to reconceptualise the relationship between individuals and society’ (Burr 2003, p. 184). Rather than focussing on conflict, we need to look at the reciprocity between the two levels, recognising that at the same time people are actively constructing the world around them and being constrained by structures, and generational ‘frameworks of meaning’ (Burr 2003, p. 187).

Having established the *lens* and level of enquiry within a social constructionist approach, it is also important to consider more about *methods of enquiry* and here the discussion turns to assess the merit of the case study approach. This approach addresses the methodological implications of focussing on discourses and lived experiences, and the need to attend to ‘the tacit understandings involved in the ongoing planning and organisation’ of food, which, ‘due to their second-nature quality, are challenging for informants to articulate’ (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 120).

4.3 Family case studies

Case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are being posed (Yin 2003; Crowe et al. 2011), and they also provide a mechanism for examining family food practices in-depth, drawing on multiple member perspectives within each family (Gabb 2010). The particular merit of the case study approach is that it enables the ‘multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a particular context’ and overall it allows the participant voice to be heard (Lewis 2003, p. 52). Thus a case study approach places emphasis on connectedness – through participants and also through different sources of data. Although there are reported limitations of using case studies, including a lack of rigour and difficulties in generalising beyond the case being studied, they enable researchers to generalise about theoretical propositions, where the goal is to ‘expand and generalise theories’ (Yin 2003, p. 10). In this study the specific focus was on a multiple-case design, drawing on elements of the extended case method (Burawoy 1998).

The multiple-case design takes the family as the unit of analysis, rather than the school or community, although on occasion, some comparative observations are made regarding organisational aspects of food in different schools. The use of case

studies implies a replication approach to conducting the study, rather than a sampling logic, so the same data gathering format was repeated for all families across the study (Yin 2003).

Extended case investigators are focussed on a process of extending from the field out ‘to extract the general from the unique, to move from the “micro” to the “macro,” and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on pre-existing theory’ (Burawoy 1998, p. 5). This can be effective for developing theoretical insights and for examining the detail of social life, and such an approach implies a close reference to the underlying theory. Research drawing on this approach is ‘not interested in “representativeness” and the uniqueness of the case, as in the contribution to “reconstructing” theory’ (Burawoy 1998, p. 16). As Sullivan describes, the aim of the extended case method is ‘not to abstract the minimum number of essential features in one case that can be generalised to other cases, but, rather, to situate the individual case in as much richness of detail as possible’ (Sullivan 2002, p. 265).

By implication, this necessitates an in-depth approach to family food, which looks at the perspectives of different family members across a range of different contexts. Although previous studies have tended to focus on women as the main carers with responsibility for food and eating, some studies are beginning to include a broader range of perspectives including the perspectives and role of men (Devine et al. 2006; Blake et al. 2008; Blake et al. 2009). Although it is acknowledged that the policy focus on women and children is an important one, researchers are also striving to uncover what the family context means to men given the gendered divisions of domestic labour (McKie et al. 2004, p. 599), together with the marginalization of fathers’ health needs in UK policy initiatives (Williams 2007).

As well as the marginalised voice of men, children have also played a latent role in family food research to date, although there have been developments in terms of considering the perspectives of adolescents (Wills et al. 2008; Backett-Milburn et al. 2010a) in food choice decisions, and the use of a range of methods to draw out children’s views and opinions (O’Connell 2012). There is scope for expanding this research to explore more about the meanings that children and young people attach

to food and eating, acknowledging children as social actors in their own right with a shift away from research being conducted *on* children towards attempts to understand their points of view and experiences (Highet 2003).

Embedded within a case study approach, qualitative methods have particular benefits for enabling a focus on the relational and fluid dimensions of families (Morgan 2011). Rather than single approach methodologies, the literature on family practices advocates drawing on a combination of methods (Gabb 2008; O'Connell 2012), and the following section puts forward the case for using a combination of interview and diary methods as a way of moving beyond a one-off encounter with family members.

4.4 The diary-interview approach

Through their ability to capture processes that are often taken-for-granted, diaries offer potential for the study of family food practices and as Morgan points out, diaries alongside other qualitative research strategies are useful as a way of finding out 'what people do, when they do it and in relation to whom' (Morgan 2011). Also, in terms of the methodological paradigm outlined above, diaries have been useful in discerning discursive insights into intimate family practices (Spowart and Nairn 2014). In particular, diaries used in combination with interviews are regarded as a valuable combination of qualitative tools (Elliott 1997; Spowart and Nairn 2013, 2014).

The diary-interview approach can be traced back to Zimmerman and Wieder (1977) and there are three main elements: an initial interview; the research diary; and the debriefing or follow-up interview. Early diary-interview studies used the follow-up interview as a way of allowing researchers to check the authenticity of diary entries by exploring inconsistencies to see if the diarist was telling the truth (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977). This notion of interrogation does not sit well in social constructionist research where the focus is on exploring different accounts rather than being concerned by what is real or unreal (Burrows et al. 1995; Burr 2003). In contrast, later applications of the diary-interview approach have been inspired by more participatory intentions where diary analysis was used as a basis for the follow-up interview with participants asked to expand on their diaries and probed about the meanings, typicality and connections between events (Alaszewski 2006).

Elliott (1997) utilises the diary-interview method in her study on the prevalence of musculoskeletal symptoms and associated patterns of help-seeking, and reports on the way in which the method was useful for involving participants in the research, with diaries often referred to as an aide memoire for the interviews. This meant participants became ‘collaborators in the construction of the account and had a stake in the research process’ (Elliott 1997, p. 9). Others have also reported on the benefits of diaries in promoting researcher-participant collaboration. Spowart (2008) used the diary-interview method to understand the experiences of mothers who snowboard and at an early point in the study she became frustrated by the researcher-led nature of the interviews. Spowart also wanted to capture the intimacy of women’s lives, but realised observation would be problematic to conduct in the home or on a mountainside. The diary-interview approach addressed these problems and the follow-up interviews were largely guided by the diaries, and therefore became more personalised and participant-led.

The diary-interview method has also been put forward as a way of generating emotionally rich data as a result of the way in which diaries are produced close to the time of the event, in the privacy of the participant’s own home. Attention to the emotional elements of diaries echoes the social constructionist stance in the way that ‘emotions are more than states of feeling belonging to individuals, rather they are relational’ and are constructed between people rather than belonging to individuals (Spowart and Nairn 2014, p. 328). Gabb talks about the way in which diaries may be a true account of what happened, but the way the stories are told and ‘the framing of events typically reflected the dominant cultural narratives within which families operate as much as the events in and of themselves. That is to say, these data say as much about the repertoires of “happy families” and “good parenting” as they do about the particularities of lived experience’ (Gabb 2008, pp. 140-141).

A further advantage of using diaries for this study is the way in which they provide an insight into family life beyond what can be gleaned from interviews. Participant observation is problematic in a family environment (Bjørnholt and Farstad 2014), but diaries provide some insight into the taken-for-granted practices that may otherwise be omitted from interview accounts. Beyond the selection of the diary-interview approach, further methodological decisions centred around two main

questions: what type of diaries and what type of interviews were most appropriate for addressing the study's research aims.

4.4.1 Audio-diaries

Although the discussion so far has emphasised the importance of the taken-for-granted elements of family food, researchers have struggled to find ways of encouraging participants to reflect on this mundane aspect of daily life (Delormier et al. 2009; O'Connell 2012). Audio-diaries offer potential for capturing thoughts and feelings, and compared with written diaries they provide an accessible medium for capturing intimate stories about daily experiences (Hislop et al. 2005).

Audio-diaries have also been shown to have particular appeal with children because of the novelty factor and because of the way they allow them to take charge of the process (Worth 2009). The use of open diary formats also offers potential for capturing thoughts, feelings and the tacit meanings behind everyday routines. Although structured diaries have been shown to be useful for recording precise activities or behaviours, they are of little use in understanding how behaviour is embedded in a social context (Hislop et al. 2005).

In this study, following an initial interview with parents and children, participants were asked to record an overview of their food practices at the end of each day, for one week. Each family was provided with an audio-recorder, cassettes and spare batteries (Figure 2). They were also given suggestions about what to include, such as anything they enjoyed or disliked about food that day, and how food fitted in with other activities.

Figure 2 Audio-diary kits



The diaries were collected, analysed and the analysis was used as a basis for the follow-up interview. During these interviews, participants were invited to expand on topics introduced in their diaries, and were asked about the meanings of events, how typical these events were of their daily lives, and connections between them. The open and audio-format of the diaries provided opportunities to capture thoughts and feelings, and in several diaries participants revealed how emotions were closely inter-twined with food practices. Parents in particular referred to how they were feeling in relation to a busy week due to shift-work combined with childcare responsibilities, and entries suggest how these emotions impacted on food practices, particularly the neglect of parents' own diets.

Diaries have proved useful in promoting researcher-participant collaboration (Elliott 1997; Spowart and Nairn 2014), and this is in line with a social constructionist perspective where the emphasis is on methods which break down the power imbalance between researchers and the researched (Burr 2003). In this study, families were free to conduct the diaries however they wanted with minimal input from the researcher, apart from a text message reminder at the start of the diary-week, and some written suggestions about what to include. Most families chose to provide individual narratives at the end of each day and ten out of 36 participants opted for a written diary format, as they felt uncomfortable speaking into a recorder, which resonates with other diary-studies (Spowart and Nairn 2014). One family (the Banks) chose to interview each other, which produced interesting interactional data highlighting different concepts used by different family members:

Beth (mother, Banks): And any snacks today?

Bobbie (son, age 10 years): Well there was a sandwich?

Beth: Yes, but that was because you didn't have any dinner wasn't it?

Bobbie: I know

Beth: So it wasn't really a snack it was more of a second dinner wasn't it?

Bobbie: Yes.

Using the diaries to guide the follow-up interviews allowed these to become more personalised and participant-led than the initial interviews, and this also proved useful in raising potentially difficult issues. As reported by Spowart, if an issue was introduced by the participant in the diary, this legitimised it being raised in the follow-up interview (Spowart 2008). Similar openings were created in this study, as

was the case in one family where the mother talked about the 'poor' quality food the children ate when they were with their father. This meant that the different food practices shaped by these separate family arrangements - something that might not have otherwise been raised - could be explored in more detail in the follow-up.

In terms of ethical considerations, diaries may be viewed as an intrusion into personal lives and whereas an interview is a one-off event, a diary can remain with participants for a longer time and may be read or heard by someone else. In their study of sleep patterns, Hislop et al report how participants commented that the diaries (and their involvement in the study overall) may have affected their sleeping patterns by encouraging 'an unnatural focus on sleep; an event which would otherwise be taken-for-granted' (Hislop et al. 2005, p. 13). Similar comments were expressed by participants in Spowart's study and the diaries gave them time-out from motherhood through which to ponder aspects of their lives they would not normally reflect on, and to some extent there may be a therapeutic element to diarising in this way (Spowart and Nairn 2014). In this study participants commented on how the diaries encouraged them to do something different during diary week, usually encouraging them to be more health-focussed. As one father commented when reflecting on the diary:

Greg (father, Gates): It made me concentrate more on eating healthily, I suppose, because someone else would hear what I had been eating.

As well as one-off changes for diary week participants also reported the process of self-reflection raised their consciousness, and made taken-for-granted practices more visible and open to reflection:

Alison (mother, Abbotts): Having done this it's made me realise the kids tend to eat the same sorts of things, day in, day out and maybe need a little bit more variety.

4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are widely utilised as a method in research on families and health (Backett and Alexander 1991; Devine et al. 2003; Inglis et al. 2005; Wills 2012; Brannen et al. 2013; O'Connell and Brannen 2014). Unlike structured interviews which are based around a formal list of questions which the researcher asks verbatim, semi-structured interviews are based on a pre-defined list of questions

but enable the researcher to maintain breadth of coverage of different themes and topics, while at the same time allowing for more in-depth insights into certain aspects – which varies between respondents. Inglis et al drew on semi-structured interviews in their study of the food behaviours of women of low socio-economic status and note that this format was useful to ‘capitalise on the richness of the women’s responses while allowing the researcher to gain as complete and detailed an understanding as possible of the topic at hand’ (Inglis et al. 2005, p. 335).

Within an overall semi-structured approach, interviews with families also drew upon elements of narrative inquiry. The main appeal of the narrative approach is the way in which it provides a depth of understanding beyond the data into norms, structures and contexts, which are embedded within people’s accounts, thus drawing out insights into lived experiences alongside more discursive themes which are more ‘storied in its focus’ (Mello 2002, p. 232). Although narrative research comes in many forms and stems from a range of disciplinary backgrounds (Riley and Hawe 2005), one overarching definition provided by Denzin is that ‘a narrative as a story has a plot, a beginning, middle and an end. It has internal logic that makes sense to the narrator. A narrative relates events in a temporal, causal sequence’ (Denzin 1989, p. 37).

As Coffey and Atkinson note, there is nothing ‘uniquely privileged’ about personal narratives and there are no hard and fast rules about the best approach, but one of the main benefits of the narrative approach is the way it can provide a critical way of examining not only key actors and events but also cultural conventions and social norms (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p. 80). In this way narratives aim to bridge the tensions between structure and agency, which is appealing given the theoretical considerations around structure-agency interactions (Frohlich et al. 2001).

Exploring the hidden meanings behind daily practices and interactions around food are often difficult for respondents to articulate (Delormier et al. 2009), but narrative accounts can help to tease out these tacit meanings. Narratives are advocated as a means of understanding the social context of individual practices, as a way of understanding the individual’s place in their life-world and the day-to-day realities of life (Popay et al. 1998; Elliott and Williams 2004). Thus instead of asking closed

questions about the detail of particular interactions, open questions were employed in this study to encourage more lengthy accounts, with interviewees asked to focus on one or two important interactions, rather than documenting all the interactions that they could recall (Shucksmith et al. 2005). Follow-up questions also encouraged the generation of narrative accounts and included questions such as: ‘tell me more about that’, ‘how did that feel for you?’ or ‘can you think of an example?’ (McNair et al. 2008, p. 4).

To supplement interviews, field notes were also drawn on and this constituted an element of unstructured observations during visits to the family home. Using field notes in this way is useful for identifying interactions or encounters which include ‘comings and goings’ by friends or other family members, as well as activities related to the preparation or consumption of food (Kaufman and Karpati 2007). It was felt that observation in the family environment would be difficult and would be an additional burden to the research participants who were already being asked to give considerable amounts of time to the study through interviews and diary completion. Field notes also aimed to capture what was interesting and important about the field work as well as recording the detail of what happened that might otherwise be forgotten (Wolfinger 2002). One example of where field notes became relevant was in the case of the Irving family where interviews with the mother (Isla) proved difficult at an emotional level. Isla revealed a lot about her own childhood, how she was bullied at school and then later difficulties related to the trauma of losing her young son to pneumonia. The field notes captured the difficult points in the interview and this was useful at the analysis stage in terms of explaining why certain themes were not pursued in more detail.

Further detail about the format and content of the interviews with families are presented later in this chapter, after first attending to the practicalities of selecting study areas and recruiting families.

4.5 Selecting study areas

The three areas included in the study were lower socio-economic, post-industrial valleys communities in South Wales. A representative sample of different socio-economic areas was not relevant to the study’s aims and general social homogeneity

was important for two reasons. Firstly, lower socio-economic groups (especially in valleys areas in South Wales) are a particular policy priority given the trends in children's dietary health, and the dearth of evidence on how to engage parents from disadvantaged backgrounds has been highlighted as a research gap (Shucksmith et al. 2010; Currie et al. 2012; Public Health Wales NHS Trust 2013; Basterfield et al. 2014).

Secondly, overall social homogeneity enabled a focus on family food practices and the inter-relations with schools. Focusing on homogenous groups provides a means of enabling 'detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles of research interest' (Ritchie 2003). Similar approaches focusing on homogenous socio-economic groups have been undertaken in other studies on families and food such as Wood et al's study of interpretations of dietary advice amongst mothers in lower socio-economic groups, and Bolam et al's study of control over health amongst lower socio-economic groups (Bolam et al. 2003; Wood et al. 2010).

In addition to this focus on lower socio-economic areas, purposeful sampling was used to select schools that were seen to be active in terms of developing links with families, in relation to food and eating practices. Theoretically these schools (and associated families) would be able to comment on the interface with the family food environment and the selection of case studies was thus influenced by key stakeholders (Crowe et al. 2011). Three sources fed into this selection procedure: consultation with the National Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes Co-ordinator, based at the Welsh Government; feedback from local authority based Healthy Schools Co-ordinators across Wales; and once an area had been selected, further discussions with the relevant local authority Health Schools Co-ordinator, helped produce a list of schools who were active in developing links with families. In the three selected schools, actions related to involving parents and communities included: parent involvement in running the fruit tuck shop (Ash Park); encouraging healthier lunchboxes (Bridge Hill and Cherry Wood); food hygiene courses for parents (Cherry Wood); and parental involvement in school gardens (this was an action across all three schools). Further details about the selected schools are presented in Table 1.

The profile of the selected schools shows that there was some variation between schools and their catchments based on geography, free school meal entitlement and levels of deprivation. In terms of geography the sample included: a village with close proximity to an urban centre; former mining communities; and more remote valleys locations. There was also some variation in terms of free school meal entitlement compared with the average for the local authority (22.7%), with a range between Ash Park (18.47%) and Cherry Wood (45.83%), although all the schools had entitlements above the average across Wales (16.2%) (Welsh Assembly Government 2008b).

This variation within the sample was also reflected in deprivation indices. All schools were located within a single valleys local authority in South Wales, which is the third most deprived local authority area in Wales, with 18% of Lower- layer Super Output (LSOA) areas in the most deprived 10% (Welsh Assembly Government 2011a). There was some variation between the selected areas with one LSOA in the catchment for Cherry Wood School ranking in the 10% most deprived in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government 2011b). Appendix A includes the introductory letter, information sheet, consent form and interview schedule used with schools.

Table 1 Profile of study schools

School description	Number of pupils on roll ¹	Free school meal entitlement (FSM) ¹	Deprivation scores for LSOAs in school catchments ²	Number of families recruited (number of participants)
<i>Ash Park school</i> Semi-rural village at southern end of valleys, close proximity to M4	249 pupils	18.47%	8.5 and 17.9	3 families (11 participants)
<i>Bridge Hill school</i> Former mining community, borders Communities First area	211 pupils	23.22%	25.1, 30.2, 33 and 45.2	5 families (15 participants)
<i>Cherry Wood school</i> Former mining community, Communities First area	168 pupils	45.83%	35.5, 50.9 and 70.1	3 families (10 participants)

Notes

¹ Number of pupils on roll and free school meal (FSM) entitlement. Data provided by StatsWales for 2007-2008 (Welsh Assembly Government 2008c, b).

² The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is the official measure of deprivation in small areas of Wales. Deprivation scores range from 0 (least deprived) to 100 (most deprived). There are 1,896 Lower-Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Wales each with a population of about 1,500 people. School catchments covered more than one LSOA so deprivation scores for each LSOA within the catchment are presented. Data provided by StatsWales for 2008 (Welsh Assembly Government 2011b).

Each school demonstrated slightly different dimensions of family-school interactions, keeping in mind that they were all purposefully selected because they had taken some steps towards working with families around food. The schools were not strikingly different from each other in terms of their relationships with families, but the differences were more subtle and exploring these differences helped explore the contours of power dynamics in different contexts and from different perspectives. Further details about the nature of their relationship with families are discussed in Chapter Six.

4.6 Interviews with schools

The main aim of this stage of the research was to provide information about the school context in terms of approaches to food and eating, and the school's experiences of linking with families. It was important to include the school's perspective as their role in health-promotion has shifted from hosting health initiatives to more active collaboration in public health (Shucksmith et al. 2005; Spratt et al. 2012).

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with school staff. In Bridge Hill and Cherry Wood the Head teacher and the in-school Healthy School Co-ordinator were interviewed together. The Head was able to give a more general overview and the in-school co-ordinator was able to add detail about school actions around food and eating, and the school's involvement in the Healthy Schools Scheme. In Ash Park an interview had been requested with the in-school Healthy School Co-ordinator but this was not possible on the day due to other school commitments, and the Head felt they were able to cover all aspects of the interview schedule.

A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) included an initial section on the school catchment in terms of key characteristics and problems or issues. The history of the school's involvement with the Healthy Schools Scheme framed the rest of the interview focussing on the school's approaches to food and eating, including school food provision and other activities related to food within the school. School approaches to linking with families was a final area for discussion, particularly schools' experiences of what facilitated and challenged family engagement.

Field notes were made after each visit to the school and these captured additional information such as: interactions between teachers, pupils and parents; current work displayed which referred to school food activities; and the school layout. This proved to be useful background information to draw on when meeting families and helped establish rapport. Children in particular found it easier to narrate school-based practices once they realised the researcher had visited the school and had knowledge

of the physical layout of classrooms, dining halls and other spaces. In addition to field notes, there was an additional meeting attended at Bridge Hill school. Around the time of the interviews the school organised a meeting with parents regarding lunchboxes as a means of encouraging healthier options. The main reason for attending the meeting was to recruit parents to the study, but field notes were also made about the event and this highlighted interesting dynamics between parents and teachers, and this is discussed in Chapter Six. The next section focuses in more detail on the recruitment of families and research methods used.

4.7 Recruiting families

The overall aim of the recruitment of families was to explore experiences of family-school interactions in families where there was at least one child between eight and eleven years, identified as a critical time for the negotiation of food and nutrition (Warren et al. 2008; Department of Health 2011). It was important to select children at an age when they are quite well established in primary school as younger children are still adjusting to starting school and this raises additional issues around transitions between home and school (Mayall 1994). Other family researchers have reported utilising a range of recruitment strategies with families including leaflet distribution, cold-calling, attendance at local community groups, and the use of established networks and friendship groups (Gabb 2008). A number of different methods were used to recruit families to this study including: meeting parents at drop-off and pick-up at schools; distributing letters via pupil-post; presentations to pupils, with flyers to take home; and attendance at parents' evenings. Across the three schools the most effective recruitment mechanism was meeting parents at school drop-off and pick-up. Appendix B includes the letter, information sheet and consent form used with parents, as well as the adapted information sheet and assent form used with children.

The initial information presented to parents suggested that participation in the study should be discussed within the family (between adults and children) before they decided to contact the researcher to confirm a willingness to take part. At the end of the data collection all participating family members received a gift voucher in recognition for their time and effort devoted to the study. The ethics associated with paying participants for their involvement has been widely debated, particularly the

ethics of paying children, with some opposed to this practice on the grounds that children may be pressurised into taking part (Cree et al. 2002). This study followed the approach taken by the National Children's Bureau (1993) and offered the voucher as a thank you or honorarium rather than as an inducement.

With the aim of selecting at least three families in each of the three study areas, the final sample of eleven families (18 parents and 18 children) included parents aged between 28 and 56 years (with an average of 39 years), and children between six and 16 years (with an average of nine years). Six parents were not in paid employment (including one father who was retired), and two were single parents. The 12 parents in employment mostly worked in manual and skilled trades (light manufacturing industries), or caring and service occupations (shop work and learning support assistants in schools), and three parents worked in professional and managerial occupations (a nurse, a policeman, and an engineer). Although the case study families were fairly homogenous in terms of all living in lower-socio-economic areas, they varied in their characteristics and included different numbers of children, single parent families, and single and dual income families. Further details about the families can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 Profile of case study families

Family	Parents (age), employment status	Children (age)	Others in household, not study participants
<i>Ash Park school</i>			
Abbotts*	Alison (35), part-time childminder	Andrew (14)	
	Alan (35), gas heating engineer	Aiden (8)	
Banks	Beth (40), part-time travel agent	Bobbie (10)	
	Brian (40), factory worker		
Carters	Christine (48), part-time nurse	Christopher (8)	Colin (father),
	Carys (30), not in paid employment	Catherine (8)	Carl (13)
	(daughter to Christine)		Carlie (6)
<i>Bridge Hill school</i>			
Davies	Debra (28), trainee Learning Support Assistant	David (8)	
		Dean (6)	
Edmunds	Emma (36), not in paid employment	Ellis (8)	Edward (4)
	Edwin (40), factory worker		
Falkner	Faye (35), not in paid employment	Fran (9)	Fraser (father), Finley (4), Ffion (2), Fred (14 months)
Gates	Gail (42), Learning Support Assistant	George (11)	
	Greg (42), policeman		
Harris	Hannah (43), nursery nurse	Helen (16)	
	Howard (43), engineer	Harry (10)	
<i>Cherry Wood school</i>			
Irving	Isla (33), shop worker	Ian (9)	Ioan (father), Ifan (7), Isobel (4)
Jenkins	Jemma (42), not in paid employment	Jane (13)	
		Jennie (8)	
		Joseph (7)	
Kemble	Kate (36), not in paid employment	Karen (12)	
	Kenneth (56), retired	Kyle (10)	

**To preserve anonymity, all names have been changed.*

4.8 Interviews with families

4.8.1 Interview format

As highlighted in the literature review chapters, a number of ‘voices’ have been marginalised in traditional studies of the family food environment, particularly voices of men and children (Williams 2007; Gadhoke et al. 2014). This study aimed to address this gap by interviewing all family members including parents or carers and children. This created the potential for whole family interviews which is defined as ‘a method of data collection where all of the family unit are involved in a group setting specially designed for the purpose of gathering information’ (Astedt-Kurki and Hopia 1996, p. 507). Whole family interviews can be seen as a form of group interview and do not lend themselves to as much depth as one-to-one interviews. Given the specific aims of this study to provide in-depth information about food practices, whole group family interviews were not appropriate. In addition, there are also logistical difficulties reported in the literature such as whether individuals feel obliged to comply with the views of others in the family (Astedt-Kurki and Hopia 1996). A further factor to consider in this study was the young age of the children involved and a decision was made to tailor methods for children as detailed in the section below.

A further methodological decision was whether to interview couples together or apart and although the literature suggests that joint interviews are in some ways second best, there are also advantages of conducting joint interviews. Although they are not superior to individual interviews, they can produce rich data as a result of interview dynamics between the couple and between the couple and the researcher. As Bjørnholt and Farstad comment, ‘interaction between couples brought up arguments and topics that may not have been revealed so readily in individual interviews’ (Bjørnholt and Farstad 2014, p. 7). Discussions between partners can reveal detailed pictures of family relationships which strengthen the knowledge base of the researcher, and in some cases the researcher takes on an observer role as the couple conduct a discussion between themselves. One example of this was in the Harris family where the parents’ interview was used as a forum for discussions about the son receiving second helpings in school. The parents discussed how they had

dealt with this issue so far and how it continued to be a subject for discussion. In this way the joint interview facilitated a means of tapping into family discussions:

Hannah (mother): And I think as well, he enjoys going to breakfast club and I know it's cruel but I think he's a bit of a charmer with the dinner ladies isn't he? Cos he did say he likes the dinner ladies. I had to stop him, he was having toast and cereal and they were giving him an extra slice of toast and I had to ask them not to cos I didn't think he really needed it. Which is probably a bit cruel, but,

Howard (father): He had seconds the other day which he shouldn't really need, the meal should be enough.

One concern raised about joint interviews is that one partner will lead the discussion and the other partner's perspective will be overlooked. In this study, questions were directed towards both participants and contributions encouraged where there was a tendency for one partner to begin to dominate. The diaries proved a useful supplement in these cases as they allowed the less dominant partner to have a voice, and also enabled a direct line of questions to be composed for the follow-up interview.

4.8.2 Interview themes

Drawing out elements of the theoretical framework around structure, agency and practice interactions, the line of questioning focussed on families' daily food practices at home and school, the meanings behind their practices, their agency and negotiations in family and school contexts, and the ways in which structural factors influenced their food practices. In alignment with the diary-interview approach, follow-up interviews were more tailored towards the diary accounts so these were more specific to each family and each family member. Interview schedules used with parents and children are included in Appendix C and guidance notes for diaries are included in Appendix D.

The first step in the interviews was to gain an overview of family food in the home and school, with families asked to recall a typical day and to talk through the decisions behind the various food practices (Wills 2012). Within this overall approach, three cross-cutting themes were explored: comparisons between children's food across family and school; roles and responsibilities around food in order to ascertain dynamics around agency; and questions about families' interactions with schools. Each of these three main areas is considered below.

Firstly, in terms of comparisons between family food and school food, questions followed Delormier et al's (2009) exploration of the ways in which rules and resources around food are attached to family and school contexts. This also builds on other studies where children and parents have been asked to compare differences between family and school, which has proved useful for exploring food preferences, availability and structures across different eating contexts, (Morabia and Costanza 2010).

A second cross-cutting theme was the exploration of agency in relation to family and school food practices. Specifically the interviews explored intentions and capabilities to influence family food practices, and the extent to which these intentions were met with acceptance and resistance. The way into exploring incidences of agency empirically was through questions about *roles* and *responsibilities*, covering a range of practices including planning, shopping, preparation and mealtimes, investigating who was involved, what happens, when and where. Here the emphasis was not on quantifying the roles that family members undertake, but looking at the *quality* of those roles (McMunn et al. 2006). That is, how they are determined and how they relate to the roles of others. This drew out important insights about social relationships, including parent-child relationships and relationships with other family members and friends.

A final area of questioning related to links between families and schools including involvement in education and a focus on links relating to dietary health improvement. This included exploring family's awareness of activities within the school food environment, as well as their level of involvement with schools, encompassing their roles, experiences, interactions, meanings and motivations. Families were probed about the nature of the interaction with schools, any difference it made to family food practices and whether the interactions had been complimentary or contradictory to their usual practices. Probing about the facilitators and challenges was also important in order to address the limitations of existing interventions attempting to link schools and families. Across this broad range of themes there was also an emphasis on understanding meanings behind interactions (between family members and between families and schools). Therefore questions probed about the various roles of families and schools in healthy eating approaches,

and more broadly in terms of issues of acceptability and legitimacy of state intervention in family life.

4.9 Research with children

Studies of family food are beginning to include a broader range of member perspectives with children and young people acknowledged as social actors in their own right (Highet 2003; Backett-Milburn et al. 2010a; O'Connell and Brannen 2014). The emotional, social and symbolic aspects of food have been shown to be important for young people and this helps public health approaches address these challenges more appropriately (Stead et al. 2011). Studies which have drawn on children's perspectives show important insights with findings relating to the different and contradictory perspectives of children and parents, as well as issues around relationship dynamics (Backett 1990; O'Connell and Brannen 2014). This study aimed to build on these findings by examining children's accounts of family food practices, and the following sections consider the involvement of children in terms of ethics and methods used.

4.9.1 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University Ethics Committee. Interviewing children raises ethical and legal issues about the rights of children and the obligations of researchers (HMSO 1989; Fraser et al. 2004). Unlike research with adults, which ordinarily only requires the consent of the person participating, research with children often requires the prior consent of someone who has personal responsibility for the young person in addition to their own assent. Parents were provided with information to allow them to decide if their child should participate, and children were also provided with information about the nature of the commitment to participate (including their rights as respondents), and the purpose of the research. They were also given the opportunity to refuse to participate at all stages of the research and it was important to agree a signal to enable them to withdraw easily from the interview at any time (National Children's Bureau 1993). When designing the information and consent tools for children care was taken to: avoid overcrowding the consent form with text; simplify the information children were asked to read; and avoid asking for their signature as children of this age may not have developed this skill.

For ethical reasons, it may not be possible to guarantee children the same degree of confidentiality as adults if the research uncovered child protection issues. The researchers' duty to breach confidentiality in these circumstances was made clear in the information given to parents and children. It was important to talk through these issues with parents and children, and in particular to check their understanding of 'harm' and 'confidentiality' (Williamson et al. 2005). In respect of child protection issues, a clear protocol was drawn up based on other studies (Williamson et al. 2005), together with the All Wales Child Protection Procedures which are guidelines produced for all individuals and agencies working with children and families (All Wales Area Child Protection Committees 2008). A copy of the study protocol for child protection was given to parents at the start of the research process and is included in Appendix E.

It was not anticipated that the topics covered in the interviews would cause any harm or upset to children or families. However the researcher was mindful of potentially sensitive areas such as eating disorders, and therefore the information provided to participants directed them to their GP or Health Visitor if they had concerns about family feeding. All families were sent a letter of thanks after the data collection was completed and they were also provided with copies of their interview transcripts to amend if appropriate.

4.9.2 Tailoring methods for children

Although research has shown that there are benefits from interviewing children alone in terms of enabling them to be open about experiences and feelings (Hill 1997), it is also acknowledged that it can be intimidating for children to speak in a one-to-one situation (Hill et al. 1996; Kellett and Ding 2004). In this study a pragmatic approach was adopted and interviews with children were conducted in a variety of formats including interviews with siblings, whilst some interviews were conducted with parents present. It was left to the children (in conjunction with parents) to decide on the format they felt most comfortable with.

The interview format for children was designed in order to provide prompts and stimuli to encourage discussion and to keep in mind the need to generate good and relevant data (Punch 2002). At the same time it was crucial to maintain their focus

and interest, whilst acknowledging that interview situations can be intimidating for children (Hill et al. 1996; Kellett and Ding 2004). Other studies with children have highlighted the importance of appropriate language when phrasing interview questions where the adoption of a ‘non-specific, non-testing and personalised approach’ is not too formal, but draws on frames of reference which children can relate to (Backett and Alexander 1991, p. 36). This approach was followed in this study where the line of questioning asked about ‘things to eat and drink’ rather than ‘food’ or ‘snacks’, and instead of asking about foods that were good or bad for you children were asked what they liked and disliked.

Interviews were conducted with children using appropriate methodologies that ‘create the potential for children to have their own ideas and explanations heard and understood’ (Backett-Milburn and McKie 1999, p. 397). One way of achieving this was through the use of an initial ice-breaker activity to help put them at ease and build rapport. For example, in Hill et al’s study of five to 12 year olds’ emotional wellbeing in Scotland, they used ‘about myself’ sheets at the start of the interview. These allowed children to write or ask the researchers to write some basic things about themselves such as likes and dislikes. They noted that this helped reinforce that the interview was not about right or wrong answers but was about their perceptions (Hill et al. 1996). In practice this activity worked well with some children, but some interviewees found it quite daunting to ask questions of the researcher, especially at the start of the process when relationships were still being developed. As a result, the ice breaker activity was amended to focus on the recording device because this proved to be a source of interest with children, and after being shown how to operate it they were invited to make a short recording and play it back. In some cases children were happy to ask the question and in other cases the researcher posed the question on a topic unrelated to the rest of the interview.

The remainder of the interview was structured around the same topics as the parent interviews but also included a set of photographs to help stimulate discussion. This approach was drawn on by Ells (2001) to investigate food choices with children and adolescents. A similar activity was used by Warren et al (2008) in their evaluation of the all-Wales primary school free breakfast initiative, where focus groups with

primary school children were stimulated by photographs depicting different eating scenarios (such as the school canteen, family kitchen and family lounge etc.). The same photographs were used in this study as a way of encouraging discussion about similarities and differences related to each context (Figure 3). Children were asked what they thought was happening in the photograph and whether this was pertinent to their own experiences.

Figure 3 Photographs used in interviews with children²



Throughout the interview, the emphasis was on encouraging children to tell stories about specific incidents or encounters, in alignment with the narrative approach. They were asked to describe a typical day in order to encourage them to take ownership of the discussion and to highlight encounters and events that were significant for them. Other researchers have identified the importance of asking children to describe specific daily events, rather than asking directly about the child themselves. Mauthner describes questions about routines as a useful approach and in this study children were asked about the following daily events: what happens at

² These photographs were used in the study evaluating the Primary School Free Breakfast Initiative in Wales (Warren et al. 2008).

home before they go to school; what happens at school (looking at break times and lunch); and what happens at home after school (Mauthner 1997).

To round off the interview two short activities were introduced – a sentence completion task and 'Aladdin's wishes' (Hill et al. 1996) (see Appendix C). The sentence completion task was useful for summarising views on the topics already discussed. They were prompted with 'I enjoy eating at home because...' and 'I enjoy eating at school because...' and this often generated additional insights clarifying differences and similarities between these contexts. A second useful summarising activity was for children to state three wishes, like Aladdin. Hill suggests it may be helpful to set limits for these wishes so in this study children were asked to state (or write) three wishes for changing food practices in school and three wishes for changing food practices at home. This proved useful for thinking of future change and aspirations, and further prompts explored challenges and facilitators (Hill 1997).

4.10 Thematic analysis

Once interviews and diaries were transcribed a thematic approach to analysis was adopted encompassing elements of discourse analysis. Thematic analysis 'acknowledges the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of "reality"'. Therefore thematic analysis can be a method which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of "reality"' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 9).

The analysis broadly followed the approach by Braun and Clarke (2006) which proceeds through a six-stage process, starting with familiarisation with the data, followed by the identification of codes which are then collated into themes and reviewed, refined and named before selecting appropriate extract examples for presentation. The familiarisation stage included reading each transcript several times working towards an emerging thematic framework (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). This stage also involved 'making listening and analytic notes, identifying recurrent phrases or talk on particular topics and paying particular attention to aspects that initially appear puzzling or surprising' (Will and Weiner 2014, p. 294). Further

coding consisted of more detail where the relationships between initial themes were drawn out.

The refinement of codes and collation into themes was facilitated by the software package N-Vivo 8 which was used to manage the data and facilitate further analysis. All of the identified themes were entered into N-Vivo and organised according to the analytical framework which had been developed. By systematically reviewing the transcripts and field notes line by line, codes were added at the ‘manifest’ level of what was said and at the ‘latent’ level where meaning was inferred from the words spoken or actions perceived (Mason 1995). This reflects the different forms of thematic analysis which include inductive or bottom-up analysis where the themes emerge from the data, as well as more theoretical or top-down analysis which moves beyond the ‘surface’ or explicit meaning of the data, focussing on ‘latent’ themes whereby ‘underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations’ were examined (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 13). The collective lifestyles approach assisted the analytic framework by providing a lens into the following themes: the food-related routinised activities of family members; the way in which food was associated with different dynamics of relationships; and how food practices were related to constraints and opportunities, across socio-ecological domains (Frohlich et al. 2002a). In this way, the collective lifestyles lens facilitated the shift from coding and analysis towards interpretation, and the shift from the practices themselves, towards a consideration of the role of structure and agents.

Identifying ‘latent’ themes is closely related to discourse analysis ‘where broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings are theorised as underpinning what is actually happening in the data’ (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 13). Therefore, in addition to drawing on thematic analysis, the study also drew on elements of discourse analysis, in order to explore in more detail the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions which shaped individual accounts.

4.11 Discourse analysis

This study followed a ‘middle-range’ or ‘meso’ conceptualisation of discourse analysis which can be defined as ‘being relatively sensitive to language use in context but interested in finding broader patterns and going beyond the details of the

text and generalising to similar local contexts' (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000, p. 1133). This compares with a 'micro-discourse approach' which focuses on the detailed use of language in a specific context, and a 'Grand Discourse Approach' which includes looking at organisational cultures and ideologies (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000). Middle-range discourse analysis has been used in other studies of family food and allowed for 'a detailed focus on the contextualised interview talk' together with, 'an interest in synthesising these within wider discourses' (O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010, p. 526).

Analytically this involved focussing on the structure of participants' explanations including their words, phrases, concepts and belief systems, drawing out contradictions, ambivalence and paradoxes. In order to focus the analysis, three more specific questions were used to explore the data: firstly, what discourses were drawn on in accounts; secondly, how were these discourses used to position individuals in relation to others; and thirdly, how were accounts positioned in relation to broader socio-cultural structures. Each of these areas is considered below.

Firstly, attention was given to the 'linguistic resources or tool kits available to speakers in the construction of their accounts', which in practice means focussing on grammatical constructions, metaphors and figures of speech that people draw on in their accounts (Burr 2003, p. 167). Discourses (including contradictory discourses) were drawn out by Will and Weiner in their study on 'healthy living' talk in relation to cholesterol reduction and how this related to health, pleasure, sociality and pragmatism which illustrated the 'messy compromises' in their everyday lives (Will and Weiner 2014, p. 301).

Secondly, in exploring the utility of discourses the emphasis was on examining how participants constructed their position in relation to others, whether they defended and legitimised their own practices through comparisons with others who they deemed were more or less responsible or more or less morally worthy.

Finally, discourse analysis also examined how accounts reflected broader structures, including how material, social and cultural arrangements worked to support and challenge different discourses and positions. Thus attention was also given to more

general societal-wide comparisons which are ideological in nature (Burr 2003). There is also a political dimension to this sort of analysis with the aim of overcoming the dominance of oppressive discourses and making more marginalised voices heard. This is important given the way in which negotiations around food are imbued with power dynamics between schools, parents, children, and the state. Therefore, one of the appealing aspects of discourse analysis is the way ‘it attends to mechanisms of power and offers a description of their functioning’ (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2007, p. 91).

Discourse analysis also facilitates links into policy and practice recommendations through the way in which analysis shifts from the level of the account, towards broader observations about society. This follows Willig’s discursive approach to analysing interviews with heterosexual men and women about sexual activity in the context of HIV/AIDS. This analysis shifted beyond how men and women are positioned within discourses of sexuality, towards recommendations for future policy and practice, which related to recommendations for changes in sex education (Willig 1999). Through this staged process of analysis we can see that ‘what her participants had to say is taken as much more than simply an account of their personal opinions or beliefs’ (Burr 2003, p. 174). Following this approach the analysis considered the power of different discursive positions to enable and constrain food practices (which leads into recommendations about school approaches to food and eating), and how material conditions worked to support and challenge these discourses (which leads into recommendations about wider organisations and structures).

4.11.1 Analysing affect and emotion

Analysing the affective dimensions of everyday food practices helps elucidate the significance of emotion and care-work, moving beyond emotion as reports of feelings to recognise this as ‘a rhetorical activity’, with the display of emotion performing some ‘interactional business’ (Wetherell 2001b). The analysis in this study explored how displays of emotion elucidated ‘interactional business’ related to doing family, doing food and connecting (or disconnecting) with the school – focusing on the cross-cutting role of emotion and care-giving. This provided space

for the emergence of discourses of food as care and food as emotion to emerge alongside discourses of food as nutrition, commensality and socialisation.

Attending to emotions resonates with discussions about social class and the role of emotional capital. Debates have moved on from Bourdieu's conceptualisation of emotions as conservative, non-conscious aspects of habitus which reinforce former practices without potential for change (Wetherell 2012). More recent work has taken forward the notion of emotional capital as a more complex phenomena which needs to be understood in terms of the specific context, relationships and normative assumptions of the key actors and circumstances at the time, and it is these dimensions that govern whether the emotion under analysis has any value, rather than being predetermined by the social class in question. Instead of continuing to focus on social class, it is now time 'to re-consider solidifying affective patterns in ways that also focus on sites, scenes, actual practices and contexts of use, and the messiness of social life' (Wetherell 2012, p. 119). In this study, rather than drawing distinctions between social groups, attention was given to the particular family context where emotions are represented, considering who is involved, the dynamics of the relationships, as well as the background and history around the interaction, and instead of rounding off smooth edges the messiness of the data was maintained (Gabb 2008).

4.11.2 Data comparisons

Throughout these main strands of analysis, data comparisons were drawn at a number of levels. Firstly, data was compared *between* families and the influence of area, school, and family characteristics were examined, although as the discussion above has highlighted, most attention was paid to the specific context of families, their relationships and the circumstances at the time. Data were also compared *within* families to explore consensus and contradictions between accounts from children and parents (Backett 1990). This level of comparison was also used to illustrate different experiences and meanings of family-school links within the same family.

Data comparisons were facilitated by constructing case descriptions of families to help identify causal links and processes. Other studies have shown that these can be a powerful way of understanding family processes (Alldred et al. 2002). As Coffey

and Atkinson point out, 'our informants may tell us long and complicated accounts and reminiscences. When we chop them up into separate coded segments, we are in danger of losing the sense that they are accounts' (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Thus in addition to chopping and segmenting the data, it was also useful to collate data and produce whole family case studies, linked to the relevant data from schools. This was a useful tool for re-constructing families' unique stories, stories which became more vivid through hearing the voices of different family members. N-Vivo was a useful tool for splitting the data and looking at comparisons, but manual collation of case studies for each family was an additional important component. O'Connell and Brannen (2013) also comment on this case study approach in their analysis of family food practices and how they brought together data from parents and children to give a sense of the family as a whole, while maintaining differences in the perspectives of the individual actors.

The diaries also facilitated data comparisons highlighting consistencies and inconsistencies between parents and children. As Gabb notes, 'when several members of a household completed the same methods it was possible to use comparative analysis to look for patterns across the family dataset' (Gabb 2008, p. 142). In some cases there were shared narratives and in other cases there were more contradictions as each member put forward their own perspective on events.

One example is in the case of the Gates family where Gail (the mother) attached particular importance to the family eating together, and this came through in her description of breakfast routines. Gail would be in the kitchen preparing packed-lunches but would maintain communications with George (her 11 year old son), and she emphasised this point on four out of five week days in her diary. George's perspective on this mealtime was slightly different. He did not stress the communication flow with Gail and saw this mealtime as a lone experience. For example on the first day of his diary he commented: 'I ate on my own in the living room'. For the same day Gail's diary entry was as follows:

Gail: George had his breakfast in the living room but all the doors were open and we were able to talk to each other.

All data in the following chapters are referenced with the family name and the name of the individual family member. In line with a social constructionist approach the decision was taken to use names rather than roles (mother, father, son, daughter etc.), influenced by the way in which the use of roles as labels suggests that these identities are more important than the speaker's gender or any other identity. As Wetherell and colleagues note, 'the role, therefore, constructs the talk as a certain kind of occasion and could be criticised for imposing this interpretation. We could ask: are the participants orienting to this?' (Wetherell 2001a, p. 35).

4.12 Reflexivity in researching families

Family-based research involves considering how families relate to the research process, and how researchers' own family experiences affect the questions we want to ask and the way we want to ask them (Daly 1992). Thus 'the task of the researcher becomes to acknowledge and even to work with their own intrinsic involvement in the research process, and the part that this plays in the results that are produced. The researcher must view the research as necessarily a co-production between themselves and the people they are researching' (Burr 2003, p. 152). Co-production is particularly relevant in family-based research given the personal nature of the issues involved and as Copeland notes, 'everybody has a family and everybody has notions about how families work' (Copeland and White 1991, p. 10). Although this can provide useful insights, relying too much on personal experience is to be avoided, and one way round this is for researchers to continually recognise their assumptions and values.

In this study, the presentation of my own experiences as a parent and as someone with a history of living in a valleys community was useful for negotiating trust and for developing relationships with families, especially during the recruitment stage. This was important to help build rapport, although it was also important to be mindful that too much researcher and respondent symmetry could lead to assumptions and misunderstandings (Morrow and Richards 1996). My role as a mother to a young child was highly relevant to some interview discussions where experiences of children's food were exchanged, and this proved to be a useful way of encouraging a more conversational style of interview, in line with the narrative approach. The analysis was reflexive of this kind of interviewer role and built upon

research which has shown that reciprocity between interviewer and interviewee, and a willingness to share personal details can be a useful tool to enhance engagement, trust and interview depth (McNair et al. 2008). Field notes included reflexive comments to describe the circumstances unique to each interview, such as the extent to which the interviewer may have influenced the interview and any other points that could have a bearing on the interview process.

This reflexive approach continued through the analysis stages, and memo notes in N-Vivo were used to record changing levels of interaction with the data as my own family circumstances changed. While conducting the interviews my experiences of parenthood were restricted to pre-school environments, but during the analysis stage I became more involved in the school environment as a parent, and this broadened the experiences I brought to the study. My growing family and the birth of a second child also provided new insights into parenthood and feeding the family - experiences which I appreciated through a different lens once my own family life became more complex.

4.13 Guide to empirical chapters

Chapter 5: Families' relationships with food

The empirical chapters commence in Chapter Five with an exploration of all families and the key characteristics of their relationship with food, which addresses the first research aim which was *to understand how family food practices are discursively displayed and framed with regards to state and society*. One of the central arguments of this thesis is that family food needs to be understood within the context of influences from across a range of socio-ecological domains, and this chapter begins to address this by exploring policy and societal influences.

This chapter draws upon data from interviews and diaries with parents and children, although in the main, the data are derived from the initial interviews where family members talked about their overarching priorities for food. All families are introduced in this initial empirical chapter, whereas subsequent chapters are more selective but provide more in-depth accounts, drawing on illustrative examples. In this chapter the emphasis is on inter-family comparisons (although some intra-family

comparisons are drawn out where relevant, such as where there are distinctions between the framing of parents' and children's food).

Following the discursive elements of the analysis plan, as described above, the chapter draws out analysis in relation to: the form and function of accounts; and how accounts were positioned in relation to others, reflecting on relationships with state and society. The chapter identifies two main discursive positions which can be seen as expressions of how families interacted with these structures: families talked about being in control; and they also talked about struggling with food. The findings are theorised in relation to the dilemmatic and social character of control, within these two broad positions.

Chapter 6: Family-school relationships

Chapter Six addresses the second research aim which was *to understand how family-school relationships mediate broader family-state relationships*. This shifts the discussion towards an examination of socio-ecological influences at the institutional level, paying particular attention to the interface between families and schools.

In alignment with the case study approach to analysis, data from school interviews are analysed alongside interviews and diaries with parents and children. This chapter is organised around the three study schools in order to foreground their perspectives, whilst also considering connections and disconnections with accounts from families.

Drawing on the structure-agency approach, the focus is on theorising the inter-relationship between school-based structures and key agents across family, school and policy contexts. For example, in terms of school lunchtime practices, the analysis draws out how this was influenced by schools responding to government guidance and also how lunchtimes were perceived and experienced by children. At the same time, lunchtimes are explored from parents' perspectives looking at how they interpret and respond to school rules and structures. Compared with the previous chapter, this chapter encompasses a different scale of analysis, with a more localised lens of inquiry into relationships at the family-school interface.

Chapter 7: The lived experience of family food

Chapter Seven addresses the third research aim which was *to explore the main aspects of the lived experiences of family food including challenges and constraints encountered*. This moves beyond the broad relationships with food which were analysed in Chapter Five, and instead considers the way in which food and eating is embedded within day-to-day interactions, and how responsibility is enacted and constrained in daily life. In socio-ecological terms this relates to the inter-family level, looking at the range of practices across families, drawing out the specific context and circumstances of each case.

This chapter is organised around three broad sets of practices: eating together, more varied food practices, and more individualised practice - with emblematic case studies drawn on to exemplify the way in which different practices were constructed. At the same time, the analysis (particularly the discursive elements of analysis) elucidates how these practices reflect broader structures, including how material, social and cultural arrangements work to support and challenge different discourses and positions.

The analysis illuminates particular structures which constrained family food practices. At the same time the emphasis is on the different ways in which families interact with and interpret these social structures, which is expressed through the different meanings attached to food. Families shift in and out of control as their agency is tempered within disparate contexts, and the chapter's emphasis on day-to-day experiences adds further complexities to the concept of control.

Chapter 8: Child-parent food relationships

The final empirical chapter addresses the final research aim which was *to understand patterns of interaction between parents and children in relation to food in the family and the school*. In socio-ecological terms this centres on intra-family relations, drawing on data from parents and children to consider family dynamics around food negotiations. The main sources of data for analysis are interviews with parents and children, and diaries also facilitate data comparisons highlighting consistencies, inconsistencies and different priorities.

Building on previous reports of child-parent interactions around food (O'Connell et al, 2014) this chapter examines three main patterns of interaction: parental control, child control and parent-child negotiations, although the findings also theorise the complexity of child-parent interactions, with fluctuations in control demonstrated across different contexts. Particular attention is paid to the dynamics of parent-child relationships around school food which builds on family-school relationships considered in Chapter Six. The interface between parents and grandparents also provides further insight into the wider significance of food, and how it is embedded in extended family relationships and care-giving, drawing on more affective dimensions of the analysis.

Chapter 5 Families' relationships with food

5.1 Introduction

Part of the challenge of improving family-school connections around food includes, shifting beyond a simplified understanding of family relationships towards an appreciation of the way in which the family is situated within a broader context of influences, from across socio-ecological domains. This chapter begins to address this challenge by exploring how food and eating is embedded within broader family experiences and relationships, thus addressing the first research aim which was *to understand how family food practices are discursively displayed and framed with regards to state and society*. This includes exploring how families position their food practices in relation to contemporary discourses of food, eating and the family, which builds on a growing literature on how individuals respond to public health messages from the media and the state (Crossley 2002; O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010; Maher et al. 2013).

In constructing their relationship with food, families also related to the food practices of others and this builds on studies which have considered food as part of communities of sameness, and food as a marker of difference (Lawton et al. 2008; van Eijk 2011). For this chapter, important questions about social relationships pertain to the way in which families consider their food practices to be aligned with or distinct from other families, the mechanisms they draw on and the implications for understandings of their food practices.

Two broad discursive positions emerged from the analysis relating to control, which builds on existing conceptualisations of a 'sense of control' in relation to health (Bolam et al. 2003; Lawton et al. 2008). The first position concerns taking control of food, couched in positive framings and positionings. The second discursive position concerns struggles around food where accounts implied less controlled practices. In examining these different positions, reference to agency and structural factors are considered in terms of how they are implicated within discourses of control.

5.2 Controlling family food

Related to discussions of power and agency, explorations of individual control over food have been explored amongst those in lower socio-economic groups (Bolam et al. 2003) and in relation to family and community food and eating (Lawton et al. 2008; O'Connell 2012). These studies have discussed agency and control in a theoretically informed manner, paying close attention to how control is constructed, the function it serves, and the way in which it positions groups and individuals within society.

Seven case study families displayed discourses of control echoing public health messages around food and eating, and positioned their own food practices as aligned with these messages. This alignment came through vividly in the Gates family where they presented acceptance of government nutrition advice, and the result was the display of a polished approach to family food.

The parents in the Gates family talked about a high level of control (and satisfaction) with their overall food routine – ‘we’ve got it to where we want it’ – and this seemed to reflect the nutritional aspects of their diet, but also the social aspects of being able to create a window of family time around the dinner table. Their priorities for food and eating resonated with public health advice - eating together, preparing food from scratch, and stocking up on fruit and vegetables.

One of the main factors that underpinned the Gates’ overall approach to food was their emphasis on nutritional discourses. This included more traditional discourses about the importance of good nutrition and healthy cooking styles, as well as a focus on eating ‘meals’, which generally entailed a cooked meal including meat and vegetables (Murcott 1983). There was a strong emphasis on eating healthy food and the parents talked about healthy eating as something they strived for in their food choices, as Greg (the father) noted: ‘I think it’s the desire to eat healthier; we don’t have chips’.

Although it was mainly the parents who put forward this controlled and nutritionally sound approach to food, these sentiments were also echoed by George (the son) in

his accounts. For example, he talked about the healthy components of his school lunchbox and the restrictions on having less healthy snacks. He also referred to his evening meal at home being 'healthy', with less healthy options such as chips being limited to 'once every week':

George (11 years): My main food in the evening, I know that I always have something healthy. It's only once every week I have chips and I have like vegetables, like broccoli and carrots and potatoes, and I have meat like pork and beef and chicken and turkey.

This structured and controlled approach to eating was supported by a structured approach to planning meals and food shopping, and the family's socio-economic circumstances supported this. The mother was at the helm of meal planning and her role was supported by the fact that she worked part-time, close to home, and therefore had time to devote to planning and food preparations. Also, apart from the family talking about being keen to avoid waste (this was one of the rationales for writing a shopping list), they did not talk about major financial constraints or having to budget for food.

5.2.1 Personal drive to achieve 'good' family food

Like the Gates family, the Jenkins family also displayed a controlled approach to food. The Jenkins' presented their food priorities as being in line with public health discourses, but compared with the Gates' they demonstrated more personal ownership over their food practices. Rather than adhering to public health messages, they were adhering to their own (mainly the mother's) concept of good nutrition, which was aligned with public health messages. This more individualised stance reflected the particular circumstances which they were negotiating at the time of the interviews. Jemma's (the mother) accounts conveyed how they were negotiating financial issues and changing family circumstances which included a recent separation from John (her husband), and the implications of living on a tight budget. In some ways this led to the display of a stronger sense of control over food than in the Gates family, as Jemma described the effort involved. There was renewed vigour in her determination to feed her family well as a result of the recent split with John, and they were making adjustments accordingly: budgets for food were tight; Jemma was anxious about the food the children ate when they spent time with John; and she

tried to provide a relaxed atmosphere around the evening meal so that the children would feel open to talking about their feelings.

Jemma held strong views about good nutrition and wanted to feed her children well, and this was related to longer term impacts and improved childhood development. She expressed an element of pride in her own practices, for example, she talked about ‘never, ever buying ready meals’ and she seemed defensive when she spoke about not being able to find any ‘convenience food’ in her cupboards. Jemma spoke about ‘always’ being healthy herself and how she wanted to foster this principle within her own children. The strength of her determination is summed up in the following:

Jemma: ...more than anything else it’s my own drive. I’ve always been really healthy minded and it’s my own understanding of nutrition that makes me want to feed my children as best as I can.

We discover more about Jemma’s ‘drive’ to eat well in relation to coping with a chronic illness (Multiple Sclerosis, MS). She talked about being unwell for a long time and as a result she was not currently in employment, although she had just started an on-line course at home. Jemma did not discuss her illness at great length, but there were hints about the extent of the effects on her own and wider family life. For example, she talked about previously being involved in the school’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA), but she was not able to devote as much time to this since becoming ill.

Jemma partly attributed her management of MS to the benefits of good nutrition. Therefore eating well was important to her and she spoke about trying to boost levels of nutrition for her children. This included introducing healthier alternatives, such as replacing cow’s milk with goat’s milk, and introducing ‘super foods’ into their diets. Alongside this personal drive to achieve good nutrition for her family, Jemma’s control of their overall food priorities also came through in the way in which she compared their own approach with that of other families in the local community. Against a backdrop of out-of-control food practices and out-of-control parenting, her own practices appeared more controlled and confident.

The food practices of others in the community were associated with local take-away outlets serving ‘not the best food’, but being popular with locals. These comparisons

were also linked to spend on food with some families 'living' on take-away-food, and Jemma expressed disbelief that families on benefits could afford to eat this food all the time. Further comparisons were made in terms of how a reliance on take-away food was equated with less effort, with no cooking and no clearing up. Comparisons also shifted to people's weight and Jemma made links between eating lots of convenience food and families being overweight (parents and children). As others have noted, this construction of difference is one way in which people construct a positive identity for themselves - by distancing 'their kith and kin from "improper" people in places' (Popay et al. 2003, p. 65).

Having a 'poor understanding of nutrition' and eating convenience foods was also linked to behavioural issues in children. In the following account, comparisons of food practices are associated with comparisons of approaches to parenting and moral judgements about ways of living. What also emerges in this account are the different levels of effort involved – with balancing a budget and eating well being hard work, but eating convenience food labelled as a more lax approach. This emphasis on hard work resonates with the effort involved in meeting the demands of an 'intensive mothering ideology', which has become the norm and standard against which mothering is evaluated (Lee 2008, p. 469):

Jemma: I don't know how some of the families can afford to eat out as much as they do or have take-aways as much as they do. I've got friends who live, live on take-aways. I worked out that with my budget I've got £1.33 per person, per day to spend on food and I do provide good, nutritious food for the children on that money. But I'm figuring that a lot of people have child benefit have the same budget as I have and yet they must be spending a lot more than that on a take-away

SM: You think the perception is that it's cheaper or easier or?

Jemma: I think the perception is that it's easier. They've not got to cook it; they've not got to clean up after it. But you see the same people complaining about being overweight and the same people have children who are overweight and have issues with their behaviour and stuff like that, and it is quite poor understanding of nutrition...And the same people will be going on fad diets. You hear the same people at the school saying they're overweight and they want to lose weight.

Jemma's presentation of her own approach to food came through as more robust than the approaches of others in the local community. She presented herself as quite isolated in terms of these 'distinctions of taste', with the rest of the community presented as being less in control and less morally worthy (Bourdieu 1990; Wills et

al. 2011). These community-wide norms were suggested in the way Jemma described the food available in local shops, which reflected the demands of the local population with their emphasis on convenience food rather than meals cooked from fresh ingredients. As she noted – ‘you can’t get coriander from many places around here’. Just as she worked to overcome tight budgets, she also worked to overcome the limitations of local food availability, and at another level she also worked to overcome the social norms of the local community.

These sorts of comparisons were balanced by some more positive comments, perhaps in acknowledgement that she was part of this community, and regarded community members as friends. She spoke highly of the local food co-op (and had even sent photographs of the food available to her family and friends in England). She also talked about the local speciality dish of corned beef stew being assimilated into her family recipes, even though she had initially dismissed it (her children were shown how to make this at a local play scheme). She also described the community as ‘friendly’, where there was a lot going on, especially for young children. Therefore, as well as a disregard for local practices, there were also emotions of empathy and attachment. Although she felt her practices were different and distinct to other local families, she was not completely scathing about them, perhaps reflecting an element of defence about the place she lived (Popay et al. 2003).

5.2.2 Tailoring public health messages - making it their own

In the examples above, public health messages about good dietary health were held as ideals and yardsticks for measuring their own (and others) food practices. In two families (the Banks and the Kemble), there was a sense that they were not so closely aligned with government discourses. Instead they tended to put their own perspective on food priorities, making their own guidelines for what determined ‘good’ and ‘bad’ practices, suggesting a level of mistrust of state guidelines and a desire to do their own thing. There was an element of taking on board public health messages, but making sense of them and transforming them through the logic of their own daily lives. This gives an indication of the meaning of public health information in everyday life and the ways in which the information was not simply resisted or accepted. This transformation of messages is similar to what O’Key and Hugh-Jones (2010) observed in their study of mother’s levels of trust about dietary advice.

Although the mothers in their study showed a mistrust of government advice, they still signed up to the overall health agenda, but they simplified messages so that they could utilise them more readily.

Translating public health messages into their own routines and practices not only provided families with a level of internal control over external structuring factors, but it also enabled them to negotiate public health advice alongside their own family idiosyncrasies. This contextualised knowledge, or their own interpretation of official advice, provides an interesting insight into the meanings they attached to public health messages and how they negotiated control.

The Banks family displayed a confident approach, with the mother particularly keen on healthy eating and talked about always being on a diet. Despite alignment with broad public health objectives, the family seemed keen to put their own mark on their practices and steered away from some public health mantras. They achieved this through establishing their own parameters and rules for family food, using their own language and terms of reference.

Beth (the mother in the Banks family) talked about not strictly adhering to public health messages such as five-a-day. Instead, she applied her own interpretation such as trying to ensure they ate a variety of vegetables every week. There was a sense that Beth did not want to put too much emphasis on sticking rigidly to the five-a-day message, preferring a more relaxed approach, while still eating healthily. She talked about avoiding junk and snack food, with the reference to a family-specific term ('mucks') reinforcing this as territory that they controlled and something they did as a family, rather than something prescribed to them through government advice. Beth said she was surprised to hear her son talking about the five-a-day message in his interview as that was not a message they used in the home:

Beth: ...because we say about not having mucks don't we? But we don't drum it into him. But like what he said to you about his friend having five-a-day. I've never mentioned about five-a-day. I thought that was hilarious when he said that.

The Kemble family conveyed a similar approach, and their talk about food revealed how they tended to prioritise avoiding waste over healthy eating. They had a fairly

relaxed approach, with the children having a role in mealtime choices. Kenneth (the father) talked about doing things in ‘moderation’ and how you cannot avoid unhealthy foods because ‘kids do like crisps, they do like sweets’. He saw this being balanced by the fact they also liked yoghurts and fruit:

Kenneth: We’ve tried to avoid the unhealthy eating thing because you can’t get away from it, because kids do like crisps, they do like sweets. But you do it in moderation. They like yoghurts thankfully. Fruit yeah they do like fruit, so you’re not twisting their arm all the time.

Kenneth was particularly keen on avoiding wasted food and talked about planning for food and using leftovers where possible. This priority seemed to originate from his own childhood (he was one in a family of ten), and was also influenced by media reports of food wastage and his own observations of waste in society, citing examples of people leaving food in restaurants, which he regarded as ‘shameful’. Kenneth and Kate talked about their own attempts to avoid waste, such as encouraging children not to open things for the sake of it and making meals out of leftovers. Overall, the children were described as ‘adventurous-ish’ and would try things with a ‘little coercion’. Kenneth seemed pleased that they would ‘clear their plates’, which fitted with his overall priority to avoid waste:

Kenneth: But they do eat. They clear their plates which is nice. I’ve got a thing, I don’t like food being wasted. I will not have waste. If they want to eat something then as long as it’s eaten and not wasted then we’re happy, because as you say you only have to look at the television and see starvation in the world and consider them.

5.2.3 Comparisons with ‘out-of-control’ others

Comparisons with other families formed part of the accounts of the Jenkins family as described above, but whereas with the Jenkins’ family, comparisons further endorsed the strength of control, in other families comparisons with others were underpinned by a more defensive tone, as a means of defending the way in which their practices did not quite meet their expectations or ideals. In the following families (Harris, Falkner and Abbotts), there was an element of dissatisfaction presented in respect of their food practices, but downward social comparisons with others helped them regain a degree of control. The way in which families positioned their own approach in relation to others, adds to the case for food as something which contributes to boundary-making (van Eijk 2011; Wills et al. 2011). The discussion below provides

insights into the significance of these comparisons, and the way in which they invoked differences in parenting approaches and different moralistic approaches to 'good' and 'bad' food.

The Harris family were comfortable in financial terms and both parents worked full-time (Howard, the father, had recently completed an engineering degree while at work and Hannah, the mother, worked as a nursery nurse at a local school). They talked about not needing to budget for food shopping and the parents had a buy-to-let house in the village as well as a new family home, which they had recently renovated and moved into. They were a very close-knit family with strong links between parents and children. There was always a sense of warmth in the home (physical and emotional): on each visit there was a real fire alight in the main living area, and the children seemed happy milling around at home after school. There was a sense that the children enjoyed spending time at home, they liked the contact with parents and did not want to spend much time in their rooms alone (even though they had Sky TV in each bedroom). Also, the parents were keen to maintain close contact with their children in the future: they discussed their plans to buy each of them a house in the village; and Hannah wanted her daughter to go to a local university.

Their relationship with food resonated with this cosy approach to family life with all members in agreement about the importance of eating a 'proper' meal at home in the evening, by which they meant a cooked meal rather than just a snack or something cold. They also talked about aiming to eat together as a family more often, and in particular Hannah held quite strong views on good nutrition (she was constantly watching her own weight and wanted her children to eat well too). Despite these aspirations there were some aspects of their food routines which were described in terms of being more out-of-control. There were some concerns about the amount of food the son ate, with the parents trying to address this through portion control, and also the daughter was referred to as a 'fussy eater' – which led to some separate meals being cooked or meals adapted to suit her particular tastes. Although the family did not struggle over financial issues, the nature of their working lives and busy activities after school meant that they did not always find time to eat together. In their accounts they seemed to compensate for this through comparisons with others, especially other families in the local community.

Hannah and Howard had strong connections with local families having been brought up in the village or nearby (in Howard's case). They had strong links with the school (Hannah was on the Board of Governors), and there was a sense that they all had lots of friends in the local area. Despite this affinity with the local community, Howard and Hannah talked about how their family were different to some neighbouring families in terms of their approach to food. Hannah displayed shock and dismay about a boy she saw buying a cake in the local shop - not only was he buying a chocolate cake but he was going to eat it all by himself:

Hannah: I was in the shop the other day, I said 'what you buying Tom?' He said, 'I'm buying a chocolate cake to eat all by myself.' And he'll eat that all by himself.

In comparison, they exchanged comments about how their own children did not eat 'rubbish', compared to another boy 'down the street' who spent '£2 a day on sweets'. Whereas Hannah and Howard were exerting agency in a positive way (to guide Harry, their son, towards healthier eating), other parents were exerting agency in a less positive way (by guiding their children towards less healthy practices). Agency is seen as being central to these discussions, with all parents deemed to have a choice. These discussions also implied comparisons in parenting approaches and food moralities - they would never give Harry £2 to spend on sweets (and he would never ask for it). This level of restraint and control in their own parenting, and from the children themselves, was further displayed when they noted that Harry would choose to eat a meal before eating sweets:

Howard: Harry will eat a meal before he'll eat a bag of sweets

Hannah: He'll never come home and ask for a 50p mix from over the shop. Never, ever. But Tom down the street has £2 doesn't he? On pick and mix.

There is a further element of moral display here as the parents endorse the strength of their own tightly bounded family unit, which in itself is a demonstration of control. To some extent this goes against contemporary representations of families as more fuzzy, less structured entities (Duncan and Phillips 2008; Jackson 2009).

This moral display of a tight family unit can also be considered as a gendered form of presentation, with Hannah controlling what her children think, feel and do. In this way parenting (especially mothering), seems to be embedded within gendered

societal norms which require mothers to be in control of their children (Hammarström et al. 2013). Although these gendered dimensions of parenting and feeding children have been reported in media representations (De Brún et al. 2013), these findings add a further dimension and illustrate how notions of gender are also reflected in families' relationships with food.

At another level, Hannah drew out comparisons with the practices of her work colleagues. She noted how their food practices contrasted with her own, and how she found it hard not to be 'drawn in' on their fast-food habits. The strength of Hannah's control emerges in direct comparison with the limited restraint exercised by her colleagues, who eat 'rubbish'. Resisting their habits was presented as hard work which emphasised her self-control and discipline. Following a similar theme as the Jenkins family, here again there is a reference to strength of maternal control. In the Jenkins family it was Jemma's knowledge of good nutrition that gave her strength and control, and similarly in the Harris family it was Hannah's food beliefs and principles that seemed to be the driving force, as she said – 'I'm not a big believer in fast food':

Hannah: Yes. I'm not a big believer in fast food. It's awful hard when I'm in work because we only sit down for half an hour. We have coffee or tea and the girls tend to eat a lot of rubbish. So it's hard not to be drawn in on that like they went to KFC today and brought it back.

The reference to 'the girls' is interesting as Hannah positions herself away from the social norms of her work colleagues, and she presents them as a homogenous, younger, less knowledgeable group, who appear to dismiss longer-term health impacts. She reinforced how her own food was different, requiring more effort, and being brought in from home (which implied an element of planning). This contrasted with colleagues who went for the easier option of going to the nearby shop. There was a sense of displaying accomplished food practices, with Hannah working hard to maintain the standards she set for herself:

Hannah: So the girls will have chips every day, cos there's a fish shop near us. But I had crumpets with a slice of cheese on top today, and a cup of coffee.

5.2.4 Comparisons with neighbours

Comparisons with families living in the local community were also common in other families, but in one case the scale of the comparisons was different. The Falkner family drew comparisons with their next door neighbours, indicating a more intimate comparison of practices. Comparisons at this scale revealed a level of visibility of the food practices of others, which suggests an element of surveillance – not surveillance through direct contact or direct observation, but surveillance through more informal means such as sounds, sights, smells and snap-shots of each other's lives. As with the Harris', such comparisons served as a mechanism for re-gaining some control over food practices.

Faye (the mother in the Falkner family), spoke about aiming for a certain level of order and routine to food and eating, and it was always their intention to have Sunday lunch together. The aim was to try and eat together as a family and avoid eating different meals (although in practice there were slight variations on the main meal). Faye seemed knowledgeable about the nutrient content of different foods; knowledge she had 'picked up' from her time spent working in a nursing home and undertaking food hygiene qualifications. The main issues which undermined control were concerns about the type of foods and portion sizes consumed by Fran (her nine year old daughter), and the effort involved in organising the children's food (there were four children in the household, with three under five years). This meant that Faye's food practices tended to be neglected and when reflecting on her diary entries she commented that she 'ate very little', which resonates with other findings about the low priority attributed to mothers' individual needs (Warin et al. 2008).

Thus despite discourses of good nutrition and wanting to eat well as a family, there was a sense that at times the family found it hard to achieve the practices they wanted. Financial issues were also a concern. Faye talked about the high cost of eating out as a family, and in terms of food shopping she talked about selecting the cheaper options. Other struggles around food related to lack of support with childcare. The family had moved into the area from London about five years previously and although they had some extended family living in close proximity, they did not have the extended network of friends and wider family that supported

other families in the area. This absence of childcare support, coupled with Faye's lack of driving skills meant that shopping was fitted in around the father's work (he was a car mechanic), and the children's after school activities.

Despite these difficulties related to their socio-economic circumstances, there was some sense of control in Faye's accounts, and this came through most clearly when she commented on the food practices of others. This included comments about the levels of fizzy drink consumption amongst the neighbours' children. The way in which she referred to the lack of knowledge about nutrition being common amongst 'a lot of people', implies the normalisation of poor eating practices at a wider societal level.

Further downward comparisons emphasised moral judgements about right and wrong food, although Faye pointed out that her family ate similar things some of the time, just not on such a regular basis, with the implication that there were different levels of control in operation. We are given the impression that the neighbours are out-of-control with 'awful' diets and reckless mealtime choices. In her own household she talked about taking responsibility for 'balancing it out', which suggests a degree of control and agency in her own parenting practices. There is a consistent focus on parental agency here, with children's food practices being shaped by agency rather than structural factors:

Faye: There's a boy and two girls next door. The youngest is seven, the oldest is seventeen and their diet is awful. They think nothing of pot noodles and stuff for dinner or something from the chip shop which every now and again is fine. But you have to balance it out with other things. Yeah, every now and again we do. If we have something with chips then it's the chips from the chip shop. I cook the rest of it.

These moral judgements were made in the context of her own families' food practices, which she pointed out, were not perfect but were more balanced. Whereas the neighbouring family would tend to eat pot-noodles and 'chip shop' food on a regular basis, her own family would only have this sort of food 'now and again'.

5.2.5 Comparisons with wider society

At a different scale, comparisons with wider societal norms also served to re-assert families' control over food practices, and this was the case in the Abbotts family.

Their main concerns about food centred on fitting food around their busy lives, and in terms of their struggles over Aiden's (their youngest son) food preferences. A snap-shot of family food practices within this household, would suggest individualised approaches to food – with a marked division between the food consumed by parents and children.

Despite this highly individualised approach, they were keen to emphasise the 'healthy' aspects of their food practices, such as the fact that their children ate a lot of fruit, and they adopted a moralistic approach to food at the societal level – holding other parents as morally accountable for childhood obesity. One account from Alan (the father) echoed the current political climate of concern about children's nutrition, and parental responsibility for children's food choices:

Alan: I mean the big thing I blame is these computers and x-boxes and all that, because when I was a kid I was never in. Our two are out. If they can be out, they're out. Andrew's football mad. But half of these kids, they're sat in front of the TV and the parents are letting them do it...

This moralistic high ground was maintained when framing the obesity problem, with the Abbotts' parents in agreement about the need for parents to accept moral responsibility for children's health. They suggested that healthy eating was a priority for them and felt it should be a priority for all families. The parents held strong views on this and had no hesitation in calling other parents to account. As well as demonstrating clear views on parental responsibility for childhood obesity, these position statements display a particular image of their own family – one which is the antithesis of the negatives they present about 'other' families – where there is a lack of care about what children eat, where the children and parents are obese, and where the parenting is lax and out of control. By implication, their own family is presented as one where they provide care and consideration about what their children eat, where the children (and parents) are not obese, and where parents make an effort to shape these positive food practices, set within an overall framework of control. What also comes through in this extract is the emotive tone of the language used in parent-blaming. The vivid and disparaging language used in the condemnation of parents for their role in contributing to the obesity epidemic, resonates with wider media representations of parent-blaming, and behind these framings of childhood obesity are implications about poor maternal care (Maher et al. 2010; De Brún et al. 2013):

Alan: It's just eating healthy really isn't it? That's the key thing I think anyway. Having kids to eat healthy

Alison: I was just going to say that

Alan: You know, watch what you eat. There's a lot of obese people in the UK and they just don't care what they eat

Alison: And obese children

Alan: And obese children. I really don't like that. There's no need for it, for obese children because there's all these things out there.... And you usually find that obese children are obese because the parents are obese and there's no need for it at all I mean there's so many things out there for everyone to do but they just can't be bothered, can they?

This extract invokes an 'out-group' of parents deemed unable to make good choices, and this reinforces the moral symbolism attached to what and how parents feed their children (O'Key and Hugh-Jones, 2010). The final speech from Alan emphasises parental culpability, reinforced by the rhetoric of a three part list – 'there's no need for it', 'so many things out there' and 'they just can't be bothered'. Embodied notions of family food also come through in this account with the suggestion that obese bodies are 'out of control' (Rich 2010; Shilling 2010; Rich et al. 2011). The reference to out-of-control bodies is one part of their overall diminished control over food and this builds on the literature around 'out-of-control' bodies and families' (especially mothers'), changing experiences of embodiment (Warin et al. 2008).

This emphasis on uncontrolled food practices within wider society was maintained through the parents' accounts, and at the same time they also displayed a more controlled approach to their own food. For example, Alison talked about 'fast food – not fast food – quick food' in order to avoid associations with junk food, and they also intervened in children's accounts to make sure these also fitted within a controlled, 'healthy' approach. The following extract is taken from a diary entry from Aiden, where Alison interjected with background prompts in order to present a 'healthier' glow to the version of the 'chicken and chips' meal which he presented:

Aiden: Then I come home and had chicken and chips

Alison: Kiev

Aiden: Kiev

Alison: With boiled potatoes

Aiden: With boiled potatoes

Alison: And beans

Aiden: And beans.

This example is not included to cast doubt over the authenticity of the families' accounts, but rather to show the range of approaches parents used to display what they felt was a controlled and appropriate approach. These frames of reference illustrate the pervasiveness of government and societal expectations about how parents should be in control.

5.3 Struggles around family food

The families discussed so far made some reference to difficulties around meeting ideals for family food, such as compromising on the frequency of family meals eaten together (Harris), or sometimes giving children 'junk' food (Falkner). In the families that follow, struggles around food were more pronounced, and the theme of limited control over food practices was more dominant in their accounts. What varies between these families are the different issues they faced and the different mechanisms they used to try and navigate their own sense of control, although the main theme to emerge was a sense of lack of control and struggling. To some extent, this moves on from reports of control over health amongst lower socio-economic groups, where there was a tendency to balance struggles with more positive thinking and individual agency (Bolam et al. 2003). Instead, the accounts below resonate with recent findings from Will and Weiner about people's 'readiness to live with apparent incoherence', and rather than trying to find a balance, there are multiple layers of meaning and interpretation in their accounts (Will and Weiner 2014).

5.3.1 Struggling with public health messages

In the Davies family public health messages including 'five-a-day', 'balanced diets', 'eating fish regularly', and 'avoiding television viewing at mealtimes' were reflected in what Debra (the mother) regarded as her priorities for family food, but her accounts also referred to the struggles involved in meeting these priorities. This can be exemplified in the following extract where she talked about trying to avoid mealtimes in front of the television. The domestic context was important here as the family lived in a three storey house where the kitchen and eating area were located in the basement, and the living room was on the ground floor. Debra talked about trying to find strategies for keeping her sons sat at the kitchen table (in the basement) for the duration of the meal:

Debra: I do try to you know what I mean, because I do think right we'll eat downstairs, they should be eating at the table, they shouldn't be eating in front of the tele all the time, they watch enough of tele, it's time to sit down and chat. Maybe even read their books to me or spelling tests, or just something to keep them occupied instead of watching the tele all time. But they get so bored. And then they're like, 'Mam, can we go upstairs?' I think 'go upstairs'. Maybe I should persevere with them but I do find it hard because my kitchen is downstairs. Maybe if it was all in one room it wouldn't be so bad but because it's downstairs they're not very keen on being down there for some reason so they'd prefer to be up here. I think it's more cosy up here than downstairs. They definitely prefer to be up here.

There is a real sense of the effort involved in applying public health messages in the course of daily life. Debra (as a lone parent) found it difficult to stop the boys escaping the kitchen to watch television, and the way in which the house was organised meant that it was 'more cosy' for them to be on the ground floor, rather than in the basement. What results from this is a sense of diminished control for Debra and this is reinforced by other comments about diminished control in relation her own physical body. She talked about her personal weight concerns and how these were tied in with her relationship with her sons. When the boys were in a different room she talked about her own dieting practices, and how she was sensitive to what they felt about this, and how them labelling her as 'fat' saddened her. This highlights the connections between the physical body and diminished control, and reminds us to consider embodiment as a dimension of control, which reflects the centring of the body in contemporary culture (Shilling 2010).

5.3.2 Resisting public health messages

Whereas in the Davies family there was a sense of prolonged struggles over food and ongoing concerns about the way they were not meeting public health ideals, in another case study there was more talk about how the struggles were behind them, and currently they were resisting public health messages in favour of their own instinct and knowledge base.

The Carters family consisted of Christine and Carys (Christine's grown-up daughter) living in the same house. Christine and Carys both had children of the same age – Christine had Christopher (eight year old son) and Carys had Catherine (eight year old daughter). The household also included: Christine's husband (Colin); Carl (her

13 year old son); and Carys' youngest child, Carlie (a six year old girl). None of these additional household members participated in the study, although Carlie was present during some of the interviews.

Christine talked about particular struggles around Christopher's 'fussy eating'. Interestingly, what came through in her accounts was the way in which she dealt with these struggles, and in some ways achieved an alternative sense of control and coherence, through resisting the logic behind public health advice and expressing a preference for her own maternal knowledge.

The Carters developed their own approach to children's food, which built on their experiences of how children develop (with five children between them in total they had a wealth of pooled knowledge). Christine talked about not being concerned about a child showing a lack of interest in food, something she had worried about in the past with her eldest son. Having witnessed his normal development, she presented more control over the situation and therefore instead of problematising the issue, she dealt with it as something within her control. Christine draws on this family history in order to rationalise her relaxed approach towards Christopher's eating preferences. Christopher had Asperger Syndrome which meant that he had some difficulties around social interaction, alongside restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour and interests.

The Carters' resistance to public health messages is similar to approaches within the Banks and Kemble families identified above. Whereas these two families seemed to generally be in agreement with public health messages (but wanted to add their own mark), the Carters family seemed to be more dismissive of public health ideals. They favoured their own instinct, opting to position themselves as trustworthy sources of knowledge, which resonates with Maher and colleagues' findings about 'the knowing mother' (Maher et al. 2013, p. 203). This also adds further dimensions to debates about mistrust of government advice and family-state relations (Wyness 2014). Impersonal public health campaigns were cast-aside in favour of their own individual and lived experiences, and maternal instinct was privileged (O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010):

Christine: Carl was a terrible eater when he was younger. I've seen me cook him one chip because he wanted one chip. And he was skinny, really skinny. If you see him now he towers above me, he's like a rugby player. So whether he eats terrible when they're younger I don't think that's any influence on when they're older. I mean apparently my mum says I was a terrible eater – I had injections and everything when I was a child and look at me now. So I don't think a little child not eating is anything to worry about... Carl was tiny, really, really tiny. I used to cry over the fact that he wouldn't eat and now he eats us out of house and home! He does eat it's just he likes basic things, you know.

Dissecting this account further also reveals the gendered dimension of the mother's own logic. The contrast she draws between the 'skinny' child and the 'rugby player' her son has grown into highlights the importance she attached to strong, physical bodies – a view that this is a marker of good food and good parenting, particularly where boys are concerned (McKie et al. 2004, p. 599).

A slightly different response to public health advice was displayed when Christine talked about her *own* food practices, and this echoes other observations that parents may orientate towards different issues when considering their own diet, compared with that of their children (O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010). Christine was keen to defend her appearance illustrating her concerns about the wider societal gaze. She felt that she may be judged on the way she looked, which might suggest she followed a certain set of practices – practices related to her 'sitting and stuffing' and her neglect for public health advice. She was keen to point out that her practices were not like that – which sounded like a statement to the researcher and to wider society:

Christine: This is what annoys me really because the size I am I don't sit and stuff – it's the honest truth.

Although she stated that she probably ate the 'wrong' food, she was keen to present adherence to public health information, such as avoiding large portions. The reference to the reported speech of her husband and her work colleagues acts as a rhetorical device to support her own story:

Christine: So I'm obviously doing something wrong for the size I am but I don't sit down and stuff my face. And I can't eat big meals. You put a big meal in front of me and it defeats me. We go out for a meal and my husband says 'you never finish anything.' I always leave food. In work the girls always say to me 'you never eat a whole meal' because a

big meal defeats me. I obviously eat the wrong thing because I'm not thin, but it's not the quantity then.

What comes through in this account is a weakened sense of control compared with how she handled children's food. There is a definite sense of powerlessness in these accounts - not eating huge meals, following public health advice and eating vegetables, but a notion that she must be doing something wrong because she is 'not thin'. Whereas Christine seemed in control of her children's food, her own relationship with food appeared more out-of-control, resulting in greater concern about how this aspect of food practices was displayed outside the family.

Within these accounts of powerlessness, the role of individual agency is dominant, with Christine referring to her role within all of this but overlooking other contextual factors, such as the difficulties of working shifts and caring for a child with special needs. As Chapter Seven will explore, these contextual factors came through at different points in the research process, but were not associated with the mother's discussion about her appearance and weight. In this case, there was a disconnection between contextual factors and food, reflecting the pervasiveness of public health approaches which are focussed on an individualised approach to dietary health.

5.3.3 Out-of-control bodies

Alongside the Carters' references to out-of-control bodies, the embodiment of food also came through as a more pervasive theme in two other families (Edmunds and Irving). This reflects the way in which individual lives have become increasingly politicised, resulting in increased pressure for individuals to monitor their own weights and those of others (Rich 2010).

Monitoring and self-surveillance in response to modern-day consumer culture came through clearly in the Edmunds family. Their priorities for family food included the notion of 'proper food' which referred to: eating meat on a regular basis; eating fresh vegetables grown in the garden or allotment; and they also used the term 'proper food' to refer to structured mealtimes. However, what also came through in their accounts was reference to physical bodies – related to Ellis and Edward (aged eight years and four years), and Emma and Edwin (the parents). The first meeting with the

family set the tone for this as Ellis introduced the family, not by their names, but by how they rated on the Wii Fit (exercise game console). The Wii Fit represented a mechanism through which notions of bodies and weights entered the family living room and were immediately presented to an outsider:

Ellis: That's why we've got the Wii Fit. It shows us how healthy we are. Shall we show you?

Emma: No

Ellis: It tells us like, well, I'm overweight

Edward: I'm the fattest on it

Ellis: I'm overweight. Those two are obese.

Emma went on to explain more about the Wii and how it assessed weight and fitness levels:

Emma: It actually measures your body mass, your body mass index – it's frightening it is. It's frightening. It measures your BMI, your weight and it gives you different exercises. It's got yoga exercises on that.

One means of regaining control (and perhaps an attempt to reclaim the body), was through presenting food issues as universal struggles experienced by other families, which meant that personal issues were not elevated to problem status. There was a sense that they were problems shared by other families and therefore nothing out of the ordinary.

In the following example, Emma talks about the widespread influence of media and advertising, and how this was something she felt presented a challenge for 'millions of families' in the same way. Compared to the earlier extracts from the Abbotts family and the Jenkins family, where the problems around childhood obesity and poor eating habits were laid firmly at the feet of parents, in this extract the responsibility is shifted outside the family, onto the structuring influences of media and advertising institutions:

Emma: I mean the thing is there's so much advertising on the TV aimed at the kids and like with that one incident of going to McDonalds, once he had that idea in his head that that's where he was going, that's where he was going, and I suppose it was the same for millions of families.

High levels of convenience foods and family members eating different, individualised meals were also set out as perceived norms, and the family presented their food practices as fitting in with these norms. This process of normalisation

removed the focus from their own food practices, and in some ways gave their routines a propensity of their own, which made them seem beyond their control and something which they could not change:

Edwin: ...It's like they're having a lot more rubbishy stuff than what they should have...I suppose it's convenience a lot of times isn't it? Which it shouldn't be but... I suppose everybody's the same. Instead of doing something where everybody has the same it's not. It's right, he'll have one thing, he'll have another and they'll have something different. Do you know what I mean? I suppose that's how it is with kids.

The theme of out-of-control bodies also came through in the accounts of the Irving family, but in this case there were closer connections between Isla's (the mother) body and that of Ian (her nine year old son) – perhaps reflecting wider representations about how society views mothers' bodies and children's bodies as closely connected, with mothers responsible for both (Maher et al. 2010). These sorts of connections between family members also has implications for the way in which policy has become focussed on the individual child as a unit of analysis, with the findings here suggesting that the broader family context is also highly relevant.

The physical and emotional dimensions of food came through in the mother's accounts, which included references to previous 'troubled times'. Isla presented herself as very much a 'family person' and wanted to spend as much time as possible with her children, which was linked to losing her son to pneumonia nine years previous. This resulted in her wanting the best for her children, which meant avoiding 'bad times'. In light of this, she spoke about wanting to make her children happy and satisfied in terms of their food, by which she meant feeding them food which they enjoyed and which made them happy - such as pizza and chips. In hindsight she felt this had led to them being reliant on this sort of food. This exemplified different contradictions in her accounts because although she had been feeding the children in order to keep them happy (reflecting on this during the interview), she felt this was the wrong approach ('now I look at them and I think what have I done to them?'):

Isla: No, I was quite depressed and I've had a bad time with, because now I suffer with anxiety and I tend to have a lot of panic attacks because I feel as if I have that time of panic, I fail and I used to always feel I failed my family and I've already lost a little boy. He died of pneumonia nine years ago...And it's very hard for me to. I've had to

bring up courage quite a lot so my family's the most important thing in my life and I certainly don't want them having bad times and I don't want to see them upset at all, so long as I can keep them happy and I think that's what I have been doing, keeping them happy and giving them satisfied food you know and I feel what have I done to them? Now I look at them and I think what have I done? They're relying on pizza and chips and things like that and I feel that if I had started from eating healthier a long time ago maybe they would have enjoyed their vegetables. That's really hard.

Childhood experiences were a major influence and Isla talked about being overweight as a child and having poor experiences at school. For her, childhood was a time of depression. She spent time in a children's home and had low self-esteem, and drawing on these experiences she perceived important links between eating well, looking healthy and having friends (with friends and social support being important to get through hard times). These childhood experiences translated into a sense that a good diet and eating 'the right balanced meals', would provide her own children with a good foundation from which to deal with life.

Isla's accounts of her own dieting shifted to concerns about Ian's weight, and how she saw him 'getting to be like her'. She said she used to be big like him and 'played consoles', and she did not want her children to be like that. Associated with this were other issues, such as Ian 'complaining he hasn't got many friends' and Isla talked about having empathy with this because it mirrored her own childhood issues. She went on to talk about how they tried to get active on the Wii Fit and do the 'body test', and how he liked to 'see if his little figure has gone down, even if it's only a pound every month' (she related this to doing more exercise rather than weight control). She also talked about Ian not having the energy that he should have for an eight year old. Concerns about Ian's weight reinforced the sense of struggle the family experienced – difficulties around control of weight, difficulties around how to approach it within the family, difficulties around how to deal with society's response - and this was all particularly pertinent for Isla given her own childhood struggles.

For Isla, the practices of extended family members provided an important source of comparison through which she regained some notion of agency. Isla noted that some things about her own children's diets may be 'bad', but they 'never drink two litres of pop in a day'. There is also an element of bodies as a form of 'visual symbol of

distinction' in the way Isla refers to other children's rotten teeth and how her own children compared more favourably against these other bodies (Shilling 2010, p. 151):

Isla: ...I went over my Auntie's one day and she'd just come back and she had so much crisps and chocolate in her bag... The other thing as well that got me is that all their teeth are rotted – they've gone so black. I thought I'm so glad my children haven't got teeth like that. I'm so happy – well ok – some things might be bad in their diet but my children never, you know, drink two litres of pop in a day.

Despite these downward social comparisons and attempts to regain control, the overwhelming theme that came through in the Irving family was the sense of struggling, and this was accentuated by a degree of uncertainty about how to make sense of and interpret public health messages in the context of their own family. Examples included, uncertainty about how to handle children's cravings for sweet food, and how to ensure children ate enough fruit and vegetables each day. Keeping to the five-a-day rule was important for Isla, but her accounts suggested that she felt this was unachievable given her children's food preferences:

Isla: I can't find five things, five-a-day into my children's – I can't find it, you know?

This is presented as an individualised struggle. Isla refers to it as her struggle, not something she shared with her partner, and this reflects societal discourses where the mother-child relationship is individualised without recognition of the role of wider influences and structures (De Brún et al. 2013). Chapter Seven provides a closer insight into the day-to-day experiences of some of these struggles around food, providing an exploration of the interactions between control and social structures, and how these shaped the context for food within the Irving family and other case studies.

5.4 Conclusion

Contemporary approaches to food and families frame poor dietary health as an individualised problem, related to individual maternal and child relationships, rather than acknowledging broader relationships and social frameworks. This chapter begins to address this shortcoming by exploring the broad relationships between families and the state around food. The most striking finding is that across all

families there was a tendency to try and present some level of control over family food, and there were two prominent discursive positions in relation to control: control and struggles around food - although families shifted in and out of these positions across different contexts and at different times. Two families demonstrated a controlled approach to food (Gates and Jenkins), although there was variation in terms of whether this related to their own personal drive (Jenkins family) or a stronger adherence towards public health messages (Gates family). Five other families aspired towards a controlled approach, in line with societal and public health ideals, although they did not always meet these ideals (Abbotts, Banks, Harris, Falkner and Kemble). Four families (Davies, Carters, Edmunds and Irving) reflected struggles around food, although there were variations in terms of the impact of these struggles, and the extent to which they regained some control and balance.

Discourses of control over food were inter-woven with notions of morality and gender. Being in control of family food was portrayed as hard work (particularly for mothers), doing family in the right way, and maintaining a closely bounded family unit. The embodiment of food practices was articulated in subtle and more direct ways, and in some cases families made clear connections between the physical and emotional elements of food, with the bodies of children and parents featuring prominently in their discussions (especially in relation to out-of-control food). The ways in which bodies were managed within participants' accounts, particularly the avoidance of negative connotations, suggests that public health approaches need to acknowledge the experiential and relational aspects of embodiment.

Within negotiations of control, there was an emphasis on comparisons with others and this included reflecting on their relationships with friends, extended families, communities and colleagues. In terms of the utility of these social comparisons, downward social comparisons and families' eagerness to present their own family as a morally bounded unit served to endorse the strength of their own relationships. In other cases, social comparisons acted as a means of providing shared experiences and shared struggles around parenting and food issues, thus removing the focus from families' individual challenges, presenting them as more universal problems.

Presentations of families' overall approach to food, also revealed complexities and dynamics of their relationship with the state, which included the way in which health messages are accepted (Gates), rejected (Carters), and transformed (Banks), which echoes findings from other studies (Crossley 2002; O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010; Maher et al. 2013). But within these broad categories the analysis also revealed finer-grained nuances of family-state relationships which included: different responses to health messages when parents considered their own diet compared with their children (Carters); a desire to distance themselves from the state and related messages, despite broad acceptance (Jenkins and Banks); and the way in which struggles about making sense of government messages are embedded within broader struggles around food (Davies and Irving).

Explorations of broad-level relationships between families and the state provides contextual insights into an important dimension of the socio-ecological framework, but there are further questions around how these broad-level relationships relate to more specific relationships between families and schools. Furthermore, it is also pertinent to ascertain how families position themselves in relation to the school and what happens to responsibility for children's dietary health in the school context. These questions are considered in Chapter Six.

Chapter 6 Family-school relationships

6.1 Introduction

Hindered by poor mechanisms of engaging parents and a lack of understanding of possible mechanisms of change, attempts to connect families and schools around food have been limited in effectiveness, and engagement is regarded as an ongoing challenge (Sormunen et al. 2013; Langford et al. 2014). This resonates with broader critiques of the settings approach to health promotion and the need to reconsider complexity at a number of levels, including drawing out understandings of what settings mean to people, and how they shape and are shaped by that setting (Shareck et al. 2013). Translating these critiques to the family-school interface, it is pertinent to consider the meanings that schools attach to family-school connections, and their perceptions of roles and responsibilities in steering children's food. With the role of schools shifting from passive host of public health interventions, towards a more collaborative role with public health professionals, it is important to explore assumptions about the role of schools, with specific reference to their role in food and nutrition (Spratt et al. 2012).

Drawing on interviews with schools, and interviews and diaries with parents and children, this chapter examines the interface between families and schools relating to food and how families respond to school-food approaches. This addresses the second research aim which was *to understand how family-school relationships mediate broader family-state relationships*. This includes exploring the complexities of relationships between families and schools, moving beyond policy assumptions about how families connect with schools.

The findings are organised around the three study schools, with each demonstrating slightly different dimensions of interactions with families. Schools were not markedly different from each other in terms of their relationships with families, and they were purposefully selected because of the way they had prioritised links with families as part of their involvement in the healthy schools scheme. Differences in relationships were more subtle, and exploring these differences helps us understand

the challenges and facilitators to family-school relationships in different contexts and from different perspectives (schools, parents and children).

The first section highlights the way in which schools tried to control children's food, through a discourse of 'school as family', and how parents responded to this on the basis of whether school approaches met their own priorities for children's food. The second section gives more of a sense of how the school was positioned within the community, and how the school attempted to address local issues (health and wider inequalities), exerting control beyond the school. Views from parents and schools examine the limitations of extended agency in the face of structural influences beyond the control of schools and families.

Finally, the third section considers parental resistance towards school food approaches in the context of school-parent relationships and parent-to-parent relationships. Alongside some acceptance of school messages, schools and families talked about the tensions within these relationships and the way in which this produced a picture of messy socio-spatial relations.

Within each section, reference is made to the views of schools and families and each section begins with a summary of the school's overall relationship with parents, together with details about their relationship with study families. Parental views dominate the family perspectives in this chapter, whereas further insights into children's roles and their views on the family-school interface are discussed in Chapter Eight.

6.2 Controlling children's food through schools

In terms of roles and responsibilities, parents across all families agreed that they had the lead role in providing health improvement messages for children. This allocation of responsibility was mainly determined by a moral assessment of the role of parenting and was also determined by effectiveness. In this respect, they acknowledged that the school had a role in helping with consistency of messages and presenting messages in different, more exciting ways. There was also a sense that parents expected this sort of role from schools, perhaps reflecting increasing wider societal expectations that schools will deal with a whole range of social problems

(Parcel et al. 2000). Schools accepted this role and their accounts suggest that they had adopted this role enthusiastically, going beyond government policy rhetoric about how they should be involving and working with families.

6.2.1 School as family

All three schools constructed a positive parental involvement ethos and referred to an open door approach, which gave parents access to school life and opportunities to raise issues with the school. This was vividly conveyed in Ash Park where the Head teacher inferred a close relationship with children and parents, referring to ‘school as family’, which reflects wider observations about the way in which family-state relationships have moved on from a distinct private-public dichotomy, towards a more blurred and complicated relationship (Wyness 2014). The Head suggested that this close relationship with parents was encouraged by the school’s emphasis on making parents feel comfortable and unthreatened in the school environment. The importance of the school within the community was also conveyed by the Head, and she talked about it being the biggest building in the village and centrally located. The three families associated with Ash Park all had connections with the school, mainly through the PTA. All three mothers in the Abbotts, Banks and Carters had previously been involved in the PTA. Alison Abbotts had also worked in the school as a teaching assistant and was currently involved in supporting classroom activities on a voluntary basis.

Notions of school as family came through in the Head’s reference to lunchtime supervisors as ‘aunties’, which builds on discussions about their important (but sometimes neglected) role within policy approaches to improve school meals (Moore et al. 2010a). The Head talked about ‘aunties’ being part of the school team, helping provide consistent messages, and having a distinct role which was synonymous with parenting roles including: dealing with children’s emotional wellbeing; ensuring they practiced appropriate table manners; and caring for them in the playground:

Ash Park, Head: It’s really important. We’ve got to be giving the same messages. All the kitchen staff are employed by [South Wales Valleys area], are employed to cook the meals, serve the meals, make sure the lunch areas are kept clean and tidy. The dinner ladies are there for the emotional, the care of the children. That’s their job. They’re not there to clean, they’re there to make sure the children eat appropriately, that

manners are adhered to, that they're safe on the playground, but all those staff are known as aunties.

The role of the school in family was broader than this, and the Head talked about various aspects of school life being designed with parents in mind. Adopting a family-friendly approach was put forward as the *raison d'être* for primary schools and the Head spoke about schools extolling family values, especially where these may be limited at home. Suggestions about a standards driven culture for education were hinted at, but interestingly the Head's take on this was that schools needed to do more, moving beyond standards and shaping children's wider development and 'personality', providing them with life skills needed to get on. This encompassed a broad approach to health beyond healthy eating, related to inculcating positive approaches to health in the longer-term (Spratt et al. 2012):

Ash Park, Head: Yes, because we're a family. And if I would say anything I think that is the message for a primary school. You are a family, the family values should be the same as the family values in the house...I always say to staff 'never under-estimate the significant impact you have on a child's personality'. It is about shaping them you know and I think we've got a duty to make sure they're educated in terms of healthy lifestyles, healthy lifestyle choices. It's not just about eating it's about the issues of bullying...and how to deal with those things, you know, and sex, relationships, keeping yourself safe, all those things. It's where the grounding starts here. They should have had that by the time they get to the comp.

Moving beyond the rhetoric of school as family, we also hear about how the Head put this principle into practice, and there was an emphasis on getting parents involved with notions of working in partnership, and respecting parental views and knowledge:

Ash Park, Head: And parents are included in that team. They're not second class citizens. They're often far more qualified in areas than we are...There's no arrogant assumption that we know everything because we don't. Together we build up a picture of what's best for little Johnny, bottom line.

There was also a sense of embedding parental relations as part of the school ethos, and 'partnership' was a word used repeatedly by the Head as in the following extract - with children, teachers and parents positioned as central to the partnership:

Ash Park, Head: Partnership. Partnership, and there's got to be respect within that partnership. Children need their voice within that. Teachers need their voice in that and parents need to be heard.

Sensitivity towards the needs of parents also influenced the approach to school food and the Head spoke about instigating a change in practices to fit the surveillance needs of parents. For example, sending children home with lunchbox leftovers was seen as allowing parents to have more of an insight into what went on at lunchtimes. Displaying the lunchtime menu for parents also provided a perspective on the school day and the Head specifically talked about this in terms of enabling better co-ordination between mealtimes at school and home:

Ash Park, Head: And one of the other things we've done is to put the menu - there's a three week menu - we've put it on display for parents to see...Parents have said, 'I don't want to provide my child with a meal that he's already had in school'.

6.2.2 Different priorities for families and schools

In terms of roles and responsibilities, parents whose children attended Ash Park agreed that they had the lead role in providing health improvement messages for their children. In the Carters, Carys talked about a role for school and the family, but indicated that she felt her children would listen more to the school as a result of the influence of peers and the authority of the teachers. There were also positive reports of how the school had made a difference to the range of foods children would eat, for example Bobbie (the son) in the Banks family enjoyed garlic bread and lasagne after taking part in an 'Italian day' at school. Overall there was agreement that despite the school's potential, there were limits to what the school could achieve on its own, and that parents had an important role to play.

A further dimension of the family-school interface came to light in the Banks family, where the mother seemed critical of some of the school approaches. This critical stance was not a complete rejection of school approaches, but instead it highlighted difference and distinction between school and family priorities. The Banks family presented a fairly controlled approach to food at home and in the following example Beth (the mother), explained why she disagreed with the way the school limited puddings, unless children had eaten their main meal. Although Beth described

herself as ‘not a big pudding person’, her way of rationalising practices in school was that Bobbie may end up not eating anything all day – and therefore she preferred him to have a pudding rather than nothing at all:

Beth: He didn’t like the mash because it’s lumpy and horrible, he said, but the problem we had is if he didn’t eat the mash they weren’t allowed to have their pudding. And, obviously I’m not a big pudding person, but to me if he’s not eating his dinner and he’s not eating his pudding, he’s not eating anything all day. So that’s why I didn’t like that. Because if you were in a restaurant and you didn’t eat your veg they wouldn’t say to you, ‘you can’t have dessert’.

Beth also talked about the need for children to have more choice at lunchtime, taking into account the fact that ‘every child is different’. She felt that the lack of choice at lunchtimes, and the knock-on effect in terms of Bobbie not eating very much, led to her shifting him from school dinners to packed-lunch. The previous chapter explored how Beth exerted a certain level of control over food practices at home and this criticism of school approaches can be seen as an extension of that control, and an extension of the way she interpreted public health messages more broadly. Her priorities were different to that of the school, but her limited control over school food structures meant she had limited power to change things, and a shift to packed-lunch helped re-establish some control within school.

Despite mechanisms to provide parents with a perspective on daily life at school, there was still an aura of mystery surrounding school life and gaps in parental understandings about lunchtimes, which included a failure to understand the rationales behind some lunchtime routines. Beth expressed concern about the way lunchtimes operated in school, and she had specific comments on the way in which those with a packed-lunch ate their food in a classroom rather than the dining hall, although she admitted to not having a full understanding of what goes on at lunchtimes (‘I don’t know how they work it’). The analogy she draws with her own lunchtime routines at work draws a clear picture of how she viewed the school routines as sub-standard, and something which adults would not accept. The use of a two-part-list is a powerful rhetorical device here and it makes her critique of the school more credible:

Beth: ...It’s as if they get a bit shoved out really because I know in the past, not this past week, but I know when I’ve spoken to him before and he said ‘I didn’t have very long to eat my dinner’ or ‘I didn’t have very

long to play' because they had to wait to go in, for the other kids to go out, and I think he was starving. So I don't know how they work it, and for a couple of days they had it in a classroom which: (A) isn't a very nice place to sit and eat your dinner; and (B) they should be in a place altogether, shouldn't they? It's go in there, have your sandwiches kind of thing, then go out and play...Because it's a bit like you not going to the canteen and just sit in the cupboard and eat it. I wouldn't want to sit at my desk and eat it. I'd want to go and sit somewhere else.

There were also calls for improved connections between lunchtime food regulations and other school food activities, which might promote consistency of messages and help the children understand the links more clearly. Beth presented one example of this when she described Bobbie questioning why they were not able to have salt at lunchtimes:

Beth: ... I think Bobbie said he liked salt didn't he? Yes, but the fact that salt isn't good for you and if you say don't have too much salt and rather than saying to him don't have too much salt because it's not good for your cholesterol or whatever, and the same with burgers, don't have them all the time because it's not good for your heart.

This signals a need for better communication between parents and schools – in order for parents to understand school rationales and for schools to be aware of parental concerns. Through their various levels of interaction with the school, parents constructed a picture of some of the school structures that placed limits on lunchtime practices. This included their awareness of staffing issues, the need to cater for large numbers, budgeting limitations and the need to avoid waste. However, within these structures parents called for a more individualised and social approach to lunchtime practices, which included calls for more agency for children - agency which they saw as being limited by rules relating to seating arrangements, how much food they have to consume and what they are allowed to drink (water not squash). Parental demands for more individualised practices reflects the notion of school as a consumer sphere, subject to market-orientated school systems (Jamal et al. 2013), which is underpinned by broader consumerist ideals and the changing nature of the state's relationship with the school (Gustafsson 2004; Daniel and Gustafsson 2010). This suggests that parents perceived themselves in more of a client relationship with the school, which conflicts with the notion that school has a familial role.

6.3 Extending control beyond the school

6.3.1 School as community

Schools seemed to embrace their role in steering children's food as a way of helping families who may be struggling, and this notion of 'school as community' came through most vividly in Cherry Wood, where they seemed to be extending control of children's food beyond the school gates. The Head described positive support for school activities from a majority of parents associated with the school, although a core group of parents were more involved in organising events and activities through the PTA. One set of study parents (the Kemble parents) were currently involved in the PTA and were integral to establishing the school garden. Jemma Jenkins had previously been a member of the PTA but stepped down her level of involvement since becoming ill, and Isla (Irving) was not a member of the PTA but talked about supporting school events.

At one level, schools were responding to government discourses about improving children's dietary health, but their responses indicated that they were going beyond this, taking on board the needs of local communities. To some extent, this is inconsistent with the way schools have been portrayed as prioritising education (rather than health) within a target-driven policy framework (Bonell et al. 2012; Fletcher et al. 2014). There are some different contextual elements involved in this study, in terms of a focus on primary schools within a Welsh policy context (whereas other research has focussed on secondary schools in England), but the way in which schools prioritised the broader wellbeing of the child and were seen to be trying to address local issues, came through as consistent themes.

Out of the three study schools, Cherry Wood experienced the highest levels of deprivation and was based within a Communities First area. The school catchment was described by the Head as 'transient', with a local Women's Refuge feeding into the school and low cost housing making it an attractive area for people moving in. Taking forward the notion of school as family introduced in Ash Park, Cherry Wood added a further dimension to this theme with the school attempting to address local issues and inequalities (in terms of access and resources) through school actions. This was different to Ash Park because Cherry Wood had more challenging local

issues to deal with, including drugs and child protection issues in the local community:

Cherry Wood, Head: It's very drug prevalent at the moment and increasingly getting worse. We've got more and more children coming on the register with social services as children in need and the child protection, so the majority of the time is taken with those families.

The Head and the Healthy Schools Co-ordinator recognised the limits on family resources and issues around the increasing cost of school lunches, which meant packed-lunch was regarded as the cheaper option:

Cherry Wood, Head: I think the difficulty now with those parents who pay for school dinners tend to do packed-lunch cos it's cheaper

Teacher: It's gone up again

Head: You're looking at £9.75 a week now for five days

Teacher: So it's nearly £2 a day really

Head: And if you've got more than one child that's a lot of money in a week isn't it?

The Head commented on her perception of some children's family food routines (missing breakfast and other meals at home), and suggested how the school could play a role in filling these gaps. She talked about introducing the fruit tuck shop as a way of addressing the fact that 'some children had no breakfast, nothing at playtime and then nothing till lunchtime.'

The school seemed keen to play a role in addressing these local issues and this was reflected in the tough stance adopted by the Head towards enforcing school approaches. When first attempting to promote healthier lunchboxes, the Head described an initial backlash from parents. However, instead of backing down she spoke about 'persevering' with the same message so that it would become more accepted, and as a result they had reached a situation where 'you don't see anybody with sweets':

Cherry Wood, Head: ... 'Who was I to dictate what was in their lunchboxes?' We tried to talk about Appetite for Life, the document that had come out, and we're interested in the children's health, and we did win them over I have to say, but initially, 'who was she to say what I put in my kids' lunchbox...'

SM: But how did you win them over then? What changed?

Head: Perseverance, yeah perseverance it's usually the case here isn't it?

Teacher: Yeah.

The Head's reference to the policy document – 'Appetite for Life' – was interesting as this acknowledged the way in which the school were involved in delivering public health policy. However, in some respects school actions seemed to be going beyond these policy directives, with the school taking their own initiative to address local issues.

A further innovation in school mealtimes (the introduction of a pre-ordered lunchtime meal) was also instigated in acknowledgement of the importance of this meal for some children in the school, and how they wanted that meal to be more than just 'one scoop of mash.' Whereas in the previous extract there was a sense that the school was meeting its policy obligations, this extract invokes a different relationship with the state, with the school moving beyond policy rhetoric. Instead, they talked about taking control of what they saw as 'not acceptable' and taking their own steps to address it:

Cherry Wood, Head: We were having children just say 'one scoop of mash on my plate' because that's all they liked what was left and when you've got 49% of children on free school meals this could be their only meal of the day. That's not acceptable.

As well as the school addressing nutritional inequalities on a day-to-day basis, they also saw their role as addressing educational inequalities and broadening children's horizons with regards different foods and tastes. In the following extract the Head talked about the role of the fruit tuck shop in extending children's food vocabularies and trying different foods. This also reveals more about the schools' perception of local community and family norms where diets were narrow in focus:

Cherry Wood, Head: It's surprising, before we tackled all this, the children didn't recognise what a pineapple was or they didn't know what a kiwi was because they hadn't seen them and if you ask them 'well, what did you have for dinner today?' – 'I had meat.' 'Well what meat?' 'I don't know – meat.' And they're just not used to seeing, well not using the language as well, and that's very important.

In Cherry Wood there was also a recognition of some of the barriers facing parents locally, including limited finances, and they were keen to build this into their approach by emphasising that 'healthy eating doesn't have to be expensive.' This extract is interesting in the way that it shifts the emphasis from dealing with pupils to dealing with parents and infers the wider role of the school beyond the school gate:

Cherry Wood, Head: I think parents are of the opinion as well – ‘I can’t afford it’, ‘I can’t afford healthy eating’ and I think that’s an issue that Communities First are finding as well which is why they’re setting up the groups to educate them. Well, no, healthy eating doesn’t have to be expensive. In fact sometimes it’s cheaper if you start from scratch in putting a meal together.

6.3.2 Positive response from parents

There was a mixed reaction from parents in response to Cherry Wood’s approach to healthy eating. The Irving family spoke positively and Ian (the son) came home very excited one day after he had made smoothies in school, which prompted them to talk about how he had made it, giving Isla (his mother) ideas about different foods they could try. Isla talked about trying to make some of these things at home and also talked about the important role for schools in encouraging cooking skills, which the children would then hopefully pass onto future generations.

Isla also talked about the school supporting what she was trying to do at home. One example was the way the school had encouraged her sons to drink more water. She talked about them accepting this message more than if she had asked them to drink water. This was important to her from a dental health perspective and also a financial perspective, with water being a cheaper option:

Isla: ...there was one week where they were able to take a healthy packed-lunch home, and obviously in there was what the children had chosen to put in their packed-lunch, which was great because I think Ian came home with a wrap and then obviously there was all different fruits and there was a bagel in one or a croissant and there was all different things, and they brought them back, and instead of having a fruit shoot they would normally they come home with a bottle of water ... Because I don’t like the fact that Ian relying, every tea time he’s got to have a glass of pop because I try and encourage him that that’s bad for your teeth as well... You know, I think he’s lost all his baby teeth now and I’m trying to encourage him just to eat, or, drink non-added sugar, instead of pop because how cheap it is, you normally get three bottles for a pound and that’s how cheap it is.

Despite schools demonstrating a strong commitment to addressing children’s dietary health, and some parental praise for school actions, parents also felt that schools could be adopting a more comprehensive approach, with more consistent messages projected from different domains within the school. The next section examines these

criticisms more closely and also looks at the limitations of school agency in terms of structural challenges.

6.3.3 Beyond school and beyond family - agencies and structures

The need for schools to adopt a more comprehensive approach towards food came through in the comments from the Jenkins family, where Jemma (the mother) positioned herself as having a controlled approach to food. She observed that Cherry Wood demonstrated inconsistencies in its application of rules around food and eating, and she also described an inconsistent approach to conveying healthy eating messages, such as the school's approach to monitoring lunchboxes. Although the Head reported a tough stance on healthy lunchboxes, Jemma's perception was that this was not consistently tough, and she showed concern about the 'unbalanced' and 'inconsistent' approach of the primary school. They were apparently clamping down on some children who brought in chocolate or fizzy drinks in their lunchboxes, but overlooked other children, and this sort of discrimination appeared to be focussing on the more conscientious parents. As a result, in Jemma's view, the 'wrong' parents were being targeted, and 'the parents who should have been changing things weren't interested in changing things'. She qualified this by referring to similar comments from other parents at the school – thus adding credibility, suggesting that she was not alone in this viewpoint.

Jemma also observed inconsistencies in the broader approach of the school. On the one hand there was a focus on healthy eating, but on the other hand there were few healthy options available at school events, like discos. She described the food at these events as 'stodge' and acknowledged that this was 'what people want but it's not carrying on that message'. She felt the message should be consistent in order to be more powerful:

Jemma:...The only thing I would say about this school is that when they put on their events, discos such as that, if they put on any kind of food for those events, there's not so much focus on healthy eating there...That would be my only thing that I'd pick the school up on, the fact that when it's laid on for the kids there's a lot of stodge really. Its cheap chicken nuggets and you can tell that it's not decent chicken that's in the chicken nuggets. There'll be hot dogs – and I know that's what people want but it's not carrying on that message to them. It's saying its ok for the school to give them rubbish when really what they should be doing is putting as much good food out as bad. The last thing I went to there was no

chopped carrots, no chopped cucumber and that is easy enough, but if you're going to put the message across it should be consistent really.

Inconsistent messages were seen as adding confusion to parents' perception of schools as health promoting, therefore diluting the overall message. Communication about school rationales and parental concerns may ease some of these conflicts, and this suggests a partnership approach involving parents, schools and children, could be a promising way forward (Sormunen et al. 2013).

This reinforces the importance of the whole school approach and the rhetoric moves beyond the Head's commitment, towards a more holistic approach which includes those involved with school fund-raising ventures. Jemma felt the school's approach gave out the wrong messages, especially to parents who were not 'very sure how to provide healthy food on a budget'. Whereas in this case Jemma was able to rationalise messages from the schools, and draw on her own repertoire of food-based knowledge, she felt that other families (other mothers) 'aren't sure how to provide healthy food on a budget' and for these parents the school should be leading by example.

Despite the roles and responsibilities taken on by the school and the more consistent and comprehensive roles suggested by parents, there was also an awareness of the limitations facing schools, particularly in terms of agency to change local context and broader issues facing families. Schools were seen as important for 'chipping away' at things like poor dietary practices, but there was an acknowledgement of the limits to what they could achieve, placing some of the responsibility onto families:

Cherry Wood, Head: I think we need to continue what we are doing and providing the basics...I think we need to just continue what we're doing

Teacher: Yeah just chipping away at it all the time. Because we do it all the time you know it's not just a one-off a healthy packed-lunch it's all the time you know and I think perhaps it will just lay the foundations.

These limitations on schools were also acknowledged by parents. As well as talking about the inconsistent messages from schools, Jemma also suggested that the onus was on the parents to change – overall responsibility was firmly placed with them:

Jemma: I think it is very hard to make them do anything. If they're not interested they don't see the benefits of giving their kids a healthy meal

and a nutritious meal then you're not going to make them change. Unfortunately that is the way it is. If parents care, if they really are bothered about it then they'll do it. But if they won't then quite frankly they won't.

Jemma was asked if she thought there was potential in the children bringing messages home from the school, but she felt that the children would need to come home with more than just ideas or suggestions. Instead what was needed was direct, practical guidance - 'I think some people need to be told exactly how to do it and where to do it, to actually get off their backsides and do it.' This places responsibility firmly at the feet of parents, prioritising their agency over and above structural influences that may play a role, and this is consistent with Jemma's broader relationship with food and her views on parental responsibility, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Given these difficulties of prompting parents into action, Jemma felt that schools had a huge task on their hands in trying to instigate changes in the way people steer food choices. The scale of the challenge facing schools can also be demonstrated from Jemma's account of her own attempts to help another mother. She described one of the mothers she knew through the school as eating 'junk food constantly'. This mother had approached her for advice about how to 'eat properly' and led to an informal mentoring role for Jemma, where she helped the friend with meal-planning, cooking and shopping. Jemma described the problems as something passed through the generations, where the absence of parenting meant that this mother did not know how to parent herself - 'if your parents haven't shown you how to do it, how are they supposed to know how to show their children?' There is also a gendered tone to her line of reasoning, with an emphasis on the mother's role and her mother before her, holding working mothers (especially those who work full-time) particularly culpable for their children's poor diets:

Jemma: Yeah well the one girl that, like I say, does eat junk food constantly, I've told her, 'stop going to the slimming club and just eat properly.' That's all you've got to do. Just cut out the junk and eat properly and save money blah, blah, blah. And she came back to me and said 'I need you to show me how, I mean meal planning.' Show me how to cook and she wanted directing completely from start to finish. She wanted me to go and take her food shopping as well because she did not know what to buy, how to shop. It's parenting skills at the end of the day. If you haven't been parented in that type of way, if your parents

haven't shown you how to do it, how are they supposed to know how to show their children? It's the whole broken family thing isn't it? When the parents aren't there to lead the children then the children don't get led and she was raised by her Mum who worked all the time and her food was take-away food.

We begin to see a shift in Jemma's reasoning here. Whereas she previously emphasised individual agency when considering a personal case, (that of a friend), she went on to acknowledge that there was more than individual agency at stake. The issues around food practices also related to family background and other wider socio-cultural influences. As she summarised, 'it's the whole broken family thing'. This shifts the debate beyond the level of the individual and beyond the family-school interface, with increasing recognition that children's food practices are not just issues for school or families, but they are also issues to be addressed at a broader societal level.

6.4 Accepting and resisting a role for schools

6.4.1 Complexity of school-parent relationships

Tensions and resistance between schools and families have been well documented in the wider educational research literature (Alldred et al. 2002), as well as in the literature around school food (Daniel and Gustafsson 2010; Pike 2010). To a certain extent all three schools mentioned some level of resistance from parents in terms of what they were doing around healthy eating. However, displays of power between families and the school were most vividly articulated in relation to Bridge Hill School, where accounts from schools and families raised issues around the nature of the family-school relationship and associated tensions and interactions. This is perhaps a reflection of the way in which some of the case study families were more intimately involved with Bridge Hill, with one mother on the Board of Governors (Harris), another mother working in the school as a Learning Support Assistant (Davies) and another mother involved in the school on a daily basis as a volunteer (Edmunds). The two other families associated with Bridge Hill (Falkner and Gates) were not involved in the PTA, but supported ventures organised by the school.

In Bridge Hill School, the Head talked about 'subtle' attempts to make changes to lunchtime practices – changes which were greeted with resistance from parents. The

interaction between school and family responsibilities is clear in these accounts, where notes were sent from parents (via the lunchbox) positioning this element of children's food as the parents' domain. The Head also recalled a phone conversation where one parent firmly emphasised their role as the lead in terms of children's food – 'if I want to put seven bars of chocolate in there I will'. The school seemed to accept this parental dominance and toned down their approach to healthy lunchboxes, with the sense that they did not want to upset parents:

Bridge Hill, Head: In a very subtle way we ended up putting together a competition for the healthiest packed-lunch. Following Monday, then we ended up having notes inside, from two or three parents saying 'private property – keep off.' And I had a phone call then – 'my daughter's packed-lunch is hers. If I want to put seven bars of chocolate in there I will.' And what we felt at that time was that it would be too much for a small amount of parents.

As the healthy schools co-ordinator commented, they felt this approach to lunchboxes was 'too much, too soon'. The school appeared to lack confidence in terms of influencing families more broadly and they spoke about getting it right in the school first before expanding to engage with families. They wanted to embed and 'be comfortable' with what they were doing in school before taking messages beyond the school gate:

Bridge Hill, teacher: I think how I would see it as Healthy Schools Co-ordinator is lets embed it in the school, be comfortable with what we're doing in the school first. As I said it's only been on the curriculum now – this is the second year now with healthy school messages – so I think I wanted that embedded and then we'll look at start branching out.

This lack of confidence in taking messages to parents adds to a wider recognition of the development and support needs of teaching staff in relation to children's health improvement. Some of these issues are beginning to be explored and taken up by policy interventions with the School Food Plan recognising the importance of up-skilling teachers and Heads (Dimpleby and Vincent 2013). Linked to this is the importance of building the confidence and capacity of school teachers in terms of health promotion, and in particular, food and nutrition (Segrott et al. 2009).

Around the time of the interviews, the school organised a meeting with parents about lunchboxes as a means of encouraging healthier options. At the meeting, the Healthy Schools Co-ordinator gave a presentation about the type of food they could include

in a healthy packed-lunch. The dynamics surrounding this event were interesting to observe as it reflected wider parent-school dynamics around food.

During the meeting, the teacher was very keen to avoid a dictatorial approach, which can be understood in light of the earlier resistance they received to encouraging healthier lunchboxes. The teacher positioned herself as a parent (to a 'fussy eater') and 'not an expert in nutrition'. This seemed to be an attempt to establish an affinity with the parents attending the meeting, encouraging an equal relationship between schools and families.

During the interviews, families were asked about their views on the school's actions (including this specific meeting about lunchboxes) and the following sections explore parents' reactions, comparing contrasting perspectives of acceptance and resistance.

6.4.2 Parental acceptance

The Davies family stands out as being particularly receptive to school food messages, with Dean (the youngest son), taking on board messages from the school, and Debra's (the mother), openness to change and new ideas. Debra talked about taking on board key messages about food and eating that the school had generated, and integrated these into daily practices. Debra explained how she had used the school guidance to instigate changes to her sons' lunchboxes and this had been well received:

Debra: Yes because they ask for it and we normally go shopping for a packed-lunch and they say 'can we have this, can we have that'. But because of this healthy eating now I thought right I'll do it this time so there was no chocolate or anything in there but none of them moaned about having anything in there. I think because I gave them their own choices of what they want then if I was to do it all the time they wouldn't mind it.

A sense of balance came through in her description in terms of adhering to the school guidelines and taking account of her sons' preferences. Former family practices are still in the background, but guidance from the school features in some of the decision-making processes. Thus the end product was a mixture of what the

boys wanted - cheese strings and crisps - and school suggestions - no chocolate and 'Quavers' rather than 'bad' crisps:

SM: Did you use it then, because you said they had packed-lunch the other day?

Debra: I did use that, yes. It was healthy-ish. I thought it wasn't too bad. Maybe I could have left the cheese strings and the crisps out but well it said they can have cheese so they wanted a cheese-string instead of a piece of cheese, I put a cheese-string in and crisps, I thought as I've taken all the chocolate out, but they were Quavers so they weren't that bad as normal crisps, so I was quite pleased with myself (laughter).

In addition to these specific changes, Debra also talked about other more general ways in which the school, through the children, were influencing food practices at home. In this extract she recalled a conversation with Dean about foods he wanted to eat which had been inspired by the school:

Debra: ...What did he ask me for the other day? He said 'can we have jacket potato?' 'We haven't got no jacket potatoes here', I said, 'well, we need to buy some' he said, 'we need jacket potatoes, tuna mayonnaise and sweet corn.' 'We better go and buy some then,' I said.

In some ways this connection between family and school, channelled through the child, is more powerful than in other families and possible reasons for this receptivity to school messages are further explored in Chapter Eight, which considers the nature of parent-child relations. This acceptance of school messages was at odds with processes in other families where the emphasis was on tensions and difference. The discussion below looks at families where there was an emphasis on differences in terms of outlook and priorities for food.

6.4.3 Parental resistance

Echoing other research which has recognised schools as complex systems, the findings presented here add further levels of complexity in terms of the varied relationships between schools and families where agents, (in this case teachers, children and parents), have their own capacities and 'transformative power' (Fletcher et al. 2014, p. 513). The 'transformative power' of individuals came through in a number of different ways: through parents resisting school approaches; and in terms of resistance to the agency of individual teachers, resistance based on perceptions of difference in class, values and approaches to parenting. As with wider resistance to public health messages highlighted in Chapter Five, in this case resistance is also

associated with negotiating a sense of control, and through their resistance of school approaches families demonstrated the strength of their own practices (O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010).

At one level, resistance came through in terms of difficulties surrounding the practical enactment of school food guidance in the context of everyday life. This highlights discontinuities between family and school, in terms of different values and different contexts. The example here illustrates how the Gates' parents were puzzled about what to do with a marrow which their son had brought home from the school gardening club. To some extent this represents a mismatch between school demands and family realities related to cultural differences, and distinctions of taste (Wills et al. 2011):

Gail: What did we do with it? We didn't know what to do with it.

Greg: It sat there for a long while.

Gail: We kept looking at it.

Greg: I came home late from work and there it was. Sitting in the kitchen looking at me at about two o'clock in the morning

Gail: I don't know. I don't know what to do with it. We have got rid of it. Let's hope he brings some tomatoes this time, we know what to do with them.

This exchange illustrates the dilemmas families faced over the practical enactment of school messages in the home, and the difficulties surrounding that. As Gail sums up at the end of this exchange – 'let's hope he brings home tomatoes this time, we know what to do with them.'

This suggests that school messages were difficult to implement and we find out more about the contrasts between school and family contexts in the accounts from Emma (the mother in the Edmunds family). Emma stands out from other parents in terms of the extent of her involvement with the school and the complexity of relationships that this entailed. Formally she was involved in the school PTA, she helped organise end of term events, and had helped set up the fruit tuck shop. On a more informal basis, she was involved in painting work on the school premises – and this involved being at the school on almost a daily basis, in order to help get the school get ready for the forthcoming inspection. Benefits for the children was the main motivation for

her getting involved in the school and she also embraced the friendships she had forged with other mothers who she had met through the school.

Emma's response to the school's healthy lunchbox approach revealed tensions with the individual teacher involved, rather than the school per se. She talked about the way the teacher had 'put a letter out' and overall, she criticized the approach adopted and the way they went about it, rather than the strategy itself:

Emma: I don't agree with it I've got to be honest. You know 'you shouldn't be eating this and you shouldn't be eating that' because she's actually put a letter out telling parents not to put things in that's got fat in them and not to put things in that's got chocolate in them.

Stories of parental resistance to school food practices are closely intertwined with broader resistance to the role of the state in private lives. However, in this example the story seems to move beyond this high level resistance to tensions of a more personal nature, focussed on the individuals and the individual relationships concerned.

Support for this level of criticism came from a story about a young child being upset and worried that he was going to be reprimanded because he had a chocolate bar in his lunchbox. Again the criticism linked back to the individual teacher and how her tone should have been one of advice rather than compulsion. There is a sense that Emma knew the teacher concerned and she tempered this criticism by acknowledging that the teacher was not intentionally aiming to annoy people. Although the teacher went to some lengths to position herself as a parent, her role as a teacher was foremost in their minds:

Emma: There's one little boy in Edward's class. I mean they're only three and four, they don't understand, but he got really upset because his Mum put a little chocolate bar in his lunchbox he thought he was going to have a row off the teacher. And like I said if she wants to go out and buy their packed-lunches everyday then she can tell them what to put in them. She should be advising people not saying 'you must do this and you must do that'. I don't think she's intentionally set out to put people's backs up because that's not the type of person she is but sometimes she comes across as being either you do it my way or you don't do it all and I don't think the way she's gone around it is the right way to go around it.

Resistance between schools and families also reflected the different contexts between the lives of teachers (who mainly lived outside the local area) and parents in the local area. There were some hints at the mismatch between school expectations on families and what was possible for families living in this particular context. The short notice given by schools about forthcoming events was raised by two families (Davies and Edmunds), and they talked about this in terms of practical and financial constraints. The Edmunds family in particular talked about some ideas from the school (such as the guidance on packed-lunch) being at odds with what was feasible for ‘families in this area’.

There was a sense that school expectations failed to appreciate the limits on local family resources and families’ ‘personal situations’, so schools were positioned as being out-of-touch with family contexts. The underlying tone in this extract is again one of disconnection and difference – resources associated with teachers in the school (with inference to their ability to buy more expensive food), compared with resources associated with ‘normal’ families in the local area, and this reflects wider observations about middle-class cultures of schools versus working-class cultures of parents and pupils (Willis 2003). Underlying this comparison in levels of resources are also comparisons in value systems:

Emma: ...and the thing is they have to appreciate people’s personal situations as well. I mean at the end of the day we’d all like to shop for food in Marks and Spencer and have it all pre-packed with a little tick on it saying this is healthy and everything else but it doesn’t work like that for normal, you know for families in this area.

This extract also invokes the limits on family agency and the reference is to socio-economic differences between teachers and parents, which resonates with other findings about the class-based habitus of food, with financial limitations preventing the purchase of low fat products (Warin et al. 2008). This leads to further questions about differences between family and school: different discourses of bringing up children; different practices around food; and differences in family and community contexts.

6.4.4 Parent-to-parent relationships

This level of resistance between the family and the school was further complicated by the network of parent-to-parent relations surrounding schools. Although others studying home-school interactions have identified the need to understand schools' relationships with different types of families (such as single parents and married parents) (Epstein 1987), there has not been much recognition of the difference (or relationships) between parents who are more involved, and others who are more passive or disengaged.

The dynamics of school-family relationships becomes further complicated when relationships between different sets of parents are taken into account, and this was particularly visible in relation to Bridge Hill school, where there was a distinction between a core group of parents who were heavily involved in the school, and the wider parent population that tended to be less involved.

As described above, Emma had an intensive level of involvement with the school and this meant that she was privy to aspects of how the school worked that went unseen by other parents. She was very aware of this positioning and negotiated with the school sensitively in order to avoid tensions between these complex roles and insights. She commented on these complexities in terms of being an outsider on the inside:

Emma: I mean I'm in a position where I see a lot of things that other parents don't see – do you know what I mean?

Emma provided an example of the sort of insights such a position afforded her, referring to her knowledge about how nursery snack money was utilised and how being an 'insider' gave her the knowledge that the money was being used for things other than snacks, including chocolate spread (rather than the healthy snack options that parents were told about). She described how she approached the school to voice her objections to these practices – being sensitive to the school in the process:

Emma: I spoke to Mrs Davies the day after we had that meeting and spoke to her about the crackers and the chocolate spread and like I said to her I'm in a privileged position that I saw what was going on and I didn't think it was fair for the school for me to bring that up in front of everybody else without giving her the chance to address it internally first, do you know what I mean?

This sense of difference between groups of parents also came through in accounts from other parents. In the Harris family Hannah felt it was a shame that only a small percentage of all parents (6%, or 12 out of 211 parents) turned up to the school meeting about healthy lunchboxes, and she saw this as indicative of a general sense of apathy by parents towards children's schooling and dietary improvement. Hannah also commented on the fact that the parents who 'need' help did not turn up to the meeting. This suggests different dynamics between different parents and also suggests a level of visibility of food practices, especially children's food, within a school community context:

Hannah: Bearing in mind with the meetings and things like that, there's only a handful of parents that will turn up anyway and it's normally the parents who will do a healthy lunchbox. The ones who need to go there don't tend to turn up over there anyway.

Visibility of other family practices is channelled through the school, and the different roles that parents play in school means that parents have multiple lenses into the lives of others. As Hannah explained, her time spent in the school as a teaching assistant gave her first hand insights into the sorts of foods children were bringing in from home in their lunchbox. The description of lunchboxes filled with 'loads of chocolate' and 'nothing nutritional', translates onto the food practices of the parents and this implies moral as well as nutritional comparisons with other families. The final sentence indicates that Hannah felt this was more than poor food practices, but also poor and 'lazy' parenting:

SM: Do you think they could do anything to get those parents in?

Hannah: Yeah target the parents because even if, I know you can't go on to the parents, but when I was a voluntary teaching assistant over there, there would be times when the children would turn up and they'd just have loads of chocolate. There'd be nothing nutritional in there and they'd come in everyday with it. They wouldn't eat it and I think that's lazy parents.

In terms of potential for health promotion, these relations could be capitalised on in order for parent-to-parent networks to be more health promoting. This suggests there are a number of different ways through which schools can influence social norms, beyond what has been conceptualised to date, perhaps making more of informal

social networks between parents, and by combining school approaches with community-based approaches (de Silva-Sanigorski et al. 2010).

6.5 New spaces for family-school interaction

In response to some of these challenges around connecting schools and families, is the potential for opening up ‘third’ or ‘virtual’ spaces, which are more neutral and more conducive to *valuing* the priorities of schools and families, without *enforcing* the priorities of one setting on another, and this builds on the emergent literature around digital spaces (Bennett and Glasgow 2009).

Alongside traditional methods of communicating with families and parents, Bridge Hill had also experimented with new forms of communication offering parents a range of avenues to link with the school, which focussed on the use of the internet and social media. They were using photographs as a way of capturing special ‘moments’ to share with parents through the school website, and the Head was keen to use the web and other technologies to engage parents. Children were also key to this process by playing a role in encouraging parents to see what they had been doing throughout the school day.

The school had also trialled text messaging services and they were also using technology as a way of publicising school achievements. They had also started using social media technology (such as Facebook) as a way of communicating with parents, which added further complexities to the nature of family-school relations. As demonstrated by the media and worldwide interest in the ‘NeverSeconds’ blog by school girl Martha Payne, the internet can play a powerful role in blurring the boundaries between school, family (and in Martha’s case) the rest of the world (BBC News 2012).

Discussions about the use of Facebook led to further insights into the dynamics of the school’s relationships with parents, and although this ‘third’ space has potential for wider parental engagement (and also potential in easing some of the tensions between parents and schools), it also brings new challenges:

Bridge Hill, Head: ...some of the parents are willing to help us. They use it quite extensively and they're policing it for me at the moment because people will put messages and they'll say 'you do realise Mr Brown will be able to see this – are you sure you should be washing your dirty linen in public?' And the other thing about it as well is I don't think some people realise that if they allow their privacy settings for anybody to see things it's quite dangerous. I've had about three instances where I've gone to parents and I've said 'you do realise that you've put something on there that's untrue'. They've said 'I'm sorry, I didn't realise you could see it'.

Within this extract there are hints that the Head perceived there to be different groups of parents involved in the school, in different ways. He initially talks about 'some' of the parents offering to help the school and there was a sense that the school was in collaboration with this group of parents, taking on a 'policing' role in terms of checking social-media posts. Later in the extract, the Head refers to another set of parents who seem to have misused social media and posted 'untrue' comments regarding the school. Although we are not given the detail about these posts, the insinuation is that they are negative comments and the Head asked for them to be removed. Social media adds potential but also complexities to the family-school boundary, and the surveillance role of parents raises important questions about whose space it is and who governs it.

6.6 Conclusion

The way in which schools positioned themselves suggested that in many ways they were going beyond educational-agendas and targets, towards notions of school as family, with a persistent commitment to help local families and local communities. From the schools' perspective, the family-school interface was underlined by a discourse of care, reflecting a notion of shared responsibility, with schools concerned about the daily nourishment of children as well as nurturing healthy approaches to food in the longer-term. Despite these approaches, parents responded with calls for more tailored, individualised approaches, reflecting more of a client relationship with the school. These contradictions between the different positions of families and schools have important implications for the family-school interface, and the ways in which schools attempt to support families in the future.

Following earlier considerations of the broader family-state relationship, this chapter provides further insights about the micro-relations between families and schools. Tensions between schools and families have mainly been considered in terms of power and domination (Metcalf et al. 2008; Metcalf et al. 2011), but the findings from this study builds on this literature, revealing two further levels of complexity.

Firstly, examples of resistance between families and schools revealed more detailed insights into the nature of the resistance: parental resistance tended to focus on the school's approach rather than the strategy itself; and resistance also took on a more personal tone, with resistance targeted at individual teachers, reflecting histories of relations, tensions and personalities. A second level of complexity in power relations relates to how resistance towards school approaches was not always about battles of power, but in some case it was more about the practical enactment of school messages in the home, and the difficulties surrounding that. Such accounts revealed mismatches in terms of different discourses of bringing up children, different practices around food, and different levels of agency and resources. This contributes to a broader literature on how schools and families clash in terms of different cultures (Jamal et al. 2013; Fletcher et al. 2014).

The challenge of family-school connections around food was a shared conclusion across all three schools, but the findings also point towards practice implications. The first implication relates to improved communications between schools and families, in order for parents to understand school rationales and for schools to be aware of parental concerns, engaging parents and schools through a partnership approach. The second practical implication relates to exploring the further potential of schools, which includes developing parental networks, and also exploring social media as a way of opening up neutral spaces for connecting schools, families and the state.

The way in which discussions about school-family connections shifted the emphasis away from individual agencies towards the contexts and complexities of family life, taking account of relationships with the state and the role and agency of children, suggests the need to look at the family context in more detail. This includes: exploring daily food practices and how they are negotiated alongside other family

activities, experiences and priorities (Chapter Seven); and looking more closely at parent-child food negotiations across family and school contexts (Chapter Eight).

Chapter 7 The lived experience of family food

7.1 Introduction

In shifting away from individualised, behavioural approaches, towards more contextualised understanding of family food, it is important to consider everyday food experiences, which includes exploring the meaning behind different practices and inspecting the taken-for-granted elements of family food, considering how socio-economic structures and specific contexts work to support and undermine food negotiations (Warin et al. 2008). Important questions pertain to the range of structures and constraints relating to food, as well as the different ways in which families interact with and interpret these structures. This builds on a body of research which considers public perceptions of individual and state responsibility for health (Reeves 2009), by examining how responsibility is enabled and constrained on a daily basis, such as how resistance towards public health approaches also reflects an approach to dealing with multiple structural demands. It is also pertinent to examine the daily realities of feeding the family, in terms of the way in which mothers respond to media and state discourses of responsibilisation for children's dietary health (Maher et al. 2013). Thus this chapter addresses the third research aim which *was to explore the main aspects of the lived experiences of family food including challenges and constraints encountered.*

This exploration of the lived experiences of family food builds on Brannen et al's case analysis of dual earner households and the way in which patterns of paid work, together with children's extra-curricular activities, and their different food preferences and tastes, culminated in juggling a range of factors when coordinating food (Brannen et al. 2013). Thus families are organised around three broad patterns: families who ate together most of the time; families where there were more varied food practices and where shared mealtimes occurred some of the time; and families where more individualised food practices prevailed. Within each section, the emphasis is on the facilitators and barriers that families experienced. Drawing on the collective lifestyles lens, this patterning enables a discussion of the interplay between structures, agency and meanings, focussing on how families constructed their own way of doing food. As well as providing a sense of how this patterning is reflected

across all families, the discussion below also selects a number of emblematic case studies in order to provide a sense of how different conditions and contexts interact to produce different practices.

7.2 Shared food practices

7.2.1 Making time for family food

In the context of neo-liberal approaches and economic change, Chapter Two outlined the ways in which family food is being influenced by changing working conditions and more flexible working, with ‘time-squeeze’ or ‘harriedness’ resulting from the difficulties of synchronising the time-space paths of different family members (Southerton and Tomlinson 2005). Accounts about eating together as a family reflected these socio-cultural changes and pressures, with much of the talk focussed around the difficulties of finding time for family, and where families did find time to eat together, this was accompanied by a sense of accomplishment.

The families in this section resonate with Brannen et al’s discussions about eating together as a family, which included families who ate together on most weekdays, through processes of synchronising timetables of different family members (Brannen et al. 2013). Two out of the eleven families (the Gates and the Jenkins families) talked about eating together as a family on a regular basis, generally with everyone eating the same food, akin to the traditional or idealised family (Videon and Manning 2003; Fulkerson et al. 2008). This confirms the way in which these families were presented in Chapter Five, and the order and regularity of family meals fits within their broader controlled approach to food which reflected public health ideals. The section below explores the characteristics of these two families looking at factors that facilitated their approach to family food and the way in which working practices (especially part-time work and working close to home), enabled them to devote time to family food. In terms of challenges, finances were a major issue for the Jenkins family, but the section below illustrates how tight budgeting and planning for food were utilised as strategies for maintaining some control over this aspect of their lives. The meanings behind family food and eating together are also explored, particularly the way in which practices were underpinned by nutritional

and social discourses - the importance of eating well and enjoying time together at mealtimes.

The Gates family displayed a fairly regimented weekly and daily food routine. On weekdays they aimed to have a family meal together, at the dining room table, most evenings. The Jenkins family was also characterised by food routines which involved eating the evening meal at the dining room table. Jemma (the mother in the Jenkins family) talked about all the children eating the same thing ('everyone has to have the same food'), at the same time, at the living room table.

As Chapter Five described, both families (particularly the mothers) gave a sense of being confident and in control of family food practices. In the Gates family there was a consistent level of satisfaction with food practices, but in the Jenkins family Jemma talked about how different food practices associated with the children's father (who had recently separated from Jemma), meant she saw it as her responsibility to counter these practices and reassert her own control. These two families were also characterised by a formal approach to planning for food and this is consistent with families in another study, where parents conducted food provisioning in a highly planned manner, with an underlying organised tone (Backett-Milburn et al. 2010b).

The Gates family talked about being satisfied with family food practices and when probed about challenges to eating together Gail, the mother, said that they tried to make sure it happened regularly:

Gail: We tend to try and make sure that we sit there; even if it's just George (son) and I, we sit at the table because if it's the weekend for instance and Greg (father) is working, George and I will sit at the table and we are talking across it to each other.

There is a sense of moral display here, with Gail reiterating the same point on a number of occasions throughout the interview, highlighting the commitment and effort involved in eating together. Also, this helps to socially construct a level of importance about the family meal, in terms of creating social order and routine (Caplan 1997), and in terms of reinforcing a sense of family identity and bonds between family members (Charles and Kerr 1988; DeVault 1991). This is connected with perceptions of historical accounts of cosy, harmonious family life, including

medieval feasts and Victorian domesticity (Jackson et al. 2009). Gail's sense of control over this regular family time was reinforced by the way she said 'we always make this time', which creates the impression that certain standards of food practices were sustained:

Gail: George and I spent our time at the dinner table talking as we normally do as we do about our day. George telling me about his and me telling George about mine. We'll wait for Greg to come in later and Greg will tell us all about his day. We always make this time so we can talk to each other about our day.

Linked to this sense of control, the Gates family also talked about planning ahead and adopting an organised approach to food. Gail organised meals a week in advance and used a recipe planner to facilitate shopping trips, so that they had the correct ingredients for each meal. Gail's reference to 'looking through a recipe book' suggests that she set aside time (and effort) for this task. Overall there was a sense of a high level of satisfaction with their family food practices, with the family achieving practices that were right for them – 'we've got to where we want it'.

Planning for family food and being able to eat together on a regular basis, was facilitated by the time available for preparing the evening meal and the opportunities for the three family members to sit at the table together. The parents discussed how the changes in the location of parental work (working closer to home and working shorter hours), freed up time for preparing the evening meal:

Greg: I mean you have more time now that you are not working in [local city] haven't you?

Gail: Oh yeah definitely.

Greg: Because sometimes you would come home from [local city], and I was working and you would get home so late after picking up George up, you would be having beans on toast or something like that wouldn't you?

One of the main factors that underpinned this family's overall approach to food was their emphasis on nutritional discourses. This included more traditional discourses about the importance of good nutrition and healthy cooking styles, as well as a focus on eating 'meals', which generally entailed a cooked meal including meat and vegetables (Murcott 1983). They placed a strong emphasis on eating healthy food and Gail and Greg talked about healthy eating as something they strived for in their food choices.

Despite the prominence of nutritional discourses, the social interactions around mealtimes were also important, and through the family's narratives, eating together emerged as a family norm, something they usually did and something which had become part of the taken-for-granted aspects of family life. The evening meal was important to all the family members and was described very much in social terms, and the way in which it enabled them to spend time together, at the end of each day:

Gail: We all sat around the table eating our fish pie. This is where we sit down, have a family meal together and talk about the day's events and catch up with each other.

George shared this enjoyment of eating together and talked about it in response to questions about what he enjoyed most about eating at home:

SM: So first one, I enjoy eating at home because?

George: I'm with my family and we talk to each other and how our day is.

They paid a lot of attention to demarcating the evening meal as their 'time together' - a social time for them to get together at the table and talk to each other about their day, and on some occasions they said they 'could be there for hours'. They felt there was more social interaction at the dinner table than there would be if they were sat elsewhere. It was suggested that perhaps there were fewer distractions at the dinner table, but Greg also suggested that he was not really sure why they chatted more at the table - 'it just happens that way' - a suggestion that eating together had become an ingrained and taken-for-granted practice.

A number of factors suggest that the Gates' approach to eating together as a family went beyond displaying the right sort of approach for the research process. Firstly, George supported parental views about the social importance of the evening meal, and the family also talked about sharing meals with extended family (regularly on a Sunday and for special family events), suggesting that the social emphasis of eating together was embedded across the wider family unit. Finally, Gail and Greg talked about a sense of control over this aspect of their food practices, and although we hear of one occasion when finding time for the evening family meal was compromised (because of attending a school concert), this was described as a one-off change of plan.

7.2.2 Providing good nutrition on a budget

The Jenkins' family's personal drive towards nutritional aspirations were described in Chapter Five, but accounts of day-to-day food negotiations revealed more about overcoming limited financial resources and feeding the family on a tight budget. Through a closer examination of daily negotiations, we gain a sense of how levels of control fluctuated, despite an overall controlled approach to food. Jemma made several references to living on a budget and described how she: planned family food a month at a time; bought fruit and vegetables on a weekly basis; and shopped online in order to avoid in-store impulse purchases. Tight budgeting and planning for food was one strategy Jemma used for managing financial limitations, and in this way she balanced finances against the importance she attached to feeding the family well. She had calculated exactly how much she had to spend on food per day, per head: 'my budget is less than £2 per person a day for breakfast, lunch and tea.' This detailed approach to planning illustrates the realities of living in a context marked by poverty, which goes beyond the broader headlines about the escalating scale of food poverty across the UK (and particularly in Wales) (Public Health Wales Observatory 2013; The Guardian 2013).

Jemma talked about discussing planning food with a friend and from this she had the idea about planning meals from a menu. The children chose what meals they want and then she shopped accordingly for the week. Jemma spoke about doing this in the past and how she was considering reverting to this method of planning, especially now that she was on a tight budget:

Jemma: ... I've actually been talking to a friend of mine who plans her meals from a menu. The children can pick what they want from a menu and she shops for that week for those meals. And I have done that before, that was when I was with my husband we used to do that, so I think I'm going to go back to doing that again now because my budget's that much tighter again now.

Thus although finances posed a potential threat to her overall control of family food, strategies such as planning ahead, using the internet and planning meals from a menu, emerged as strategies for regaining some control and Jemma talked about trying to meet her nutritional ideals within these financial limitations. In this way,

agency still comes through as paramount, despite the discussion of how structural influences (especially financial issues) play a role, and further insights into Jemma's agency in relation to her family and socio-economic context are drawn out in Chapter Eight, when exploring parent-child relationships.

7.3 More varied food practices

More varied food practices, where eating together was not such a family norm, were described within five of the eleven case study families (Banks, Davies, Falkner, Harris and Kemble). These practices accord with Brannen et al's discussion of 'modified family meals', where eating together took place only on some days of the week (Brannen et al. 2013). Compared with the Gates and Jenkins family, these families were discussed in terms of less controlled approaches to food in Chapter Five (with the Davies family displaying particular struggles around responding to public health messages). Thus their more varied food practices fitted within this less controlled approach, with families compromising on meeting public health goals. Examples of more varied food practices included: parents eating different foods compared with the children (Falkner and Kemble); and eating in varied locations around the family home, and not always at a table (Davies and Banks).

A consistent theme across these families was that there was a mixture of eating together and more varied meal formats, with families negotiating individual preferences within the time they had available. Families found alternative ways for catching up on news and spoke of finding different times for interaction. In this way, families felt they were gaining similar social interactions as those experienced around the dinner table (Gofton 1995).

In the case of the Harris family, mealtimes varied on a temporal basis and the following case study illustrates how the busy nature of family life (for parents and children), meant that it was difficult to schedule family mealtimes, especially during week days, which fits with Brannen and colleagues' observations about 'asynchronicity' or 'mismatch' between the time patterns of different family members (Brannen et al. 2013).

7.3.1 Busy lives compromise family mealtimes

The Harris' talked about finding it difficult to eat together as a family during the week, but their compromise was eating together at weekends, with perhaps a Saturday night set aside as family time. There were a range of reasons put forward for varied patterns of eating, including the practicalities of parental work and children's activities. Alongside these practical considerations, there was also a sense that they were to some extent achieving other food-related ideals, and they placed considerable emphasis on eating 'proper meals' in the evening. Although eating together at the table was not a regular aspect of life for this family, eating a hot meal (usually home-cooked) gave them a sense of doing family food in their own way.

Eating together more frequently throughout the week was stated as one change Hannah (the mother) wanted to make. However, she went on to talk about the 'practical' challenges (shifting from agency to structures), with Howard's (the father) work and his subsequent arrival at home, too late for the children to eat:

Hannah: I would like us to all eat together through the week at a certain time but I know because of our lifestyle, because we're both working and Howard works later, I know it's not practical. I know it's not practical because I know by the time Howard comes home and has a cup of tea he won't have his dinner until about half past five, quarter to six and I do think it's unfair for the children to have to wait until then. That's why Saturday and Sunday we try and eat together as a family and catch up. We know each other's news anyway. But no, in an ideal world I'd like us all to sit down at five o'clock and eat together but I know that's not always possible...

Despite this overall aim to eat together more often, the Harris' cited examples of finding alternative time for the family to socialise, other than at mealtimes. The children were always following the parents around the house, chatting all the time, so there was a continual process of everyone knowing 'everybody's business':

Hannah: ...and we talk so much all together. Even my husband, he talks non-stop. So we know everybody's business even before we get to eat. My daughter doesn't stop talking when she comes in. She follows me around.

Despite this pattern of food practices where eating together was the exception rather than the norm, they had a positive approach to nutrition driven by Howard (who was interested in weight training and martial arts and constantly monitored his weight),

and Hannah (who was 'always on a diet'). Hannah referred to healthy food as 'good food', noting the importance of feeding the children well so that they would benefit in the future:

Hannah: I like the fact that they eat good food. Like yesterday they had sliced peppers, cheese, tomatoes and cucumber and they ate it so it's just making sure that they eat good food so that they're healthier when they're older.

Rather than eating together at a table, the mainstay of their family food routine was that they always had a proper, hot meal in the evenings. This tended to be something warm, something cooked and the parents talked about the importance of having a 'meal' rather than a 'snack'. Interestingly they talked about this as something the children had come to expect and they would not just accept a snack at the end of the day. Helen (the 16 year old daughter) also reinforced the importance of having a 'proper' meal, and how she found it strange that her friends did not always have a 'warm' meal at home at the end of the day. Conversely, she talked about how her friends found it strange that she had a cooked meal, thus endorsing this practice as something which held special significance for them as a family, and which distinguished them from other families:

Helen: I know with my best friend if I went over there they'd have a sandwich and I always used to think it's really weird they don't have a warm meal. And when she used to come over here then she used to find it weird that we did have a warm meal and she'd be eating a warm meal

Howard: So never had a cooked meal?

Helen: No never have a cooked meal because some of us ask 'what did you have for tea last night?' and I'd say like 'we had spaghetti Bolognese'. People would say like, 'that's a bit extravagant', I'm like 'no, not really'.

The Harris' conception of 'proper food' is in line with other suggestions that 'proper' implies the use of fresh, healthy ingredients to prepare meals from scratch (Murcott 1983; Charles and Kerr 1988). In this family, the 'proper meal' was also a way of expressing care and devotion within the family, and to some extent it came through as an alternative mechanism for holding the family together, when perhaps other nutritional ideals or desires (such as all the family eating together at the same time) were not so easily achieved.

7.4 Individualised food practices

Four of the case study families described more individualised food practices and whereas the families above described varied practices with families eating separately some of the time, in these four families, individualised eating (and separate food for parents and children) seemed to be the norm (Abbotts, Edmunds, Carters and Irving). The section below highlights how a combination of factors led to families eating in more individualised ways, and all four families are discussed in order to elucidate the different pathways through which a combination of factors contributed to more individualised practices.

These descriptions are in line with the more discordant patterns of eating within households which have been reported elsewhere (Valentine 1999). Rather than viewing these patterns in a negative light (Fischler 1980, 1988), the findings presented here resonate with more recent interpretations, which view individualised approaches as ‘best fit’ solutions to meet the demands of busy daily life (Travis et al. 2010, p. 113), and tensions between daily lives and food values (Jastran et al. 2009).

7.4.1 Fitting food around children

Families gave a sense of being busy, always on the go, always something going on, and this sense of being in a busy household reflects broader societal trends and less structured time for family food (Warde 1999; Brannen et al. 2013). Whereas in the Harris family (discussed above) there was a general sense of being busy and always on the go, in other families there were more specific activities which drew attention away from family food, and in particular children’s out-of-school activities consumed a large proportion of family time and energy.

The Abbotts family demonstrates a case where children’s activities meant that meals were not always eaten together at the same time, but the discussion below highlights the way in which individualised patterns of eating also related to the way in which food had to be fitted around children’s specific food preferences.

The way in which Alison and Alan (the Abbotts parents) talked about these negotiations is interesting in the way it contrasts with some of the order and control

they displayed when talking about their overarching approach to food. In Chapter Five there was a strong emphasis on the role of individual agency (and the attribution of parental responsibility for children's poor dietary health at a societal level), but the discussion which follows draws out much more about constraints and compromises, attributing far more significance to structural influences.

The Abbotts family gave a sense that eating together was not an overall priority for them. There were always other things going on in the household so that eating was fitted in around other activities. 'Hectic' and 'busy' were terms used by Alison and Alan on several occasions to describe mealtimes throughout the day, especially breakfast:

Alison: Breakfast, well it is hectic, obviously. We do all, well apart from my husband, my husband goes out to work about half seven so he grabs a bit of toast before he goes.

Descriptions from Alison's diary, presents this type of busy lifestyle as the norm as she refers to 'a typical hectic morning'. This constant level of being busy meant there were limits to what food was eaten and the cooking styles permitted in the time available. Their usual practice was to take something from the freezer and heat it in the oven – 'because it is a busy house here so it's put it in the oven and off you go'. In addition, a hectic lifestyle limited the time available to prepare 'cooked dinners' and what they regarded as 'proper meals'.

Alongside a general sense of being busy, there was also a particular level of activity associated with Andrew and Aiden's (sons aged 14 and eight years) out-of-school sports practices. As reported in a study on families with adolescent girls involved in athletics, sporting activities can have a huge impact on family food (Travis et al. 2010). Impacts included eating later on training nights, eating in restaurants after training sessions, and in other cases the daughters would eat at separate times and venues to the other family members. Although the families expressed a desire to do things differently (like all having dinner together, earlier, at the same time), they worked around the sporting activities to achieve a 'best fit' (Travis et al. 2010).

The Abbotts family also worked around children's activities and they drew on a number of different coping strategies (such as eating on the go, squeezing in meals

and missing Sunday lunch). For them, sporting activities undertaken by parents and children were intertwined with work, school and other family activities, and there was a real notion of ‘squeezing’ in meals between activities:

Alison: And then for evening meal I made the boys theirs in between coming in from rugby and going out to football.

Overall there was a sense that on some days sporting activities accounted for a segregated, ‘mish-mash’ of eating:

Alison: For tea then we had, what did we have? Oh we all had a mish-mash tonight because Andrew’s gone off training, football training and Aiden was late coming home from school. Alan had his in-between me going to get the children and looking after the child minding children. And I had mine warmed up later when I came back.

Despite the disruption caused to mealtimes, the parents were keen for their sons to maintain an active lifestyle. Thus eating together was weighed up against other family activities, so in some ways they were trying to reconcile different sets of priorities. As the father noted, ‘I’d rather it that way than them hanging around the streets’.

Children’s busy schedule of activities was not the only factor which contributed to individualised food practices within the Abbotts household. Their accounts were also littered with references to Aiden’s ‘strange’ food preferences and how this impacted on the rest of the family. This was presented as a child-centred problem rather than something resulting from broader influences, and this echoes the literature on how families deal with children’s food, locating problems within the child (Curtis and Fisher 2007). Their accounts illustrate family frustrations, and a belief that Aiden’s likes and dislikes were ‘weird’ and abnormal:

Alan: One of our friends just came and picked a chip off the plate one day and dipped it in the tomato sauce. He wouldn’t eat none of it then. He wouldn’t eat none of it. He’s very strange. Very weird with food.

Further insights were revealed when talking about Alan and Alison’s childhood food practices – insights which added different dimensions to Aiden’s preferences. Despite Alan’s accounts of Aiden’s eating habits as ‘weird’, it transpired that he also had particular food preferences as a child, as did Alison to some extent too:

Alison: He was very funny with food apparently, and when you were eight he was knocked over. He was in a coma and while he was in a coma they were feeding him, giving him all his food, that she said you hated it, and they said he's just playing you up. But when you woke up you still wouldn't eat it would you?

Alan: No.

Alison: I was fussy. A cooked dinner, I'd just have meat and potato and my Mum does like I do with Aiden, try them with about three carrots and half a dozen peas.

As well as these historical influences, the parents' involvement in weight-loss diets also influenced their approach to children's food. Both parents were following a 'points-based' diet and the structure of dieting contributed towards more segregated food - points were allocated to an individual, based on an individual's weight, size and activity levels, and this contributed towards more individualised mealtimes.

The way in which Aiden's particular food preferences were handled as an individualised problem resulted in segregated mealtimes, with Aiden eating different food to everyone else. Disagreements during Christmas dinner meant that the following year Aiden was allowed 'pizza and chicken nuggets', instead of the traditional Christmas dinner. The family had tried various strategies to help Aiden; including consulting their GP and a food specialist, so overall their tendency had been to adopt a medicalised approach. This sort of approach is perhaps a reflection of public health messages, which suggest children should be eating certain things in certain ways at certain developmental stages – creating concern when this is not the case. Within this response, there was limited reference to a more social approach to food and eating – and again this reflects public health messages which are focussed on nutritional rather than the social aspects of food and eating (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence 2006).

Despite going through various stages of trying to encourage Aiden to eat different foods, their current coping strategies revolved around giving him the food he wanted in order to keep family harmony and avoid 'hassle', and in this way, the segregated pattern of eating with children's food separate to adults' food becomes reinforced:

Alan: I mean I did use to lose my temper over what they would eat and what they wouldn't eat, but I've got to the stage now where it's not worth the hassle because I'm getting myself wound up and they're not

going to eat it. So that's why we've gone like we have. They eat what they want and we eat what we want.

This family case study begins to highlight the way in which different elements of family life interacted to influence food practices. In the Abbotts family the main factors related to children - especially their activities and their specific food preferences. The next case study starts by examining influences related to children's activities, but also looks at how this interacted with the family's socio-economic position, in particular the father's involvement in shift-work.

7.4.2 Fitting food around rugby and shift work

As with the Abbotts family, the Edmunds family also presented a busy and hectic family life, and much of their talk about being busy related to their sons' involvement with the local youth rugby team. Rugby was a big part of family life for the Edmunds family. Ellis (the eight year old son) played and trained on a regular basis for the local team and Edward (the four year old son) was looking forward to playing when he was old enough. Emma (the mother) was also a big rugby fan and weekends were taken up with rugby fixtures. Ellis' involvement with rugby had a big impact on family food, and weekends were organised around matches and other rugby-related events. As Emma explained, Sunday matches often meant they missed Sunday lunch and one of her diary entries noted how rugby and 'a manic weekend' led to a 'mish-mash' of food, with the rhetoric stressing the functionality of eating rather than the form – 'whatever...whenever':

Emma: Today is Sunday. It's been a bit of a manic weekend. We've been away with Ellis playing rugby and I forgot to take the tape recorder with me. Saturday, yesterday, the kids had toast for breakfast because we were travelling and basically all day yesterday was a bit of a mish-mash of sandwiches, crisps, hot dogs and just whatever they picked up, whenever they picked up.

When asked about future changes to family food, Emma expressed how she was looking forward to the end of the rugby season and to eating a cooked dinner on a Sunday. Similar sentiments were expressed by Edwin (the father). He was looking forward to more 'routinised' eating at weekends and having more time to do their own thing.

Here routine and structure are presented as something of an idealised goal, with the family looking forward to being less tied to the chaotic structure that rugby dictated. However, in some ways they already achieved a certain form of control *through* rugby - it provided a different sort of structuring which they fitted food around, with rugby perhaps fulfilling the role of the family meal in terms of providing (albeit different) ways for the family to interact and spend time with each other (Gofton 1995).

Although rugby served as an alternative mechanism for structuring family, other elements of family life served to undermine this structure and control. In particular, Edwin's shift-work was a major influence on the way food was managed and enjoyed. Emma was not working at the time of the interviews, but Edwin was employed as a shift-worker in a local food processing factory, and he worked day and then afternoon shifts on alternate weeks. Emma drew clear distinctions between the pattern of eating when Edwin was on day shifts compared to afternoon shifts, and she talked about 'proper food' being on hold every other week, when Edwin worked afternoons:

Emma: Thankfully Edwin's days tomorrow, so we're back to proper food at proper times.

Emma talked about enjoying the structure of mealtimes when Edwin was on day shifts, with the tendency to have 'decent' food and shared mealtimes:

Emma: On a week when he's home in the afternoon, when he's home here at tea time, we do tend to have something decent don't we? I do cook.

In one diary account, Emma described how her own food practices improved (and became more structured) when Edwin was at home and they were able to eat together. When he was on afternoon shifts there was a breakdown in this structured approach and in particular Emma's food practices suffered. This notion of structure versus breakdown was summed up in the following diary entry:

Emma: And I also have realised that I don't actually eat enough. Or eat at stupid times of the day and the wrong things. I tend to snack rather than eat meals especially on the weeks like last week when Edwin was working afternoons. It tends to be a little bit more structured when he's days because he's home at a reasonable time and we do tend to eat together. Then, when he's afternoons the kids will have something as

soon as they come in from school and then maybe it's sort of nine o'clock at night before I think about making something for myself and by that time I'm too tired or can't be bothered so I tend to eat a bit too much rubbish.

Emma's perception was that Edwin's shift-work made little difference to the children's eating practices – 'they're still having the same'. Despite this acknowledgement, it did seem that Edwin's pattern of work had a broader impact on Emma's coping strategies and the way in which she was able to deal with the demands from Ellis and Edward, which in some ways was linked to their eating practices. Emma recalled a time when Edwin was working afternoon shifts and how she gave in to Edward's demands to go to a fast food restaurant for tea after school:

Emma: He started crying and performing and with Edwin being afternoons I thought I can't put up with this for the next three hours so it was easier to give in.

In this way, it appears that Emma's levels of control over family food were diminished when Edwin worked afternoon shifts. This illustrates the ways in which specific contexts, and family's socio-economic position, were intimately connected with food and eating, with implications for parents' and children's food.

7.4.3 Doing the night shift and feeding the family

The significance of working patterns in relation to food and families, signals a need for particular broad-based strategies to address the social determinants of health, and this is in line with calls for a shift away from behavioural approaches to health promotion (Baum and Fisher 2014). Whereas the Edmunds case study illustrated how shift-work impacted across the family, in the Carters, there was much more about the specific influences of shift-work on the mother's (Christine) own food routines. These connections between food and factors related to her socio-economic status were much more visible when Christine talked about the lived experiences of family food, compared with when she talked about broader approaches to food (as in Chapter Five). Her broader approach to food reflected her individual agency in resisting public health messages and drawing on her own instinct as a mother. Day-to-day negotiations revealed more about the constraints she faced, and this resulted in fluctuating levels of agency throughout the week, with work-days resulting in 'poor' eating and attempts to regain a sense of control on rest-days.

The issues around shift-work were initially raised by Christine when she talked about the knock-on effect of working three consecutive night shifts, and then trying to revert to some sort of daily routine. The difficulties were accentuated by her underlying health problems:

Christine: I don't know whether it's because I work nights and I'm so out of sync. Because when I'm working I come home and it's my supper time before I go to bed, but I can't eat before I go to bed. Because I've got a hiatus hernia if I eat anything and then lie down I have a lot of reflux, so I tend not to eat.

She drew contrasts between work-days when she 'did not really eat that much because there's just not enough hours in the day', and then having to readjust on rest-days. Further descriptions of working patterns revealed how shift-work impacted on family life and the allocation of roles and responsibilities, with most of the food related responsibilities taken on by Carys (her 30 year old daughter). The use of terms such as 'vicious circle' makes the interaction between shift-work and food sound like they are locked into a structure which was beyond her control, and in this case there is concern about the control of time:

Christine: I think it's because I do nights. It knocks you out. It knocks you for six. It does knock you for six. And of course then I work my three nights on the trot so then I'm crap at eating. And then on my days off I've got to re-educate myself to eating in the day and by the time I've got my eating habits round the right way I'm back in work again. I think that's when it's a vicious circle.

In addition to the difficulties of finding time to eat together as a family as a result of Christine's pattern of shift work, Christopher's (her eight year old son) special needs also added to the difficulties encountered and reinforced more segregated food practices. In this way, we can see how socio-economic factors (related to Christine's shift work) interact with family contexts (especially Christopher's special needs). Managing these special needs was presented as 'an uphill struggle', and the coping strategies developed by the family in order to negotiate his food preferences, led to more segregated eating. Catering for Christopher's individual needs seem to have a trickledown effect onto other family members, so that multiple different meals for different family members became the norm. There was a sense that Christopher's routine was central to family life and other members fitted around this. From the

following passage it makes it sound as though Christopher favoured a very fixed routine – which had been accepted as part of everyday life:

Christine: Regarding Christopher's routine he likes to go to my mother's. We have to go to my mother's every morning. We have to leave at seven o'clock. We've got to be at my mother's for seven. Christopher's always up at five o'clock so we go down my mother's.

Christopher's needs were catered for in terms of *what* he ate, *when* he ate, and *how* he ate - for example, sausages had to have the skin peeled off for him to eat the middle. Christopher's specific routines and habits influenced Christine's eating practices, as she was his main carer. At one level, she talked about not being able to eat a complete meal without him needing attention and there were numerous accounts of her not being able to finish meals or being forced to eat elsewhere.

We also hear about how Christopher's condition prevented them eating out as a family because he could not tolerate certain food smells. Throughout these accounts there is a sense of fatalism expressed by Christine – this is how things are and it had become a taken-for-granted aspect of family life. She also talked about making adjustments to her own eating practices in order to cope with these particular routines. This included, finding a quieter time in the day to eat her main meal in peace, while Christopher was in school. Diaries included reference to solitary eating opportunities, with these moments being savoured amongst the otherwise hectic day-to-day routines. In some respects, these opportunities acted as coping mechanisms within the busy routines of everyday life, and this highlights the importance of the embodied pleasure of lone-eating as a way of escaping the gendered burden of caring for and feeding children (Maher et al. 2013). For example, Christine commented on enjoying breakfast alone:

Christine: For breakfast I had a bowl of porridge and a spoonful of sugar. I ate this alone because everyone else was still in bed. I prefer to eat this early because I can eat my food in peace.

Overall Christine felt that Christopher was such a big influence that this distinguished them from other families:

Christine: I think mine is different because of Christopher, you know. I think we've got to cater for his needs because you're more aware...we've got to think of his wellbeing and his needs. You can't just

sit down with a plate of something that smells of garlic because it would make him ill. So we are more conscious.

This final extract reminds us of the importance of moving beyond explorations of families' overall approach to food (the discursive), towards examining the constraints on their lived experiences (the day-to-day). Earlier presentations of the Carters in Chapter Five included a level of resistance towards public health messages. Closer inspection of family practices contextualises this resistance and illustrates the far-reaching impacts and interactions between specific factors related to family context (Christine's shift work and Christopher's special needs). This offers an alternative perspective on resistance, presenting it as a coping response, rather than as an endorsement of individual agency.

7.4.4 Navigating multiple structural constraints

Juggling multiple structural constraints also came through in the Irving family where struggles over food related to the family's socio-economic circumstances, including their finances, working practices and factors associated with the local community. As with the Carters, this shifts the discussions towards more structural influences, and in the case of the Irving family, there seemed to me more of a sense of struggling, perhaps as a reflection of the combination of factors they faced and in the context of the absence of wider social support - they had recently moved to the area, and did not have extended family close by.

Ioan (the father), was in full-time employment in the postal service and worked early and late shifts, and Isla (the mother) worked part-time (hours varied week to week) as a cashier in a supermarket, in a neighbouring valleys town. Isla's working hours were particularly erratic, and her hours of work increased between the first and follow-up interviews, in the lead up to Christmas. Unpredictable patterns of work impacted directly on mealtimes, with a sense that Isla was squeezing in family between different shift-work, and this sort of pattern also meant they struggled to find family time together:

Isla: Yeah, and obviously now I've gone back to work and Daddy's doing longer hours it is hard to try and fit in family time and mealtimes as well, it's really hard.

Links between available time and food preparation came through clearly in these accounts, and this echoes other research which has examined time management strategies amongst working mothers (Jabs and Devine 2006; Jabs et al. 2007). This sense of feeling overburdened by paid work and child caring responsibilities, echoes the way in which media representations present working mothers as responsible for children's poor dietary health, with little time for home-cooking and a reliance on convenience foods (De Brún et al. 2013).

Isla also talked about her health beginning to suffer, with the busy schedule of work and home life taking its toll. She talked about becoming run down by the long hours, limited break times in work and the neglect of her own diet:

Isla: ...But in the meantime I've not been feeling very well because I got sent home yesterday cos my eyes – they were hurting so much and I couldn't carry on. So I've had to prepare myself and get better to go back in today, this morning

SM: You did go back in?

Isla: Yeah I did. They wanted me to go back in this afternoon and I said 'look I can't, I'm not well.' But they just run you down and it's the same with half an hour on a break there, by the time you've put in a microwave meal or you've gone to the shop to get something your break has gone and you don't like to eat your dinner within five minutes you'll have indigestion, so sometimes I'll just make a salad bowl and I've put it back in the fridge and maybe I've just left it there then.

Family finances were underlying Isla's determination to continue working and take on more over-time, especially in the run up to Christmas and with her wedding planned for the following year. Coupled with the family's financial situation, aspects of the local area also added to their sense of struggle, with limited opportunities for the children to play safely outside the family home in a village that was on the very northern edge of the valleys area. Several references to the local area were made in the field notes after the first visit. This included describing it as a 'bleak place' (it was the end of November and nights were drawing in); and a playground was spotted, but there were no children playing. There was also reference to Isla's actions at the end of the visit: 'she watched me to the top of the steps outside their home and was still watching as I drove off, giving the impression that she wanted to make sure I left safely, perhaps reflecting her concerns about the area.' This was reinforced by points raised in the interview where she talked about not letting her children play in the street:

Isla: No I tend to not let my children go out in the streets around here but no we do quite a lot of activities mainly in [local city] don't we? Because our main friends go there. We don't do a lot of street playing no, no.

Isla talked about their relationship with the local community and in some respects she was defensive about the town compared with other (outsider) perspectives, but at the same time she was keen to keep her children close to home and safe:

Isla: ... You know a lot of people say 'I wouldn't trust [local town]' and stuff like that. We haven't had that much trouble but it does get quite loud down the park, especially that one because it's next to the high school and I tend to not let my children socialise. Because there have been accidents where children have been hit by a ball, you know, or you get a lot of older children, you know, and I'd rather not. And these roads here outside the street, I mean I see so many children out there and they get knocked over and I'd rather my children be home and safe so I'd rather not encourage them to go out and play. It's hard for me as well because I've got the other two youngsters as well and I can't be out there 24/7, if my son wants to be out there playing. So I'd rather know where he is and he's at home. I mean we're in the process of getting our garden done but it's not the weather now to do it but we will eventually get our garden done and get our trampoline out.

This gives an indication of how different influences are inter-woven and how context impacts on diets and health, perhaps more than in other case studies. This family made connections between feeding the family and the influence of living in a place marked by poverty and deprivation (Ivinson 2013). This last extract also elucidates the range of concerns facing families, and this echoes other studies which have illustrated how family food is just one of the many concerns facing families in lower socio-economic groups (Wills et al. 2011).

7.5 Conclusion

Families struggled to find time for sharing food together, and the tendency towards more individualised practices reflected the way in which different activities, events and priorities were being juggled. Families found alternative ways of spending time together, and although the trend was towards more varied, individualised patterns of eating, eating together as a family still retained much of its value, which resonates with wider reports (Murcott 1997; Jackson et al. 2009).

Explorations of day-to-day food practices revealed the social significance of food and its relational role in family life. Beyond the dinner table, food served as a mechanism for other ways of interacting and other ways of reinforcing family connections (such as having a hot meal at the end of the day). Individualised eating practices were also cherished, including lone-eating and eating without children.

The range of challenges to family food were framed within the context of busy lives and families adopted diverse strategies in order to navigate schedules of work and children's activities. In some ways, families attained a certain level of control through these activities, which provided a different type of structuring, for a different set of food practices (which included eating on the go and 'grabbing' food), but within this alternative structure, family bonds continued to be prioritised.

Within this overall context of busy lives, one of the main challenges for family food was the nature of parental work. The findings support changes observed by others in terms of the way in which more flexible patterns of work now require employees to live more flexible daily lives, and in particular, the findings illustrated the persistent and wide-ranging impacts of shift-work on food, and other aspects of family life and relationships (Dixon et al. 2013).

The findings also highlighted the *effort* involved in organizing food alongside work and other activities, and families experienced multiple challenges culminating in more varied food practices, across different contexts. At the same time, there were a range of experiences put forward by families, which to some extent reflects the range of experiences represented in studies which have investigated food across higher and lower socio-economic groups (Wills et al. 2011). All families in this study were drawn from areas of lower socio-economic status, but the variation amongst the case studies illustrates the importance of examining specific contextual circumstances, in order to highlight within-group differences.

Accounts of how families negotiated day-to-day challenges contrasted with the way they presented their overarching approach to food. This adds further methodological complexity to studies which have shown mixed findings in terms of the role of structural and agential explanations for health, which reflects different research

designs. Survey methods (Macintyre, McKay et al. 2005) and also the use of pre-existing focus groups (Davidson, Kitzinger et al. 2006) resulted in respondents offering structural explanations, but this contrasted with in-depth interviews where respondents drew on individualised explanations (Popay, Bennett et al. 2003). The findings from this study illustrates the way in which more intimate stories about day-to-day lived experiences, revealed more about structural influences and the entanglement with agency.

Although these findings provided insights into how food practices are constructed in relation to wider structures and constraints, there are further questions about how food practices are negotiated *within* families. Attending to these sorts of relations also prioritises the notion of agency, particular children's agency, and their role in constructing food across family and school contexts. Examining how this agency interacts with broader issues around parenting and the values associated with caring and nurturing through food is considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 8 Child-parent food relationships

8.1 Introduction

Food negotiations have so far been examined in the context of: the family-state relationship (and how this is mediated through the family-school relationship); and in relation to families' socio-structural circumstances. However, there are further questions about negotiations within families, between parents and children. This attends to policy limitations around children's dietary health which has tended to: firstly, overlook the way parent-child relations around food are imbued with meaning which goes beyond food and nutrition; and secondly, policy approaches have tended to overlook the role of the child and their potential agency and perspective (Warin et al. 2008; Gadhoke et al. 2014).

The main contribution of this fourth and final empirical chapter is to advance understandings of parents' and children's experience of food, and what these experiences reveal about the role of food within families, beyond nutritional dimensions, and (in terms of relationships), beyond the immediate nuclear family. Therefore, this chapter addresses the fourth research aim which was *to understand patterns of interactions between parents and children in relation to food in the family and the school*. This includes identifying the range of interactions which take place between children and parents, as well as exploring the underlying rationales and meanings behind these interactions.

Taking forward patterns of child-parent relationships described by O'Connell and Brannen (2014), this chapter is organised around three main patterns of parent-child interactions: parental control, child control and parent-child negotiations. Looking at the overall shape and form of child-parent relationships, the aim is to convey consistencies and contradictions, looking at how families move in and out of different sorts of control (and different strengths of control), depending on different contexts.

The focus in this chapter is to draw out particular cases and contexts, exploring the processes involved and the dimensions of control and meaning in each case. Each

pattern of control is firstly described in terms of the breadth of data across the study, and this is followed by more detailed case studies drawn from families where there was a clear sense of a particular pattern of control.

Within each case study there is also a consideration of negotiations around school food and what happens to parental and child agency in the school context – how it is strengthened, diminished, continued or contradicted. A particular line of inquiry is how children navigate the family-school boundary, especially where there are differences in adult control between these settings, something which has been a neglected area to date (Metcalf et al. 2008; Pike 2010).

Following calls to explore how families frame their food practices in relation to others, the final section of this chapter looks at broader relations beyond the immediate nuclear family, exploring food negotiations with grandparents (Jingxiong et al. 2007).

8.2 Controlling children's food

Child-parent relationships have been positioned as central to contemporary policy approaches to addressing children's dietary health, with a focus on hierarchical, unidirectional relations and assumptions about the role parents can play in their children's eating (Curtis 2011). This deterministic model of public health nutrition makes connections between childhood obesity and parenting styles, and in this way parental behaviour is viewed as the most important influence on children's eating behaviour, especially in early childhood. This is based on assumptions that a health promoting family food environment requires parental control over children's food choice, together with positive role modelling, but one of the main critiques of this is that it fails to acknowledge children's agency and choice (O'Connell and Brannen 2014).

To some extent all families demonstrated elements of parental control, which included: restricting access to certain foods (Davies family); by controlling food purchases (Banks family); and by insisting that everyone had the same food (Falkner family).

However, two families (Gates and Jenkins) demonstrated stronger levels of parental control over children's food and this was consistent with their overall approach to food as discussed in Chapter Five. By looking at the relationships within one family in more detail (Jenkins), we can ascertain the tensions between parental control and the role of children's individual agency. The discussion below looks at the different dynamics of control including: mealtime control; longer-term control; and associations between controlling food and controlling family relationships. The discussion also highlights the variable strength of parental control, with examples of children's role within an overall parent-led framework.

8.2.1 Mealtime control: 'everyone has to have the same food'

In the Jenkins family, the three children (Jane, Jennie, and Joseph), lived with their mother, (Jemma), and she displayed a strict approach to food, setting out rules for mealtimes. Jemma talked about mealtime norms – always at the table, always together, and the children had to wait until everyone had finished their food. The emphasis placed on these practices as something the children automatically did, rather than things which Jemma insisted on, makes it sound as though there was limited pressure put on the children to do these things. These are norms that had been well established and the children accepted them as such, with Jane, the eldest daughter, noting that their mother would ask them what they wanted, 'but we all have to have the same'.

This emphasis on unpressurised control is again emphasised when we are told that the children were not forced into eating everything – just a 'good portion of fruit and vegetables'. The Friday 'treat day' also detracts from a display of pressure by suggesting that there is a break from this regimented routine, but Jemma's control continues to set the agenda for this and she schedules the treat so that it does not interfere with their evening meal. The way in which parental control is framed to avoid a sense of enforcement or coercion, is in line with other reports about parental tendencies to display a sense of child-centeredness within their practices, in order to encourage children's agency and independence. This reflects policy discourses and the pressure for parents to feel 'responsible both for nourishing their children's bodies and nurturing their developing agency' (O'Connell and Brannen 2014, p. 98).

In the Jenkins' case the children are presented as having a role in food practices, although parental control is still dominant.

This firm but fair approach to food and eating was reinforced when Jemma talked about food rules at mealtimes. The nutritional importance of mealtimes comes through in this extract, and although she was lenient about them eating meat, they had to eat at least some of their vegetables. Beyond control over the nutritional aspects of mealtimes, Jemma referred to other dimensions of control – control over what is not allowed (television), what is encouraged (chatting), and what aspects of family life are dealt with (time and space to discuss their feelings and emotions). Reference to the social and emotional aspects of mealtimes reflects what others have reported about the importance of food beyond sustenance, to encompass feelings and emotions (Punch et al. 2010):

Jemma: Yeah, they have to sit down to finish their food. They're not supposed to watch television when its food time, because it is food time. I encourage chatting amongst everyone. You know we talk about day's events, stuff like that. I also like to take the opportunity, especially since myself and my husband split up, to talk to the children about their feelings at mealtimes. It's a time when they're relaxed and if there's a problem I can approach them. You know it's less confrontational. And that's worked quite well. I've got quite a lot out of that. The rules are like I said that they don't have to eat all their food completely, while I need to make sure that they are getting their nutrition in a meal. They have to eat a good part of the vegetables and things; I'm not so worried if they don't eat meat in their dish. Vegetables and things I'm quite particular about. Especially this time of year, fighting colds and things.

This extracts conveys meanings associated parent-child relations at two different but interrelated levels. At one level the practices encouraged by Jemma align with dietary guidance on how families should eat together – sitting at a table, not viewing television and with socialising encouraged (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence 2006). At the same time what also comes through in this extract is the way in which eating together as a family also has more personal meaning. Mealtime is a time when Jemma creates a more relaxed atmosphere, for the children to discuss anything that may be worrying them, particularly in light of the parents splitting up. This echoes Komter's work and how meaning derives from the nature of social relations – in terms of personal meaning and also in terms of social structural meaning (Komter 2001).

Discussions about school food illustrate the way in which Jemma wanted to extend mealtime control into this context. However, she seemed frustrated by the limited time they had to eat their packed-lunch, and this triggered the move towards them having school dinners. The limits on Jemma's control in the school context are clear when she talks about putting in a 'big effort' to prepare a healthy lunch, but because of a shortage of time to eat, this food often returned home uneaten.

8.2.2 Controlling children's overall approach to food: 'I've not really discussed it with them, I've just thrown in a few more beans'

Beyond the control exerted at mealtimes, Jemma was keen to direct and steer the children's overall approach to food, including their nutritional choices and their moral judgements about 'good' and 'bad' food. There seemed to be limited involvement or discussion with them about her nutritional choices – 'I've not really discussed it with them, I've just thrown in a few more beans and things.'

Alongside switching foods, Jemma also talked about inculcating a broader sense of responsibility, encouraging the children to understand the moral value of food, and descriptions of the children's food practices made it sound as though she had succeeded in this goal. The children were described as being good with their food, 'not that fussy', something which she seemed pleased about as she equated fussy eating with 'awkward living.' Jemma seemed to have instilled in them a sense of responsibility around food, so that they made healthier food choices under their own volition, and developed self-control around food when they were faced with a range of food choices (for example, at children's parties). In this way parental control over food was extended beyond the family:

Jemma: Yeah, yeah, they're not that fussy really, none of them... I am strict with their food but I do want them to have their own ideas about what they like and don't like. I just don't want them to grow up to be fussy. It makes for awkward living. And they make healthy choices as well. They will turn down an unhealthy option for a healthy option. I've seen them at parties, at children's parties. She'll go for the ham sandwiches and she'll eat ten of them as oppose to eating a big bowl of crisps and things, so yeah.

A further example of trying to instil responsibility around food was the way in which Jemma tried to encourage independence in relation to cooking and preparing their own food – 'they all do their own breakfast; they've all done that since seven years

old'. Jemma seemed particularly proud of her eldest daughter's cooking skills, and the formulation of a three part list of what she could cook (Sunday lunch, spaghetti bolognese and pizza) further endorses the level of skill attained – 'she's a good little chef she is'. A focus on 'becomings' and agency as a future possibility has also been identified as an important concept in other studies which have explored the dynamic agency of children as they move through different places, within areas which are socio-economically deprived (Ivinson 2013).

8.2.3 Children's role in family food: 'we had a bowl down there ... so I brought some home'

Within this overall framework of Jemma being in control, the children had some level of choice and there was scope for them to shape family food practices – which resonates with what Jemma said about fostering their own sense of responsibility. She was fairly relaxed about breakfast-time choices for the children (in terms of what they ate and where), and they also had free choice of evening meal once a week, although they had to agree on the same food. There was also one example of the children making a mealtime suggestion that was then adopted by Jemma. Jennie and Joseph (the two youngest children) talked about the first time they made corned beef stew at a village play scheme:

Jennie: Well, the first time me and Joseph actually made it was down in play scheme. Like you can make cakes and they include you in everything. So we helped make it and we chopped up bits you want to put in it and things like that

SM: And then you brought it home then from play scheme?

Jennie: Yeah we had a bowl down there and if you wanted you could have more, so I brought some home.

Interestingly Jemma talked about being initially 'absolutely devastated' when she found out the children were eating corned beef, which suggests a rejection of local cultures and tastes, which accords with other comparisons made with the local area as discussed in Chapter Five. In this case though Jemma talked about tasting the stew, discovering it was 'not so bad' and the family added it to their repertoire of recipes:

Jemma: It is a local speciality. I'd never heard of it until I moved up here. I was absolutely devastated when I knew my kids were having corned beef stew! (laughter) I thought oh my God, what are you eating?

But they insisted I made it for them and when I did I must admit it's not so bad actually.

In addition to examples of the children exerting independence, there was also one example which directly undermined the level of control that Jemma presented. This challenge to parental authority occurred during Jemma's interview and represents more naturally occurring rather than reflected data, adding further complexity to the nature of power dynamics in this family. Jemma was discussing access to snacks and how the children had free access to the fruit bowl if they were hungry in-between meals, but they had to ask before taking other foods such as yoghurts or crisps. Shortly after this discussion, Jane walked through the living room (where the interview was being conducted) and took a bag of crisps from the kitchen to eat upstairs (this was before the family had eaten their evening meal). Jemma felt the need to comment on Jane's actions and she used the opportunity to note that it was not acceptable for her to have done this. Jemma commented on how she would be 'pulled up' for it.

Children's comments about food rules at home also called into question the strength of control that Jemma portrayed, and they gave the impression that there were fewer rules than she described. Joseph mentioned saying prayers before a meal (something which Jemma did not mention) and Jane noted that they had to eat at the table but 'that's about it'. Differences can also be discerned between Jemma and Jane in terms of involvement in cooking. As noted above, Jemma praised Jane's advanced cooking skills but when asked about this, Jane was more reticent, playing down her repertoire of accomplishments, perhaps reflecting a level of display work on behalf of Jemma. Jane talked about 'not really cooking that much' and 'just doing what Mum tells me' rather than working to a recipe.

Although Jemma presented a strict approach to family food, the children did not seem to describe such strict control, perhaps reflecting the way in which parental control had become normalised, and also perhaps reflecting a certain level of display work on behalf of Jemma. This raises an important point about different perceptions of control from within the same family – a distinction which has been given little attention so far in the literature on child-parent relationships around food (O'Connell and Brannen 2014). This also raises questions about the approach to data generation

and how the focus on accounts and reflections of food provide a way into making certain aspects of family dynamics more transparent, while occluding other elements, which only become more visible when other more naturally occurring data is explored.

8.2.4 Controlling family relationships: ‘I like to do about six to eight vegetables cos they have to make up for what they missed out on’

Further meaning about Jemma's control over children's food can be discerned at a personal level, and discussions revealed more about the nature of parent relations and how food practices were implicated in this. The family were interviewed during a period of change in their lives as the parents had recently spilt up and they were making adjustments accordingly. In terms of food practices, this change had widespread implications: budgets for food were tight; Jemma was anxious about the food the children ate when they spent time with John (their father); and she tried to provide a relaxed atmosphere around the evening meal so that the children would feel able to talk about their feelings.

Jemma talked about the sort of food the children ate with John, things she ‘didn’t agree with’ including ‘junk’ and ‘bought-in food’. This was discussed in the context of John and his ‘new girlfriend’ doing something which they knew she did not agree with – a sense that they were doing it out of spite almost, something which she could not understand and rationalise – ‘for some reason they don’t cook for them’. Woven into this account are moral judgements about John's new life and new relationship with his ‘new girlfriend.’ There was the assumption that this was wrong for the children, and Jemma had to work to rectify these poor eating standards when the children returned to her care:

Jemma: I make sure they’ve got a decent meal to come home to on the Sunday...I like to do about six to eight vegetables cos they have to make up for what they missed out on.

In this case food is doing a lot of emotional and relational work. This example provides an indication of the way in which the strength of parent and child control can vary within the same family, depending on the specific circumstances and the other relationships involved. The children's voice is very much diminished in these accounts. There is limited acknowledgement of the role they play in influencing the

foods eaten when they are with John, and when they return to Jemma their food is tightly controlled - 'they'll have a cooked dinner and lots of veg'. This contrasts with some of the other accounts about this family where Jemma seemed keen to foster the children's involvement in food-related decisions. The absence of the children's views in this instance weakens their level of control and serves to strengthen Jemma's control – perhaps as an indication of the strength of her feelings about feeding the children in this particular context.

Jemma's overall approach to providing 'good nutrition' for her children is reinvigorated by the change in family circumstances, and her perceived need to compensate for the decline in nutritional standards when they spend time with John. Here, food is closely inter-twined with the broader dynamics and tensions of family life, and marks out food as much more than just 'nutrition'. Food is clearly demonstrated as woven into the fabric of wider social, contextual and affective dynamics of family life. For Jemma, food had long been a mechanism for mothering, but there are break-downs in this role since the parents became separated.

The different ways in which Jemma controlled children's food provides insights into her own relationship with food. As described in Chapter Five, Jemma's management of a chronic illness was partly attributed to good nutrition, and more generally she described a long-standing drive to eat well and wanted to instil this in her children. What emerges in this type of control is a strong level of investment in her children's food and in her own role as a 'mother.' Recent family developments meant that this investment was breaking down in some respects, with certain aspects of food moving beyond her control, thus emphasising the changing patterns of control across space and time.

8.3 Covert control of children's food

Parental control was also demonstrated in the Banks family, but in this case study a slightly different form of control was expressed which was more subtle and covert. A similar sort of covert control was also evident in the practices of other families which included hiding vegetables (the Gates family), socialising children into family norms

through role modelling (the Irving family) and encouraging children to try new foods (the Edmunds family).

8.3.1 Unwritten rules: ‘he’s quite good, he says no, he knows how much to have’

Overall the Banks family presented a controlled, but at the same time a very calm, light-hearted approach to family food practices, with a sense of enjoyment coming through from ten year old Bobbie and his parents (Beth and Brian). There was particular enjoyment attached to eating in restaurants and trying new foods, although financial limitations meant that this was not a regular practice but something they mainly enjoyed during holidays.

In accordance with this overall relaxed approach, the nature of the hierarchical relationship within the family was different to that examined above in the Jenkins family, with more subtle or covert forms of parenting underlying family relations. Beth and Brian talked about specific examples of Bobbie following family rules and showing restraint with treats. In this example there is a sense that Bobbie knew the unwritten rules about what he was and was not allowed to have, even without Beth vocalising the rules. At the end of the extract there is a hint that Beth's presence was enough to remind Bobbie about these rules, and that perhaps he would not have adhered to them so firmly if she was not present:

Brian: Yes, like when he goes to my father’s on a Saturday he’ll have a bit of ice cream you know. My father tries to give him a bit more but he’s quite good, he says no, he knows how much to have. I think he’d like it if I wasn’t there though.

Covert control seemed contingent upon the specific context, and although Bobbie accepted levels of parental control, he also recognised that there were times when his mother may be more lenient, and other times when the rules would be applied more stringently, when friends came to tea for example:

Bobbie: When I’m having my tea I’m usually by the TV but when there’s a friend over we always sit at the table, for some reason. I’m happier sitting next to the TV or playing a game while we eat food, but Mum won’t allow it if a friend comes because she thinks a friend will get used to sitting at the table.

In this extract Bobbie talked about the different locations for eating, but meals with friends were always eaten at the table, perhaps as part of presenting a certain image of family life to others, which resonates with notions of family display work (Finch 2007).

8.3.2 Controlling over-eating: ‘I have to watch what he eats...he's got quite a big appetite’

The covert control exerted by Beth can be better understood in light of the issues around her concerns about the amounts eaten by Bobbie, and descriptions about his size were tied in with her own weight-related concerns. This follows the pattern of interaction between children and parents food highlighted in the Jenkins family. Although the focus of the questions were about children's food, parents' relationships with food were integral to this and how Beth handled issues around weight, health and body image, impacted on how she managed Bobbie's food too. The following extract illustrates how dieting influenced her approach to children's food, but at the same time she emphasised that she did not talk to Bobbie about dieting:

Beth: I do worry about him putting weight on and I try not to make him know that I'm worried about it but he knows I go slimming, but I'd never say anything to him. But yes I do worry because he's quite stocky Bobbie is. He doesn't look very stocky on there (*points to photo*) but he's quite, he's not fat. I think he's going to be my brother's dap. My brother's only about five foot six and he's quite stocky.

This extract provides further insights into the source of her anxieties as she moves between concern about Bobbie's physical body and also denial about whether he is 'fat' or not. Her eagerness to avoid the term 'fat' is in line with other reports about how 'fat' is an 'emotionally-loaded term', which conveys negative connotations and Beth seemed keen to avoid this sort of societal disapproval that such a term conveys (De Brún et al. 2013). 'Stocky' is the term she seems most comfortable with, but this is validated with reference to her brother's physicality, so the generational (and genetic) connection to some extent suggest that it is beyond her control. Building on discussions about embodiment in Chapter Five, this highlights how notions of bodies are implicated in discussions of family food, thus again emphasising why policies around children's food cannot overlook such issues (Rich 2010; Evans et al. 2013).

There was a sense of surveillance in relation to Bobbie's food practices, with Beth talking about having to 'watch what he eats' in terms of portion control, and there was reference to a time when perhaps this was not so tightly controlled, with the result that Bobbie ended up eating the same size portions as his parents. This is typical of the sort of self-surveillance that maternal repsonsibilisation discourses instil and the way that mothers in particular are made to feel constantly visible, even when there is no external surveillance apparent (Furedi 2002; Pike 2008). In this way control can be seen as something socially constructed by influences from outside the family, which suggests a different motivation for parental control compared to the Jenkins family, where there seemed to be more of a personal drive to control and shape children's food.

Despite parental control over the type and quantity of food eaten, Beth appeared more lax about the *location* of eating at home. She talked about Bobbie eating in different places and how he enjoyed eating breakfast in bed. Interestingly she prefaced this by describing it as 'strange' (she was keen to mention this first before Bobbie did) suggesting that she was aware of how this practice may be judged as a break from the norm, inferring poor parenting on her part. Thus there is an element of display work here in order to smooth over elements of practices that break with social norms, again reflecting a sense of a wider societal surveillance:

Beth: This is going to sound strange, sounds like he's mollycoddled. Bobbie will usually have a cup of tea in bed. And sometimes cereal in bed unless he gets up and sits with me and watches the tele.

Beth's reference to the way Bobbie is 'mollycoddled' or over-indulged in terms of where he is allowed to eat reveals further insights about the nature of family relations, and it was this leniency about *where* food was eaten that Bobbie emphasised in his accounts. He talked about enjoying eating at home because of all the different locations, emphasising the importance of place in children's food practices (Pike 2008; Metcalfe et al. 2011). Towards the end of the first interview, when asked what he enjoyed about eating at home it was the different places available to eat that appealed most:

Bobbie: I enjoy eating at home because there's loads of places you can sit while having dinner or tea. There's loads of places you can sit like in front of the TV, table, upstairs.

Bobbie's preference for eating in a range of places, and Beth's acceptance of this, reveals a further dimension to processes of power and food. It also reveals more about underlying family relations and the closeness of the mother-son bond where the focus is on care and creating happiness. This echoes reports by Punch and McIntosh et al (2010) about the importance of looking at family food practices as a way into exploring other facets of family life, including feelings and relationships.

Compared with the family context, Beth seemed more controlling about where eating was undertaken in the school context. Although opting for packed-lunch overcame some school-related structures such as the lack of choice at lunchtimes, packed-lunch came with its own challenges, and Beth expressed her concern about the way in which children with packed-lunch had to eat in a classroom, rather than the dining hall. Although packed-lunch provides a means of exerting control over what was eaten, other elements, such as where food is eaten and the wider environment, remained beyond her control.

Further parental control around the packed-lunch related to food-swaps with other children, and this was something Beth wanted to try and restrict due to Bobbie's allergic reaction to dairy products. This highlights how the lunchbox as a vessel between home and school is open to a range of influences and interests, and Beth conceded that food-swaps continued as a lunchtime practice, despite her words of caution (Metcalf et al. 2008).

8.3.3 Maternal versus paternal control

A further dimension of parent-child relations in the Banks family was the way in which food reflected different relationships between Bobbie and each parent. The positioning of mothers as predominantly responsible for child-health has led to the role of fathers and food being overlooked. At the same time we also need to understand the relational dynamics between mothers and fathers, which go beyond the static constructions of gender, as portrayed in media and public health discourses (Maher et al. 2010; Tanner et al. 2013).

There were some differences between Beth and Brian in terms of parenting styles, in their relationship with Bobbie, and in their approach to his food. Beth presented

herself as the parent who adopted a tougher line on restricting treats and this positioning echoes wider media discourses about women as gate-keepers for family health (De Brún et al. 2013). This compared with the father-son relationship, where there was a sense that they collaborated on accessing treats and tried to avoid being found out by Beth, and in this way the father-son bonds appeared comparable with friendship ties (Curtis et al. 2010). Food comes through as something that structured father-son relations and Brian talked about enjoying weekend meals with Bobbie, with opportunities for bonding foregrounded in these accounts, rather than the food itself. In one example, Brian revealed that a common practice was for him and Bobbie to go to a fast food restaurant, and then drive to an old quarry at the top of the mountain where they sit and ‘look down and see the cars, have a chat and everything’. This shifts the emphasis from food as nutrition towards recognising the social, emotional and symbolic aspects of food – for parents and children (Stead et al. 2011).

This suggests there were different relationship dynamics operating in this family, which move beyond the traditional parent-child relationships, giving an overall sense of a close-knit family. Overall this case study was characterised by (covert) parental control, but what also came through was the highly variable nature of control, which was contingent upon: different relationships with each parent; the family versus school context; and who the control was being presented for, with differences between in-ward facing practices and more outward-facing practices, which may be monitored and judged by others.

8.4 Child control

The next section considers case studies where children came through as more dominant, and this is set within a broader context where there has been a shift in interest from unilateral transmission (what is passed from parents to children), towards an interest in reciprocal processes (how children influence parents) (Fine and Norris 1989; Gadhoke et al. 2014).

Examples of child control across all families included: children having a free choice about lunchbox content (Kemble); pestering for school dinners rather than packed-

lunch (Falkner); and children steering shopping purchases (Davies). In addition, child control emerged as a more dominant discourse in three families (Abbotts, Carters, and Irving). In these cases children appeared to steer and control food practices and parents appeared to succumb to these demands.

The case studies described below have been selected to reflect two slightly different constructions of child control. In the Abbotts family, their child-centred approach seemed to be a by-product of attending to Aiden's (the youngest son) specific food preferences, so in this case child control was constructed as a coping mechanism. In the second case study (the Carters), there appeared to be stronger levels of child control, with accounts reflecting more about children's direct demands on parents, and the reasons for this are explored. Both case studies also illustrate how child control was underpinned by an element of parental control, and the examples illustrate the specific times and contexts when child control became more prominent.

8.4.1 Acquiescing to children's preferences: 'he'll have pizza and smiley faces but the tomato sauce cannot touch the smiley faces'

Aiden (eight years old) was portrayed by the parents as having a great deal of agency which included commanding specific food purchases, meticulous cooking styles and special privileges (for example, he was allowed chicken nuggets on Christmas day). Alison and Alan described their 'battles' around their son's 'phobia', and meeting these demands required parental resources related to time and finances, in order to cater for these specific needs. Within this context parental agency diminished - they seemed almost compelled by the strength of child agency.

In this way, we can understand how parental capacities for choosing and preparing food can become constrained when faced with family members whose food preferences are almost impossible to please (Delormier et al. 2009). In this way, parental facilitation of child control can be seen as part of families' coping strategies. Child-centeredness becomes a product of this and this can be further contextualised by exploring the history of dealing with children's food issues in the family.

There was a sense that the worst of the problem was behind them with earlier years described as a 'battle.' This echoes what others have reported about the way in

which contemporary state-led healthy eating campaigns result in the problematising of diets (Vallgård 2008), particularly the problematising of children's social behaviour in relation to food, as reflected in the increasing guidance on this aspect of parenting (Coveney 2008). In dealing with Aiden's 'phobia' the parents had adopted a laid back approach which was based on tailoring mealtime practices to suit the needs of the individual child, including buying certain branded products and tailoring cooking styles:

Alison: We went through a phase where he wouldn't even eat chips. He would only eat smiley faces and chicken nuggets and the chicken nuggets could only be like Birdseye, like McDonalds, they've got to be, they can't be the breaded, they've got to be battered. And they have to be cooked, really cooked. If you take them out of the oven and they're not cooked enough he wouldn't eat them. You'd almost have to burn them.

The following examples from Alan makes it sound like there was limited scope for change, with Aiden establishing hard and fast rules about how his food was prepared, cooked and presented:

Alan: I mean he'll have toast with butter but he won't have bread with butter. And tomato sauce isn't it? He'll have pizza and smiley faces, but the tomato sauce cannot touch the smiley faces. He's got to dip it in... Its pizza and smiley faces, they're not burnt, they've got to be brown on both sides. The pizza, I mean I've pulled a pizza out of the oven three times in the past – 'is that done Aiden?' 'A little bit more Dad.' I start pulling my hair out then.

There is an almost comic effect derived from these accounts, especially in the second example where Alan re-enacts the scenario, and active voicing adds weight to the sense of frustration he felt at the time. This captures the weakness of parental control rather than the strength of child control, with Aiden asking politely (rather than demanding) that his food is cooked for longer. This scenario captures the levels of emotion, effort and time involved in cooking for Aiden, with Alan acknowledging that sometimes he was left 'pulling his hair out'. This makes for difficult living, but at the same time we are mindful of the emotions expelled in previous parent-child interactions, with recollections of their 'battles' around food. In contrast, the current practices of cooking and presenting food in a meticulous way do not seem quite as emotionally charged as in previous encounters, where the parents seemed at their wits end about what to do.

Looking at the history of struggles over food we can view these parental practices more as coping strategies, and in this way the parenting strategies fit with other findings about families striving to achieve some sense of doing proper food (Warin et al. 2008; Backett-Milburn et al. 2010b; Punch et al. 2010). In this case doing proper food meant going to great lengths to please Aiden, keeping him happy, avoiding conflict and giving him food that he would eat. This emphasis on happiness and harmony extended to school food, but in this context we can discern a greater level of parental control.

Aiden had initially tried out school dinners, but this led to him eating very little and this was the parents' rationale for switching him onto packed-lunch. Alison described this in terms of her control over what went into the packed-lunch and her knowledge of what he had consumed – 'I knew then what he was eating'. The packed-lunch provided a mechanism for parents to find out about school lunchtimes and the following extract describes how Alison 'read' the lunchbox for clues about what had been eaten (and not eaten) at lunchtime. In this extract she seemed confident that Aiden conformed to parental control – 'he'll always put it back in':

Alison: But he'll always put it back in his thing. Usually there's only one little nibble out of the corner of it, it's not like he's half way through but he will put it all back in. So at least I know then, and if I put raisins in the raisins come back.

This reliance on children as the compliant link between school and family is perhaps a weak link in the chain of control for parents. Alan refers to his own childhood practice of 'chucking his sandwiches', which acknowledges that there was potential for children to exert their own covert control and disrupt this process of lunchbox surveillance.

8.4.2 Meeting everyone's individual needs: 'they generally have what they fancy...I'd rather them do that than I cook and them not eat it'

Understanding the rationales and explanations behind levels of child control help provide a fuller, more complex picture of family life. Whereas in the Abbotts family meeting children's preferences came through as a coping mechanism, slightly different patterns of child control were demonstrated in the Carters family where

there was more evidence of children making demands of parents, in terms of food eaten and foods purchased.

In the Carters household, Carys (the 30 year old daughter), took on the main cooking responsibilities as Christine (her mother) worked night-shifts as a nurse. Some descriptions made it sound like the children had their every food preference catered for:

Christine: Carl was a terrible eater when he was younger. I've seen me cook him one chip because he wanted one chip.

This pattern of child control also extended beyond the family and children also had a role in what they had to eat in school, with their resistance to eating school dinners driving the shift to packed-lunch, which was 'easier than them complaining everyday'. The children provided further insight into the reasons why they were 'complaining everyday'. As Catherine (Carys' eight year old daughter) explained, her dislike of school dinners was related to the rules about having to eat all of the food on their plate, and packed-lunch was her means of navigating this:

SM: And you have sandwiches don't you?

Catherine: Sometimes

SM: Sometimes. How do you decide whether to have dinners or sandwiches?

Catherine: I prefer to have sandwiches but Mum sometimes wants us to have dinners

SM: Why do you prefer sandwiches then?

Catherine: Because you don't have to eat everything. And I don't like eating everything especially gravy on cooked dinner

SM: So is there someone telling you you've got to eat everything if you have dinners?

Catherine: Yes. You're not allowed to leave a lot.

Christine offered some explanation behind discourses of child agency illustrating a particular view on childhood, with the sustenance of children being a priority, rather than broadening tastes, which builds on other accounts about the approaches and priorities of middle and lower socio-economic groups (Wills et al. 2011). Meeting everyone's individual needs was a key anchor point in Christine's accounts, despite the fact that this often led to multiple different meals being cooked. As in previous reports on families, where there are high levels of child control, there is a paradox in families' accounts about the level of effort involved (O'Connell and Brannen 2014).

On the one hand, giving in to children's demands feels like the easier option, and the option that will avoid hassle and avoid wasted food, but on the other hand the implication is that cooking and preparing individual meals requires more energy and time. For Christine, increased levels of effort and time preparing multiple meals is rationalised through her emphasis on sustenance:

Christine: I just make them what they want. Like just because I fancy fish that doesn't mean everybody's got to have fish, you know. So I always say to them 'what would you like for tea?' Even if I end up cooking four or five different meals, I don't mind as long as they eat those four or five different meals.

Elements of child control also came through in the way children influenced food purchases. Shopping was usually undertaken when the children were in school, but children still put forward their food requests for shopping trips and afterwards there was an element of monitoring what the grown-ups had bought, thus extending control from a distance. Carys talked in a light hearted manner about how the children berated them for not getting exactly the food that was requested, and Catherine described this as 'naughty' behaviour, mimicking traditional parent-child relations. At the same time we are reminded of the underlying control that the adults have in terms of access to food, with Catherine noting that she only gets to eat the cake if she has been 'good'. There is further evidence of this underlying level of parental control, even in a household where children had a strong say in family food. Amongst descriptions about meal-time choice, where children appeared to have a free choice, Carys injected her own authority by stating that Catherine could not just choose to have pizza everyday – 'she knows if she has it one day she can't have it the next'. Thus there was a sense of an overall parental framework, or 'cadre', which includes flexibility for children to have a say (Druckerman 2012).

8.5 Parent-child negotiations

In families where it was difficult to ascribe a direction of control towards parents or children, what emerged were accounts about the way food was continually negotiated in the household (O'Connell and Brannen 2014). This pattern of parent-child negotiation was dominant in five families (Davies, Edmunds, Harris, Falkner and Kemble). In these cases parents seemed to take account of children's

preferences, and children for their part seemed aware of parental priorities and circumstances.

Three case studies have been drawn on to exemplify the different dynamics involved in these parent-child negotiations. In the Davies family, the emphasis is on exploring parent-child relationships and how the children's negotiation with adults also extended to the school setting. In the Harris family, we uncover more about the rationale for a negotiated approach, and in particular, generational influences and parents being uncomfortable with their own up-bringing, contributed to them fostering a more relaxed approach with their own children. Finally, the case of the Edmunds family is drawn on to explore three-way negotiations between parents, children and the school.

8.5.1 Negotiating parental food: ‘they’ll say – “no Mammy, you can’t have a biscuit”’

In the earlier chapters, the Davies family were discussed in terms of the way they struggled to make sense of public health messages around food and therefore welcomed advice from the school, such as information about how to prepare a healthy lunchbox. Exploring parent-child relations in the Davies family explains some of these positionings and approaches. A main theme in the interviews was the way in which food was negotiated in the household, with the boys (David eight years and Dean six years), on occasion, sounding as though they were leading on these negotiations. The boys were very animated in their accounts and enjoyed acting out what happened at mealtimes at home and school. It was clear that they enjoyed talking about food and the mother confirmed this.

The following extract illustrates how they tried to influence Debra’s food practices during shopping trips, highlighting their awareness of her attempts to diet and their potential as agents of change in this process (Christensen 2004; McDermott et al. 2006). In one example, the interactions are more light-hearted and create an almost comic effect with the boys mimicking traditional parental control:

Debra: Maybe if we go shopping they’ll say ‘oh I fancy that’ and they’ll say ‘no Mammy you can’t have a biscuit’ and I’ll go ‘why, you’ve got biscuits?’ ‘No Mammy you can’t have a biscuit’ and then they’ll pick up something like snack-a-jacs and they go, ‘oh you’ve got to have them

instead'. I'll say 'thanks, I'll eat them instead'. Yes but they do, like if I go for sausage rolls, they'll tell me to go for the healthy sausage rolls, the reduced fat ones. Yes they are quite focussed on things like that.

Debra talked about how David and Dean were often the source of information about new foods (that they may have seen on the television), and she seemed open to trying different things in order to break the monotony of what they had been eating. In the above account there is a sense of the day-to-day negotiation and discussion about food between Debra, David and Dean. Debra's extensive use of active voicing in recalling the dialogue with her sons, serves to corroborate the level of negotiation and interaction that takes place.

As well as shaping the broader framework for food choice and ideas for new foods, negotiations also took place around mealtime choices, and here David's account supports what Debra said about negotiation and choice:

SM: So how do you decide what you're going to have when you come home from school?

David: Our mother says, she always come here and then I come downstairs and then I go down into the freezer and I open up the tray and I see what I want.

The boys in the Davies family were also adept at negotiating adult control in the school setting, assisted by their knowledge of how things worked, the unwritten rules about lunchtimes, and their personal rapport with adults in the school setting. Access to second helpings seemed to be an important aspect of lunchtimes – perhaps their way of overcoming the small portion sizes (which they and Debra commented on):

David: Sometimes we have seconds. After we finished our dinner, when all of them have gone, we all wait on the chairs for seconds and when [dinner supervisor] says 'come on then', we all run to the line or the queue and we have seconds.

The boys seemed to know that if they waited on their chairs, after the other children had gone out to play, then they would be able to have second helpings. Their description implies that only some children know about these unwritten rules, and the non-verbal signal they need to follow if they want more food.

8.5.2 Negotiating food and happiness: ‘I wanted it to be more relaxed about food, what they wanted, when they wanted’

Negotiating a joint approach to food was echoed in other families, and can be understood more broadly in terms of what families revealed about their overall approach to caring and nurturing their families. Food as a way of managing emotions within families is associated with aiming to please family members, with mothers in particular trying to achieve positive rather than negative responses to the food served (Burridge and Barker 2009). In the Harris family, parental accounts included references to creating a comfortable, relaxed home for their children, and their ‘negotiated’ approach to food sits within this framework.

In the Harris family, negotiations around food were underpinned by the parents' desire to build a happy home where the children were content and comfortable. Although Hannah (the mother) talked about an overall approach to healthy or ‘good’ food for her children (which included healthier options and portion control), she also talked about balancing this with an enjoyment of food. She wanted her children to be healthy but enjoy it, and this adds a further dimension to the positive values associated with caring for children through food (Smart 2007).

As described in Chapter Five, the Harris’ were a very close-knit family with strong links between parents and children and there was a sense that the children enjoyed spending time in the family home. One aspect of Hannah’s attempts to create a happy home environment was the way she acquiesced to Harry’s (the son) desire to eat in the comfort of the living room, which she talked about as being his ‘own space’. This importance attached to places within the home resonates with Bobbie in the Banks family and his preference for having breakfast in bed. Harry described eating at the table as ‘less comfy’ than sitting in the living room (in the electric reclining chair):

Hannah: ...Harry says sometimes ‘I’m more comfortable in there Mam; I don’t want to eat with everyone’.

Emphasising comfort and care for their children was associated with relationships with their own parents and their childhood experiences. Others have noted how compulsion and lack of choice during parental childhood is then contrasted by

experiences with their own children, where they try and instigate more freedom and choice (Curtis et al. 2009). Hannah talked about family practices at home when she was growing up, how her father (and extended family) dictated what they had to eat and how they were forced to sit at the table and finish their food – ‘if you didn’t like what my father had that was it, you had nothing else’. There was a sense of discomfort about these childhood experiences and this contrasted with the experiences she wanted to create for her own children, with alternative approaches required to challenge traditional parental control, and take more account of children’s preferences (Curtis et al. 2009). She also talked about being forced to sit at the table and finish her food as a child, and instead she wanted to create a more relaxed setting for her own children– ‘what they wanted, when they wanted’:

Hannah: ...my father would have his regular things and if you didn’t like what my father had that was it you had nothing else, you had to eat. So I think I didn’t like that when I was a child so I want to make sure my children are eating what they want to eat. And my auntie had four girls the same age as me and whenever I went down there for tea I had to sit by the table and finish every scrap off. I didn’t want that. I wanted it to be more relaxed about food, what they wanted, when they wanted. It’s just childhood influences you look back on, what you don’t like to do yourself.

Although Hannah referred to generational food linkages in terms of discontinuities and difference, these are linkages nonetheless, and serve as a process of linking children with practices associated with a previous generation (Curtis et al. 2009).

Despite this sense of negotiation around food in the home, there was a greater sense of parental control with regards the school setting, with the parents intervening to end Harry’s second helpings at school breakfast club and lunchtimes. Hannah noted that this may have been ‘cruel’ but they felt Harry did not need an extra piece of toast after already having cereal and one piece of toast.

Within this approach Harry’s preferences are diminished, and a stronger sense of parental control replaced the sense of negotiation that was more evident in some of their earlier accounts. Harry talked about enjoying lunchtimes and enjoying the friendly banter with the dinner supervisors, but there is little scope for his preferences within the intervention from his parents. This seems at odds with the greater level of negotiation around food that is facilitated at home, framed by the

overall aim of making children happy. The different approach to school food is perhaps part of parents demonstrating ‘good’ parenting in view of others (outside the family), and echoes what has been reported about the perceived need to self-monitor (O’Key and Hugh-Jones 2010).

8.5.3 Parent-child-school negotiations

Variations in control between families and schools has been discussed within each of the case studies throughout this chapter, but this final case study has been included as a way of highlighting the three-way negotiations that take place between children, parents and teachers. Chapter Seven presented the Edmunds family in terms of juggling the father's shift-work patterns, together with a busy schedule of activities for the children (which centred on rugby). This complex web of interactions meant there were daily negotiations between children and parents around food, and the following extract illustrates how these negotiations were extended when they started discussing school food:

Emma: Can you still eat outside if you’re having packed-lunch? Or have they stopped that?

Ellis: Sir stopped that but Jane [lunchtime supervisor] still says if its fine we can eat outside but Sir don’t let us.

Emma: They went through a phase where if they had packed-lunch they could eat outside which is fine in the summer but they were doing it in the winter as well

Ellis: It’s alright

Emma: It’s not alright. So a day like today they’d be sat on the floor outside eating their food which I don’t think is good for them

Ellis: We don’t sit on the floor, we sit on the steps.

Chapter Six highlighted the way in which Emma (the mother) felt uneasy about some of the school approaches, and this tension continues in the extract. In this example, several different adults seem to be having a say in what they think is an appropriate place to eat lunch in school. Ellis (aged eight years) talked about enjoying packed-lunch outside, but in school he has to navigate the different rules set by Sir (the Head) and the lunchtime supervisors. Ellis then gets interrogated about this practice at home and Emma voices her objections (although there are limits to what she can do, suggesting there are limits to the strength of parental control in school). As a result, Ellis has to do further negotiation work to convince Emma that

eating outside is not as uncomfortable as she thinks – his defence being that they sit on the steps rather than the floor.

Adult-child relations within the family and school intersect to produce different patterns of control that contradict and reinforce each other (Alldred et al. 2002). Despite discourses around increased autonomy for children in schools (Warren et al. 2008; Pike 2010), the different layers of control exerted from families and school need to be taken into account, particularly in terms of the implications for children navigating these two domains of power (which sometimes exert power in different directions). Despite attempts to encourage child agency in schools, through the establishment of school councils and lunchtime menu choices, we also need to take account of the other forms of control that children have to negotiate, including the extended control of parents.

8.6 Food negotiations with grandparents

Beyond immediate parent-child relations, other relationships also have a bearing on food, and this fits with the family practices concept of looking at the fluidity of relationships and connections beyond the nuclear family (Smart 2007; Morgan 2011). The different ways in which families and food have been examined in qualitative studies recognises that children move between different family settings, sometimes on a regular basis, and that grandparents play a significant role in the lives of their grandchildren (Curtis et al. 2009). This section considers the role of grandparents in relation to children's food, particularly in terms of how their emphasis on children's choice and 'spoiling' interact with parental control to produce more varied patterns of adult-child negotiations around food (Jingxiong et al. 2007).

Of the eleven families included in the study, eight referred to children eating food with grandparents (usually in the grandparents' home) on a regular basis, usually once a week. In the three families where this was not common practice, the families did not have so many of their extended family relatives living in close proximity. Two main themes emerged in relations to food and grandparents, and the following case studies have been selected to highlight these themes. The first theme relates to

how relationships with grandparents impacted on differential levels of parent and child agency; and the second theme relates to underlying relations around care and love, and how food is embedded within this.

8.6.1 Different levels of child control: ‘treats are only for special occasions according to Mum, but if you’re in Nana’s house they always give you treats’

Accounts of the different levels of control and choice for children in different family settings provides an insight into broader family relationships, and the way in which children experienced different choices when they visited grandparents, with an overall trend for grandparents to be more receptive to children’s food tastes and preferences (Curtis et al. 2009). Beth (the mother) in the Banks family, commented on different levels of choice for Bobbie (her son) at home compared to when he visited his grandmother’s house, in terms of the different types of breakfast cereal available. To some extent she accepted this as a compromise, which meant that Bobbie did not have sugary cereals all the time, but when he did it was more of a treat for him:

Beth: And the reason he liked those Cheerios on holiday is that I don’t like sugary cereals. My mother likes Crunchy Nut and if he goes to my mother he thinks it’s fab that he can have Crunchy Nut for breakfast because I don’t like Coco Pops or sugary things like that at all. Poor kid, he’s really good really, bless him.

Her comments about Bobbie at the end of this extract make it sounds like she is almost apologetic for her strict rules – ‘poor kid, he’s really good really, bless him.’ Perhaps knowing that the rules are relaxed when he visits his grandparents helps with her enforcement of rules at home. He has one outlet where he can have treats and sweet food, which balances the mother’s controlled approach at home.

Children demonstrated their awareness of the different rules in different family contexts and they seemed able to accommodate and navigate these differences without too much difficulty or questioning. It was almost as if the different setting signalled different rules. In one example Bobbie talked about different levels of access to treats in his grandmother’s house compared to his own:

Bobbie: Treats are only for special occasions according to Mum, but Nana; if you're in Nana's house they always give you treats even if it's not a special occasion.

SM: Nana's are like that, I think. What treats do you have in your Nana's house?

Bobbie: Loads of treats like cakes and chocolate and stuff like that.

Rules and levels of control associated with grandparents also transcended settings and if the grandparents were in 'loco parentis' in the family home, then their approach to food was carried with them (when the parents were not present). One thing that Bobbie enjoyed most about eating at home was the varied locations for eating and he talked about grandparents being very flexible about eating location, even allowing him to eat his tea in his bedroom. Bobbie's diary highlighted an instance where the grandparents allowed him to eat tea in his bedroom while they were caring for him in the family home, while Beth was in work. Beth expressed surprise that Bobbie had been allowed to eat in his bedroom and there was a suggestion that there were some family tensions about the grandmother being more lax about food rules. Although Beth did not approve of him eating in his bedroom, she accepted that her mother allowed more flexibility – 'I don't like that but that's my Mum'.

8.6.2 Creating happy relationships: 'she has really good desserts and she does really good lamb'

The different (and usually more lax) rules and approaches adopted by grandparents, reflected the way in which family relationships were underpinned by notions of care and love, and this corresponds with other findings about the way that food is closely integrated into the creation of happiness within families (Burridge and Barker 2009). Food is also an expression of their relationships and feelings towards each other, and in this context the provision of treats emerges as a practice which is imbued with meaning about the grandparent-grandchild relationship (Curtis et al. 2009).

The following section elucidates the connections between food and creating happy relationships, and the first examples illustrate the effort and attention to detail made by grandparents in terms of children's food. In the Abbotts family this involved bespoke baking, such as replacing raisins with chocolate-chips because 'Nana'

knows her grandson does not like raisins. Overall there was a sense of grandparents providing whatever foods they requested:

Alan: Nan makes him what he wants.

Alison: They can pick, they can have crisps they can do whatever they want down Nan's...So she would just let him do whatever he wanted to do. If he wanted to pick on all the Welsh cakes and if he wanted a bag of crisps and an orange and all that then that's how it went.

As well as tailoring foods towards specific preferences, there was also a sense that grandparents (especially grandmothers) often went a step further than parents and contributed more effort and time towards food preparation. This came through clearly in descriptions from Emma (the Edmunds mother) and she viewed this intensive approach to feeding her sons as enabled by the time the grandmother had available, which draws out a generational contrast with her own limited time to prepare food (Curtis et al. 2009). She talked about the grandmother making a sausage and mash 'camp-fire' meal, which she saw as requiring more time and effort than just putting the food on the plate. Again a sense of care and love comes through when we picture the grandmother taking time to arrange the food for her grandsons, and Emma enables us to visualise the contrast with her own approach – 'it goes on the plate and they eat it'. This implies that the special relationship with grandparents is more than just about the food on offer. It is also about the effort and time taken to prepare the food, and the children seem to respond to this:

Emma: To be fair down there she will give them what they want but like what day did we go in there? Saturday or whatever day it was, Edward decided he wanted a campfire so she made him sausage and mash

Ellis: Sausage and mash. The sausage is like that and a big dollop of mash and sausages for the stick and tomato sauce on top for the fire

SM: Clever Nan isn't she?

Emma: Well she's got time to mess about with it haven't she? I haven't got time to mess about. It goes on the plate and they eat it.

The notion of special care, special food and 'spoiling' has been discussed as a possible area of contention between grandparents and parents, with 'spoiling' in contrast to the moral responsabilisation of parents (Hill 1989; Curtis et al. 2009). It is suggested that the grandparent-child bond can be seen as a challenge to the parent-child bond and the way that food is ordered in the nuclear family. Although parents highlighted differences between their own approaches and that of grandparents, they seemed to accept these differences without regarding them as a challenge or a threat.

Children's navigation and acceptance of the differences between parents' food and grandparents' food also endorses the view that these different approaches did not undermine the approach of one family member over another. Children's descriptions of grandparents' food also highlighted how they appreciated the efforts grandparents made and this reinforced the significance of their relationship. In the Edmunds family, Ellis and Edward usually spent time with their grandparents on a Friday night, and they recalled how their 'Nan' catered to their specific food requests and 'spoilt' them:

SM: And you said you eat down your Nan's sometimes as well?

Ellis: Yes she spoils me

SM: So you have what you want down there do you?

Ellis: Yes, yes, yes. I get a good breakfast down there I get toast, I get Weetos and I get egg.

In the Banks family Bobbie seemed to enjoy talking about Sunday lunch at his 'Nana's' house and his account included quite detailed references to the food eaten, how it tasted and his enjoyment of the meal – even the wheat-free desserts were 'still good':

Bobbie: Well I like it then because every time it's coming to dessert, she has really good desserts and she does really good lamb. The only type of meat I don't like is when she does is the chicken because it's dry, it's dry

SM: What do you like about the lamb?

Bobbie: It's always tender

SM: And what about puddings, what would be your favourite?

Bobbie: It would be milk ice cream bars.

SM: Anything else?

Bobbie: There's ice cream and there's also these it's like wheat-free because my Nana can't eat wheat but it was good even though it's got no wheat in it, but it's still good.

These findings fit with broader commentaries about 'spoiling' and grandparents' indulgence of their grandchildren through the giving of treats, gifts and money. Although this practice may contradict parent-child relations, 'spoiling' seems to be accepted by parents and children, and plays an important role in reproducing generational relationships and identities within families (Curtis et al. 2009).

8.7 Conclusion

Within a context of changing family connections, the findings presented in this chapter endorse the view that strong relationships continue to be valued, and

although they may be doing family and doing food in different ways, the strength of family bonds endures. At the same time, the findings also endorse the centrality of feeding to family life, and the way in which families are created and re-created through relationships involving food.

Building on patterns of parent-child control put forward by O'Connell and Brannen (2014), the case studies provide further insights into levels of parent and child control around food. A range of different forms of parental control were highlighted which included control over social and nutritional dimensions. Allied to this was the importance of cultivating a sense of responsibility for food and encouraging children to make their own healthy choices independently. Parents were also concerned about children's becomings and aspirations, marking a break with the norms of the local area (living on benefit and eating take-away food). This sense of hope about the future as something to be aimed for, accords with wider theorisations of time and futures (Adam 2011).

Elements of child control also came through (in varying degrees) in all families and included direct and more subtle forms of control, and from this, different rationales for child control can be identified. The complex nature of parent-child interactions was illustrated by the contextual descriptions of family case studies, which included the history surrounding the issues (such as a history of 'battles' around children's food preferences), together with a discussion of how food negotiations were imbued with emotion and affect, which adds a further dimension to the way in which power and control are embedded in parent-child relationships.

Variations in control also came through in relation to school food, with an overall trend for parents to attempt to heighten their level of control in this context, perhaps reflecting a stronger sense of societal surveillance outside the family. Increased levels of parental control over school food had implications for children, with children's voice usually diminished where there were family-school tensions. Therefore, school approaches cannot overlook how parents extend control from the home, and need to consider the ways in which children are positioned in these negotiations.

Woven into parent-child food negotiations were layers of emotional complexity, which varied depending on circumstance and context. Affect and emotion came through in relation to: the way in which parents devolved control to children in an attempt to create harmony and avoid conflict around mealtimes; and through a sense of families having their own food related rituals, associated with providing a caring environment (such as serving breakfast in bed). The findings extend our understanding of the role of care and emotion, with grandparents and notions of ‘spoiling’ interacting with parental control to produce more varied patterns of adult-child negotiations around food. The role of grandparents also highlights the importance of generational influences and the connections and disconnections with the past, thus adding a temporal dimension to the findings.

Returning to the central argument in this thesis and the need to theorise and understand the facilitators and barriers to connecting families with schools, the findings make the case for the need to work with parents and children in order to appreciate the meanings and rationales they attach to food and relationships. A stronger appreciation of the way in which food is imbued with emotions, bonding and care-giving is also pertinent to take forward as a practice recommendation, given the wide-ranging significance of food beyond nutrition and nourishment.

Chapter 9 Discussion and conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The central aim of this thesis was to understand the pattern and rationale for food practices in families with children aged six to eleven years, and how this interacts with children's experiences in primary schools. This involved case studies with families in a post-industrial locale in South Wales, to explore food practices from the perspective of parents and children. Interviews with Heads and teachers were also drawn on as a way of understanding schools' experiences of family-school interactions and enabled a comparison of the different ways in which adults are concerned with nurturing, nourishing and controlling children's food. This final chapter reflects on the empirical data generated throughout chapters' five to eight, and considers the implications for taking forward approaches which connect families and schools.

The chapter begins by re-visiting the study rationale and proceeds to reflect on the theoretical approach, considering the utility of structure-agency interactions across socio-ecological domains. This is followed by a consideration of implications for the theorisation of family school connections, and within this section the findings are discussed broadly in terms of how they make a conceptual contribution to the exploration of families, schools and food. Policy and practice implications for family-school approaches are also considered, including a section on specific recommendations for schools, families and policy. The penultimate section considers study design, including merits and limitations of the case study approach, and the final section draws together overall conclusions.

9.2 Situating the thesis: a case for understanding children's food practices across family and school contexts

The thesis commenced with an exploration of concerns about population level nutrition, and increases in obesity and overweight, alongside related concerns about health inequalities and levels of food poverty, with a particular focus on children's dietary health (McPherson K et al. 2007; Food Standards Agency and Department of Health 2012).

Compared with the rest of the UK, Wales has particular challenges around children's dietary health, and Wales also compares less well than other European countries (Currie et al. 2012). Inequalities also persist within Wales, with the prevalence of obesity highest in the most deprived areas (Public Health Wales Observatory 2013).

In response to these public health challenges there has been a huge policy focus on families and their role in shaping children's food preferences (Foresight 2007; Department of Health 2011). Such policies and approaches emphasise the role of parents in taking responsibility for their children's health, and overall they convey an individualistic approach, with an emphasis on providing information and guidance to change individual eating behaviours (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence 2006; National Health Service (NHS) 2009; Welsh Assembly Government 2010). Such approaches have met with limited success and this relates to: a failure to understand how food and eating is embedded within broader family experiences and relationships; and a lack of understanding of the potential tensions between the state and the family, which influences the response to public health messages (Slater et al. 2011; Wyness 2014). In order to address these challenges, the socio-ecological framework offers potential as it enables an examination of contextual influences, from within and beyond the family (Christensen 2004; Delormier et al. 2009).

Schools have emerged as an important sphere of influence, and are recognised as prominent settings for tackling childhood and youth health (Lister-Sharp et al. 1999; Waters E et al. 2011; Bonell et al. 2013; Jamal et al. 2013). Emerging evidence and theory indicates that the most successful approaches are multi-level interventions, with high importance attached to the involvement of parents and families (Langford et al. 2014). Connections between families and schools help promote consistent messages, and interventions aimed at addressing children's dietary health will be limited if they do not take account of the interactions between parents and children, and their interactions with schools (Denman et al. 2002; Rothwell et al. 2011; Langford et al. 2014)

Despite a theoretical justification for a focus on connecting families and schools to improve children's dietary health, approaches have met with limited success and there is a clear gap in school health promotion research with regards to the role of the family, with a tendency to make assumptions about how families will connect with schools (Maher et al. 2013; Wyness 2014). Taken together, these limitations suggest the need for a shift in how the family-school interface is developed and theorised. This requires a more comprehensive understanding of wider socio-ecological domains surrounding the family-school interface, while incorporating the agency of different actors. A significant gap is the role and perspectives of children, which acknowledges an emerging literature around children as social actors, and the potential contradictory perspectives between children and parents (Curtis 2011; O'Connell and Brannen 2014).

9.3 Reflections on theoretical approach

9.3.1 The adoption of a socio-ecological lens

In order to address these challenges and move towards a more contextualised understanding of family-school connections, this thesis makes the case for considering families and schools through a socio-ecological lens (McLeroy et al. 1988). Explorations of eleven case study families across three areas allowed for the exploration of contextual conditions across socio-ecological domains.

Firstly, in terms of the policy domain, the nature of the state's relationship with the public was significant. Families related to public health messages in different ways in order to frame their own practices and this included: accepting public health messages; different interpretations compared with what was intended in official advice; and in some cases they demonstrated resistance and scepticism towards official advice, which echoes findings from other studies (Crossley 2002; O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010; Maher et al. 2013). Of particular interest were the rationalities behind these different interpretations, and the way in which this was associated with parenting (especially mothering) identities and the relational nature of food in families (O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010). More broadly this resonates with the changing role of public institutions and a re-defining of the relationship between citizens and the state (Wyness 2014). This includes the rhetoric of 'shared

responsibility' and health as 'everyone's business', with governments creating health-promoting environments and a corresponding responsibility on us all to look after our own health, and access services appropriately (Welsh Government 2014, p. 3).

Community influences were also evident and analysing the way in which family food practices were positioned in relation to 'others' highlighted the influence of the community domain. This included reflections on relationships with friends, extended families, communities and colleagues, thus confirming the relational nature of food within a societal context, which extends well beyond the nuclear family (Jackson 2009). These comparisons add to the case for food as a marker of difference between families, but the findings also provided insights into what is it about food that signifies difference. Accounts revealed how food practices are closely aligned with parenting and moralistic approaches to food, which highlights a new depth to the way difference is constructed and conceived (van Eijk 2011).

School influences dominated consideration of the institutional domain within the socio-ecological framework and the findings highlight the significant role of school in family food, and its particular role in steering children's food. From the schools' perspective, the family-school interface was underlined by a discourse of care. Schools seemed to empathise with parenting struggles and appreciated the constraints families faced, which seemed to contradict how schools have been portrayed as prioritising education, within a target-driven policy framework (Bonell et al. 2012; Fletcher et al. 2014).

Finally, as well as highlighting the influence of broader political, societal and institutional contexts on family food, the socio-ecological framework also encouraged exploration of the more intimate sphere of family relationships, particularly patterns of daily interaction between parents and children. This included looking at the range of interactions, exploring what they revealed about the underlying rationales and meanings attached to food. Chapter Eight also considered how these interactions extended beyond the nuclear family to include relationships with grandparents, thus drawing out the influence of intergenerationality, adding a temporal dimension to the socio-ecological framework. This relates to current

relationships between family members, as well as parental childhood relationships and experiences, which inform contemporary practices. This adds to the notion of how ‘otherness’ is part of everyday relational living (Gabb 2011) and it also reminds us of the inclusion of temporality (through the ‘chronosystem’) within early ecological theorising (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Despite general shifts towards more diversity and uncertainty for families (Wyness 2014), the findings endorse the view that strong relationships continue to be valued, and although they may be doing family and doing food in different ways, the strength of family bonds endures (Smart 2007). We can also see a particular emphasis on bonds relating to children, and this echoes what others have noted about the way in which more traditional family attitudes are maintained, especially where children are concerned (Duncan and Phillips 2008). Overall, these findings support the notion that caring for and feeding children is relational, and this contradicts the individualistic approach inherent in public health messages (Warin et al. 2008).

9.3.2 Structure-agency interactions

Although the findings support the utility of the socio-ecological approach, the study also foregrounded theoretical considerations related to structure and agency, and this provides a different entry point for examining children’s dietary health. Examining family food through a theoretical understanding of the relationship between structure and agency was instructive for understanding family-school relations, taking account of power dynamics between different actors (Delormier et al. 2009). Moving beyond the limitations of contemporary approaches to schools, families and food, this theoretical stance was useful as an approach which looks at ‘not just the behaviours that people engage in’, but ‘the relationship between people’s social conditions and their social practices’ (Frohlich et al. 2001, p. 776).

Rather than simply appending agency as an extra dimension, this study adopted a ‘context-specific human agency’ (Frohlich and Abel 2014, p. 201). The family practices concept was useful for integrating agency by acknowledging the significance of contextual influences, and for the way it conceptualises family roles as active (rather than static), providing a sense of the everyday (Morgan 2011). In addition, the way in which the practices approach widened the perspective beyond

the everyday to consider links with history and biography, was useful for drawing out rationales and explanations behind different practices, and this also implied a sense of fluidity between families and settings outside the home.

At the nexus of structure-agency interactions was the significance of different meanings attached to food, and as Frohlich and colleagues observed in relation to youth smoking, to overlook these perspectives would bypass the ‘transactional process between the social structure...and the meaning that individuals in these territories give to the structure’ (Frohlich et al. 2002a, p. 1410). Therefore it is pertinent to ‘integrate the local meanings of smoking into the tactics to reduce it’ (Frohlich et al. 2002a, p. 1415).

The same could be said of public health nutrition, and this study furthered understandings of the meanings which families attach to school food approaches. Parents commented on the universal approach of schools compared with preferences for more tailored approaches, reflecting the needs of individual children. This reflects the idea that school is a consumer sphere subject to market-orientated education systems (Jamal et al. 2013). The school-family boundary around food is another example of a public service where ‘what people want is a deep relationship, but what they get is a shallow transaction’ (Muir and Parker 2014, p. 31).

Recursivity between structure and agency was also an important consideration in the study’s theoretical approach, with an emphasis on the different ways in which families interact with social structure. The findings provided examples of how the structure was ‘practiced, lived in, enacted and challenged’, particularly in terms of interactions with schools (Frohlich et al. 2002a, p. 1414). This came through in the dilemmas they faced, and the findings revealed different pathways towards feeding the family and the challenges involved in trying to meet contemporary food and family ideals. The messy nature of family food evoked discursive and practical dilemmas: providing a balanced diet for children alongside the practicalities of parental shift-work and attending to children’s individualised food preferences; and trying to eat together as a family, when faced with a busy schedule of children’s after-school activities.

At the same time we can see how social structures only exist to the extent that individuals construct them through their day-to-day activities. When some of the adolescents in Frohlich et al's study talked about 'fatalism with regard to their futures as non-smokers, they are not passive actors in this relationship, but are themselves creating conditions under which it will be difficult to remain non-smokers' (Frohlich et al. 2002a, p. 1414). Comparable examples in this study included the way in which parents prioritised their own knowledge over public health advice and in this way they constructed positive parenting identities, which become difficult to infiltrate in order to make room for official public health advice.

These examples demonstrate how 'health-related practices are not simply the result of the structure having acted on individuals, but rather, that individuals "act out" the structure in their practices and these same practices feed into the larger system, thus recreating conditions that make the structure possible' (Frohlich et al. 2002a, p. 1415). This has implications for the level at which change needs to be considered, and an important area for development which emerged from this study relates to employment structures and the significance of working patterns for food and families. Thus there is a need for more broad-based strategies to consider the wider implications of shifting towards varied patterns of work and shift-work (Delormier et al. 2009; Dixon et al. 2013).

9.4 Implications for theorising family-school connections

The main implication of theorising family-school connections through a structure-agency lens was the way in which it uncovered multiple and diverse discourses of control. Having a sense of control over health has been considered a key psychosocial determinant of health and inequalities (Bolam et al. 2003; Carter 2010; Anaf et al. 2013). Relatedly, empowerment (at the individual and collective level) is seen as a pre-requisite for health improvement and a reduction in health inequalities (World Health Organisation 1997; Attree et al. 2011).

Previously, research has explored a sense of control as 'an inherently discursive phenomenon, rooted in the rhetoric and life ethics of everyday existence' (Bolam et al. 2003, p. 18). The findings from this study support the notion that control 'must be

understood within the context of an individual's whole life of circumstances, including personal as well as structural factors' (Anaf et al. 2013, p. 10). The following discussion considers the diverse ways in which control was considered by participants which shifts beyond the control of food to the control of relationships, emotions and bodies, encompassing different levels of control across space and time.

Building on patterns of parent-child control put forward by O'Connell and Brannen (2014), the case studies provided further insights into levels of parent and child control around food. This included exploring the underlying rationales and meanings behind food interactions and exploring how interactions extended beyond the nuclear family, to include relationships with grandparents. Allied to day-to-day control of sustenance was the importance of cultivating a sense of responsibility for food, and encouraging children to make their own healthy choices independently. Thus, as well as reflecting public health discourses and ensuring that their children's choices were nutritious, parental control also reflected the need to foster choice, enjoyment and self-expression – as part of the social view of childhood and children as citizens approach, and the importance of nurturing independent food choices (Coveney 2008). Controlling children's food was also closely related to controlling parents' food with a tendency for parents' diets (especially mothers' diets), to be neglected and given low priority within a busy family context (Warin et al. 2008).

Further dimensions of control came through in the way families drew comparisons with others. Exploring the utility of these social comparisons, it was found that downward social comparisons and families' eagerness to present their own family as a morally bounded unit, served to endorse the strength of their own relationships, as a way of avoiding connotations with more uncertain and uncontrolled family forms (Duncan and Phillips 2008; Jackson 2009).

In some cases what emerged was a reinvigoration of control over food within the family unit as a result of challenges in other socio-ecological domains. One example of this was in the Jenkins family where the mother put forward a strong level of investment in her children's food and in her own role as a 'mother', but changing family relationships meant that this investment was breaking down in some respects with certain aspects of food moving beyond her control, especially when the children

spent time with their father. As a result, the mother attempted to re-assert control when the children returned to her care, with implications for children's control. Other cases also illustrated the variable nature of control, which was contingent upon different relationships with each parent (as in the Banks family), whereas in other cases relaxed control over children's food was embedded in family histories, and formed part of wanting the 'best' for children and avoiding previous 'bad times' (as in the Irving family).

Alongside control of food and relationships was also the control of bodies, and the embodiment of food practices was articulated in subtle and more direct ways. This builds on the literature about how 'body ideals' have become central within modern-day society (Rich 2010), and suggests a need for broader theorising which considers how the embodiment of children's food is entangled within the embodiment of parents' food, and how talk is centred around embodied experiences. As Warin and colleagues have identified, the failure to fully consider concepts of embodiment has contributed limited success in addressing poor dietary health (Warin et al. 2008). In terms of future research, this emphasises the importance of exploring children's and parents' views through multiple lenses, and through methods which enable further understanding of these embodied food practices (Paetcher 2006; Evans et al. 2013).

Through these multiple and varied dimensions of control we begin to acknowledge its complex and dilemmatic nature – 'when talking about control over health it can be expected that people work through a range of positions that are not necessarily readily resolvable' (Bolam et al. 2003, p. 18). In this way the concept of control offers a way forward for theorising structure-agency interactions, in a way that acknowledges both the material and personal circumstances of individuals and the way this shape responses to adverse situations (Anaf et al. 2013). Despite attempts to re-assert control, what came through in some accounts was families' 'readiness to live with apparent incoherence' (Will and Weiner 2014, p. 292). This 'incoherence' included spatial and temporal complexities in control and these are considered below.

Variations in levels of child and parental control emerged in relation to school food, with an overall trend for parents to attempt to heighten their level of control in this

sphere, perhaps reflecting a stronger sense of societal surveillance outside the family (Furedi 2002; Pike 2008). Increasing levels of parental control over school food has implications for children, with the potential for their voice to be diminished where there are family-school tensions. Approaches which advocate more choice and independence for children in schools cannot overlook how parents extend control from the home, and one setting cannot be looked at in isolation from the other. There were also spatial variations in control across different family settings and this provides an insight into broader family relationships. For example, children experienced different choices when they visited grandparents, with an overall trend for grandparents to be more receptive to children's food tastes and preferences (Curtis et al. 2009).

Alongside spatial variations, the findings also demonstrated temporal variations in control, with families looking to the past and the future. Existing theorisations have noted how time is one of the taken-for-granted or 'invisible' dimensions of daily life, as 'it tends not to be talked about, discussed or debated' (Adam 1999, p. 4). Despite this lack of visibility of time itself, important issues become more visible when questions of time are brought into consideration. Thus the findings illustrate the way in which considerations of time make connections and disconnections between families and food more visible. Adam summarises this range of temporal considerations as: 'their biographies and current position in their life course, their family traditions as well as their food experiences as children, their current context and family circumstances, their past-based knowledge and social capital, their ambitions and vision for the future' (Adam 1999, p. 28).

Looking to previous generations, parents mainly talked about relaxing control compared with childhood experiences, with an attempt to disconnect with the past and do something different with their own children. Nonetheless, this disconnection still represented a connection with the past, and a reflection on the direction and strength of control involved with previous generations. In terms of looking ahead, parents seemed to be future-focussed when they talked about encouraging children to have a sense of responsibility and independence. They were concerned about children's becomings and aspirations, marking a break with the norms of the local area (living on benefit and eating take-away food). This sense of hope about the

future and moving forwards, aligns with broader temporal theorisations about the future as something to be owned, shaped and exploited (Adam 2011).

Thus in some cases where lived experiences were described in terms of out-of-control practices, looking towards the future provided a mechanism for regaining some control. Within this scenario, the future holds potential and promise – ‘an open realm of choice and potential the future of modernity practically requires shaping and making. It becomes a task for planning, holding out the promise that it can be what we want it to be’ (Adam 2011, p. 592).

9.5 Policy and practice implications

The challenge of family-school connections was a shared conclusion across all three schools - both in terms of initial engagement and in terms of how to make a difference in the family setting. The implications for policy and practice are considered below in terms of: promoting increased control and empowerment for families; working with key actors (parents, children and teachers); and strategies and approaches (partnerships and the use of social media).

As well as adding to the theorisation of family school connections, the significance of control also has implications for taking forward practical steps for connecting families and schools, and suggests a reconsideration of the way we construct the interface between the two settings. The literature around community engagement and control is useful to draw on here and this posits the need for explorations of control as something to be encouraged, with a strong policy emphasis on community engagement as part of national strategies to tackle health inequalities (Popay 2006). This is based on an emerging evidence base on the benefits of community engagement activities in terms of physical and psycho-social health, as well as personal empowerment and social relationships (Attree et al. 2011; Milton et al. 2012).

A continuum of approaches to community engagement has been identified, ranging from ‘information provision and exchange’ through to ‘community control’, with different approaches leading to different pathways towards health improvement

(Popay 2006, p. 15). Considering notions of control as part of approaches to connect families and schools, we can understand how some approaches may not go far enough as they are at the 'information provision' end of the continuum. Shifting families' involvement, and their levels of control, towards the 'community control' end of the continuum may hold more potential, and have a positive health impact through 'supporting communities to take control over their lives' (Popay 2006, p. 8). Involving families in schools through an approach which advocates more control and empowerment also fits with the merits of a partnership approach, which includes broadening the role for children (Sallis et al. 2003).

As well as promoting further engagement with all parents, the findings highlighted the importance of acknowledging different groups of parents and the dynamics between them. Bauman's notion of societal 'networks' comes in useful here as we are reminded of the importance of networks (rather than structures) within a less certain, neo-liberal context (Bauman 2007). Findings from this study illustrated a distinction between a hub of parental support from a minority of families, and limited involvement from the wider parent population (with different groups experiencing different relationships with the school). Interventions need to be mindful of these different dynamics, and to date there has not been much recognition of the differences between parents who are more involved and others, who are less engaged. More broadly, the power of parent-to-parent networks has generally been overlooked in health promotion interventions focussed on schools, but their potential could be harnessed in order to work towards health improvement goals, drawing on other interventions which have harnessed the power of peer group norms (Campbell et al. 2008).

As well as working with different groups of parents, the findings also highlighted the role of children as an important part of the family-school interface. The way in which children navigate the combined powers of parents and teachers in negotiating school food is often overlooked by policy discourses, which advocate more choice and independence for children in the school setting (O'Connell and Brannen 2014). There is also scope for emphasising joint parent-child approaches, rather than addressing parents and children separately through the school, and it may be beneficial to consider models of participatory approaches involving young people,

building on the notion of children as active agents of change in influencing adult dietary behaviour (Gadhoke et al. 2014).

One potential model for involving children and making their involvement more participatory, is the US M-SPAN model (Middle-School Physical Activity and Nutrition) (Sallis et al. 2003). This intervention aimed to increase physical activity and reduce dietary fat intake within middle schools in San Diego. Teachers and catering staff worked alongside students to develop action plans which involved rewriting school policies and generating environmental change, and particular emphasis was on empowering students to be more involved in improving the school environment, including enhancements to school food provision, (Bonell et al. 2013; Young et al. 2014).

Looking at other actors across the family-school interface, the study also highlighted insights about the role of teachers, particularly the limited agency of teachers in terms of health promotion capacity, knowledge and skills, which resonates with findings elsewhere (Jamal et al. 2013). In this study teachers showed limited confidence (and capacity) in relation to taking messages beyond the school gate to parents and communities, something which they are encouraged to do as part of holistic healthy school approaches (Department of Health 2005; Welsh Assembly Government 2014). Some of these issues are beginning to be acknowledged with the School Food Plan recognising the importance of up-skilling teachers and Heads (Dimbleby and Vincent 2013). Linked to this there still needs to be more emphasis on building the confidence and capacity of school teachers in terms of health promotion. At a strategic level, this may entail better planning between health and education departments, and improved training to support teachers as well as clarity around their roles (Spratt et al. 2012).

Embracing the specific roles of these key actors across the school-family interface there is also a role for improved communication flows across the two domains. Parental insights into school lunchtimes were usually partial and parental criticisms may have arisen because the full rationale behind school approaches was not understood. As a result, parental preferences and rationalities appear to come into conflict with school rules and structures. Communication about school rationales and

parental concerns could ease some of these conflicts and this suggests the need for a more collaborative approach involving parents, schools and children. Sormunen et al (2013) report on such an approach amongst secondary schools in Finland. A range of key actors participated in developing school activities around health including pupils, parents, health education teachers, school nurses and Heads. For example, developing the health curriculum, involved collaboration between the researcher and the teachers, but others, including pupils and parents, were allowed to comment on the plans. In addition, workshops for parents were evaluated by parents and there were opportunities for them to make suggestions for change.

As part of a more collaborative way forward policy approaches could rethink the way in which expert knowledge is privileged over maternal knowledge (instinct about what their children need), and perhaps there needs to be greater collaboration between parents and professionals in order to maintain positive parenting identities (O'Key and Hugh-Jones 2010). Such developments could build on the broader literature on lay knowledge and civic intelligence, where the onus is on 'knowledge that matters in terms of people's understanding of and responses to the problems they face in their everyday lives' (Elliott and Williams 2008, p. 1113). In relation to work on Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) the involvement of lay people's views have been shown to enhance the quality of the understanding gained, which makes a case for the 'co-creation of citizen and scientific expertise' (Elliott and Williams 2008, p. 1113). This could be applied to the family school interface in terms of working with and taking on board parental expertise about feeding children, taking account of the 'weight of the history and the social realities of the people concerned' (Elliott and Williams 2004, p. 242). Acknowledging and integrating the perspectives and experiences of those involved also has the potential to break down tensions in relationships between different realms. Involving local people in HIAs helped transform the 'vertical and hierarchical relationships' between the residents and the local council into 'horizontal relationships where the players share a common arena for collective deliberation', and similar horizontal relationships could be advocated in family-school partnerships (Elliott and Williams 2004, p. 242).

In supporting these partnerships, there is also potential in exploring social media as a way of opening up virtual spaces which are more neutral and conducive to *valuing*

the priorities of schools and families, without *enforcing* the priorities of one setting on another. However, the way in which social media alters school-family dynamics (and dynamics between different groups of parents) need to be taken into account, together with the ways in which it can be potentially misused, also recognising the way in which the internet can play a powerful role in blurring the boundaries between school, home and the rest of the world (BBC News 2012).

This could draw on the emergent literature around digital spaces, where the efficacy of internet based interventions may be improved through social networking approaches, although there are a number of unanswered questions around this, such as: whether digital spaces are more effective for some outcomes than for others; how professionally moderated networking compares with un-moderated networking; and the differences between self-selecting rather than being assigned a network (Bennett and Glasgow 2009). The potential of social media also needs to be balanced against the challenges of digital exclusion, which includes access to hardware and systems, as well as limitations in IT literacy. Whereas earlier reports were about a ‘digital divide’, more recent concerns are centred around ‘patterns of digital differentiation’ taking account of the fact that in the UK most people now have access to some form of digital technology (Longley and Singleton 2009, p. 1275).

9.6 Recommendations for schools, families and policy

9.6.1 Schools

Overall, the findings point towards a need to reconsider the interface between family and school settings. A partnership approach which encourages a positive involvement ethos, creating more meaningful connections between families and schools, offers a promising way forward. Such an approach also needs to consider the way in which expert knowledge is privileged over maternal knowledge, with scope for greater collaboration between parents and professionals in the school setting in terms of the design and implementation of health improvement approaches.

Such a partnership approach should also encompass parent-to-parent peer networks across the school setting. Improving connections with community-based food and nutrition approaches may also help promote links between networks of parents. This

would build on some of the informal mentoring that already takes place between parents in relation to food.

In addition to working with parents, a key recommendation for schools relates to the involvement of children, and the findings suggest there may be benefits associated with participatory approaches. These would acknowledge the way in which parents extend control from the home, which means that children's perspectives may become marginalised. When considering the involvement of children, school approaches also need to take account of the embodiment of food practices especially the increasing focus on problematised bodies and schools as a setting where body ideals may be reinforced.

Recommendations for teachers include building their confidence and capacity, especially in terms of their confidence in extending healthy eating messages to parents. At a strategic level, this would require better planning between health and education departments, and improved training to support teachers, as well as clarity around their roles.

Future strategies to link schools and families need to consider improving communications as the findings highlighted the importance of enabling parents to understand school rationales, and ensuring schools are aware of parental concerns. Related to this recommendation, is the importance of promoting consistent messages across different domains of school activity including lunchtime menu choices, curriculum activities and food served at school-related events. Social media should be explored as a way of improving family school communications and as a way of opening up virtual spaces, which may help foster a partnership approach.

9.6.2 Families

The findings identify a number of targeted recommendations in relation to public health approaches with families. An important finding relates to the way in which families did not always share the same priorities as policy makers, and therefore policy and practice needs to take account of the perspectives and lived experiences of parents and children. This includes the social and relational dimensions of food, as

well as the different ways in which families find time for bonding through food (other than around the dinner table). A stronger appreciation of the way in which food is imbued with emotions and care-giving is also pertinent to take forward as a practice recommendation, given the wide-ranging significance of food beyond nutrition and nourishment. Future public health approaches need to integrate the priorities which have personal meaning to parents and children, and in this way such approaches are likely to be more effective in drawing families in and are more likely to lead to sustained change.

The way in which families in this study were juggling food against a whole range of other priorities also suggests that public health approaches need to be more sensitive to family contexts and constraints, including parental resources, food availability and issues around affordability of healthier foods. For example, policies focussed on the benefits of families preparing and sharing a meal together, should recognise issues related to time constraints, the limits posed by the physical space in family homes, and local availability of food.

9.6.3 Policy

As the discussion earlier in this chapter highlighted, the adoption of a socio-ecological lens helped contextualise broader influences on children's dietary health. Similarly, although the findings relate specifically to families and schools, broader areas for action can be drawn out across a range of other socio-ecological domains.

In relation to public health policy, action is needed to address the availability and affordability of healthier foods at a community level and within specific community settings such as food availability at children's sporting and after-school venues. More broadly, the food industry also needs to be subject to more stringent restrictions in order to ensure food companies make efforts to reduce the amount of fat, salt and sugar, which would help with further promotion of consistent messages beyond the school setting.

Beyond public health, the findings also add to the case for recommendations across a range of policy areas. One particular area of recommendations relates to the need to

reconsider employment structures and their implication for family food. In particular, policy needs to consider the deep-rooted implications of shift work and more varied patterns of paid work. This includes an awareness that the effectiveness of public health policy is likely to be curtailed by deep-rooted structural constraints, and that action is need to work with employers to move towards improved family work balance policies.

Further recommendations also relate to policies to address disadvantaged communities, with the findings drawing out the lived realities of living in areas marked by poverty - such as juggling tight budgets and negotiating issues around community safety. This adds weight to the case for addressing public health across all policy areas, where issues related to public health are a central consideration in approaches to tackling poverty, rather than a stand-alone issue.

9.7 Reflections on study design

The case-study approach, in which the reader gets to know the wider social, contextual and affective dynamics of family life, worked well for elucidating structure-agency interactions across socio-ecological domains. The particular merits of such an approach is that it brings together multiple perspectives, allows the participant voice to be heard, and the findings provide implications for theory development (Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2003; Crowe et al. 2011).

Nested within the case study methodology, the diary-interview method proved insightful, and in particular audio diaries provided an accessible medium for capturing intimate stories about daily experiences (Hislop et al. 2005). This helped address the methodological challenge around attending to the ‘invisible nature of family feeding’, and it has been acknowledged that such activities, ‘due to their second-nature quality, are challenging for informants to articulate’ (Delormier et al. 2009, p. 220).

Participants sometimes phrased and positioned their diary accounts with the reader in mind, and this has been observed in other diary studies (Gabb 2008). Some diaries

contained positive phrasings invoking notions of doing and saying the right thing, whereas other diarists were more candid and provided less polished accounts of their family practices. In these cases the diary data seemed less worked on, with more raw and brash accounts about the messiness of juggling family life and feeding the family.

Highlighting these differences, (between those that appear less and more polished in terms of food practices), is not to suggest that some are more legitimate or honest than others. Instead, it shows the breadth of different data generated and reflects the different frames of reference within which the participants were working. In this way the diaries were useful for drawing out both the detail of daily practices, and also the wider contexts and rationalities shaping these practices (Spowart and Nairn 2013, 2014).

A further advantage of using diaries, (especially audio-diaries) was the way in which they held particular appeal with children, because of the novelty factor and because of the way it allowed them to take charge of the process (Worth 2009). Overall, this study supported the view that diaries used in combination with interviews are regarded as a valuable combination of qualitative tools (Elliott 1997; Spowart and Nairn 2014). In addition, the diary-interview approach provided researcher contact with participants at three separate time-points which helped build rapport and developed a research relationship where participants felt more comfortable to provide in-depth insights, revealing contradictions and intimate issues.

Despite these merits of the approach, and with reference to internal validity of the data, there were some limitations of the methods with children, which related to parental presence in the interviews and diaries. Parental presence in the interviews led to different levels of involvement and in some cases parents remained mainly silent, allowing children to put their own views forward. However, some parents were more vocal and this meant that children were more restrained in their responses, despite efforts to direct questions specifically to them. The parental voice also came through in children's diary entries. Children were encouraged to record their own food diaries, but some parents wrote out the diaries for children to then

‘read’ onto the audio-recorder, and in other cases parents helped children complete the diaries, and therefore the data became more interactional.

Although parental guidance assisted children with diary completion, it also shoe-horned the diaries into a parent-led structure, and alternative methods and approaches may have been useful to access children’s accounts, within their own frames of reference. In order to mitigate these limitations, the supplementary tools used in the interviews with children (photographs, sentence-completion task, and ‘Aladdin’s Wishes’), were drawn on as a way of retaining a focus on the interview themes, and provided alternative mechanisms for children to convey their views. Taking account of the limitations of the diary-interview approach with regards to the voice of children, it would be worth considering the merits of additional methods as part of a tool-box of mixed methods. Other researchers have shown how drawing, photo-elicitation and utilising a range of methods provides additional insights into mundane daily activities, especially where people may struggle with what to say, how to reflect, or how to put meanings into words (Gabb 2008; O’Connell 2012).

In terms of the nature of the data generated, the adoption of a socio-ecological approach was limited by the study’s focus on family and school contexts, and this meant that other socio-ecological domains were not explored in so much depth. Moving beyond the school, it would also be useful to explore relationships between schools and other youth settings within the community domain, and how children and young people move between these spaces. This builds on an emerging sociological interest in young people’s interactions with space and place in their communities, and food practices may provide an interesting lens of inquiry for this work (Evans and Holland 2012; Ivinson 2013).

In terms of external validity, there were some limitations to the generalisability of the data. With the case studies representing eleven families across three areas, the study is not representative of families across Wales, and the experiences of other families’ warrants further exploration. This includes extending geographic and demographic coverage to include families in higher socio-economic groups, building on research which has highlighted noticeable differences in food practices between these groups (Wills et al. 2011).

In terms of family life-stage it would be interesting to explore practices where children are at a later stage of development, understanding the changes in negotiations and different notions of responsibility as children get older and move into adolescence, which would build on existing work with this age group (Backett-Milburn et al. 2010a; Travis et al. 2010).

9.8 Conclusion

Overall the findings support the view that families are integral to shaping food environments for children (Wardle 2007), but they also support the view that this approach needs to be more contextualised, taking account of how families are influenced by broader social contexts (Frohlich et al. 2001; Delormier et al. 2009).

The findings suggest that approaches which address the family-school interface need to be more attuned to these complex influences, shifting away from the de-contextualised family ideals as portrayed in policy guidance, which makes assumptions about families' abilities to eat together. The way in which food forms one of many priorities in family life and the complex negotiations that take place in order to get food done, is in stark contrast to behavioural health-promotion strategies, which tend to assume that people are 'blank sheets', ready to be receptive to health promotion strategies (Baum and Fisher 2014, p. 215).

Despite a clear rationale for promoting consistent messages between families and schools, such approaches have been plagued by simplified views of family life and limited recognition of the role of broader influences from across socio-ecological domains. This study has demonstrated the complex interplay between contextual and agential factors that enable and constrain family food, and which frame families' interactions with schools.

In order to overcome the limitations of existing approaches and develop more effective and acceptable approaches, there is a need to: take account of the multiple and varied meanings attached to food; understand the way in which food negotiations are inter-twined with notions of control; and appreciate the changing

perspectives and agencies of children, parents and schools, across time and across different contexts. This includes an acknowledgement of the relational nature of food and the way parents and schools are concerned with nurturing, nourishing and controlling children's food. Adopting a more collaborative approach between families and schools, where the aim is to actively involve and empower families, and value the perspectives of parents, children and schools, offers a potential way forward.

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Appendix A Research materials for schools

A1 Letter to schools

Dear [insert name],

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

I am a PhD student based at Cardiff University undertaking research into families, primary schools and food. This study aims to understand how families link with schools around food and eating and identify how these links can be improved. I have notified the Director of Education, the Senior Schools Improvement Officer and the Local Public Health Director to inform them that the study is going ahead in XXXX. I have also spoken to the Healthy Schools Co-ordinator in order to gain an overview of activities in the area.

Up to four schools will be involved in the study and this will include a range in terms of: types of communities; school size; and free school meal entitlement. The aim will be to interview school staff and families (parents/carers and children) who are linked to these schools.

I am writing to ask for your permission to carry out face-to-face interviews with you as the head teacher and the in-school co-ordinator for healthy schools. The overall aim of these interviews is to provide information about the school context in terms of approaches to food and eating and the school's experiences of linking with families.

The interviews would focus on the following topics:

- The main drivers for linking with families and how this is prioritised within the school
- School approaches to food and eating (including food provision, curricular and extra-curricular activities)
- School approaches to linking with families (for general health activities and food)
- Family responses to these approaches (including barriers and facilitators).

I would also like your help in recruiting families to be interviewed for this study. I will provide information to be sent home via pupils in years four, five and six. This will provide details about the study and invite interested families to contact me for further information. I will provide all the information to be sent home and I do not envisage that this will cause any disruption to the normal functioning of the school.

Data from the interviews will be used in order to write my thesis and present academic papers. A summary of the findings will also be produced for everyone who has taken part. The research is expected to lead to further understandings of how family-school links work and the results will help inform the development of future school based interventions that engage families.

Participation is voluntary. However, your involvement could make an important contribution to the study and I hope that you will be willing to take part. Please could you let me know what you decide by completing the enclosed reply slip and returning it by [date]. If you decide to take part I will then contact you to discuss further arrangements for the interviews.

The enclosed information sheet gives more details about the study. If you would like to ask any questions, make a suggestion or comment, please contact me by phone on 02920 879053 or email macdonalds@cardiff.ac.uk. Alternatively, please write to me at the above address.

Yours sincerely

Sarah MacDonald
Research Associate.

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

Reply Slip for Schools

Yes, we would like to take part in a study of families, primary schools & food ☐

Please contact us to discuss the detailed arrangements:

Name of school.....

Name of head teacher

Telephone number

Fax number

E-mail

No, we do not wish to be involved in the study of families, primary schools & food

☐

Name of school.....

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this reply slip.

Please return it to: Sarah MacDonald by fax: 029 2087 9054 or mail: CISHE, Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences, FREEPOST SWC1498, Cardiff, CF10 3GZ

Alternatively, you can e-mail the details to: macdonalds@cardiff.ac.uk

A2 Information sheet for schools

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

Background to the study

It has been suggested that links between families and schools are important for improving the diets of children and parents. This study aims to understand how families link with schools around food and eating and identify how these links can be improved. The study is being funded by a Researcher Development Award from the Department of Health and NHS R&D funded in Wales by the Wales Office of Research and Development in Health and Social Care (WORD).

Selecting Local Authority area, schools and families

The main aim is to select an area where schools have developed extensive links with families in relation to school food activities. It is also important that the area contains a range of different communities (including urban and rural communities and more and less deprived communities). The local Healthy Schools Co-ordinator will be asked to help identify schools that are active in relation to community and family engagement. At the same time attempts will be made to include a range of schools in terms of: types of communities; school size; and FSM entitlement. Families will be recruited from each school by sending home information about the study via pupils in years four, five and six. All the information will be provided by the researcher and it is not envisaged that the study will cause any disruption to the normal functioning of the school.

Research methods

This study will use in-depth interviews with the Healthy Schools Co-ordinator, school staff (Head teacher and in-school co-ordinator) and families (children and parents/carers). The main aim of these interviews will be to identify factors influencing primary school children's diets in school and families, the facilitators and barriers to change in each setting, how a range of families respond to school interventions and strategies for parental engagement. It will be important to look at these issues from the perspective of schools and families.

Ethics

The study has been approved by Cardiff School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The researcher will have enhanced clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau before undertaking research with children.

Confidentiality

In the final thesis and in academic papers, the local authority, schools and individuals will remain anonymous. Interviews will be tape recorded for note making purposes but individual names will not be included. During the study the tapes and other records will be stored in a secure location and only the project team will have access. All tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

It should be noted that the researcher has a legal obligation to disclose information relating to child protection issues. This will be discussed with schools and families before the interviews commence.

Findings

All participants will be offered a copy of their interview transcript and provided with the opportunity to take out or amend any part of it that they do not wish to be reported in the findings. An analysis of the information will form the basis of the PhD thesis and may be published in scientific journals or presented to people interested in the subject. A summary report of findings will also be available to you and details of all publications can be found on the study webpage: <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/research/researchprojects/macdonald-researcherdevaward.html>

Further information about the researcher

My name is Sarah MacDonald, I am a parent to a two year old boy and I have lived in South Wales most of my life. I did a degree in Geography and then trained as a teacher. After teaching for a short time I moved into university research and I am now undertaking a PhD in the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. The research is being undertaken in collaboration with two Senior Researchers at the University. If you would like further information about the study, you can contact me on 02920 879053 or email macdonalds@cardiff.ac.uk. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time.

A3 Consent form for schools

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

	Please initial
I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I would be able to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.	
I am willing to take part in the interview for this research and for the interview to be tape recorded	
I understand that no-one will have access to the recording beyond the researcher and her two supervisors	
I understand that I will be offered a copy of my interview transcript and provided with the opportunity to take out or amend any part of it that I do not wish to be reported in the findings	
I understand that data from this research will be used for 3 things: 1. PhD thesis 2. Academic research papers and presentations 3. A summary report to all interested participants or other interested parties.	

Name of interviewee

Date

Signature

Sarah MacDonald

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

A4 Interview schedule for schools

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

1. Brief overview of the school catchment

- What is the catchment area for the school?
- What is the area like in terms of issues and employment base?
- How is the school part of the community? (links with Communities First, Flying Start, other groups, how the school is used by the community)
- How do you feel the community has changed over time? What caused these changes?

2. How the school is involved in the Healthy Schools Scheme

- How long have you been part of the Healthy School Scheme? Which phase?
- How are you involved with the Healthy Schools Scheme? What role do other class teachers play? Role for children? Role for parents?
- Are there school policies on health?
- What seems to be driving the healthy schools approach in your school?

3. School approaches to food and eating

- What is the school doing to promote healthy eating as part of the curriculum?
- What is it doing to promote healthy eating through food provision (breakfast, break, lunch, after school)?
- What are the school rules related to food practices – at lunch times, break times and other times of the school day? (e.g., not allowing sweets, no chewing gum)
- What is the school doing to promote healthy eating outside school hours?
- What has worked well, less well? (Maybe focus on one example in more detail)
- Any observed change in practices or routines in school and the factors behind these changes?

4. School approaches to linking with families

- How does the school link with families, generally?
- How does the school link with families as part of healthy schools?
- Why is it important for the school to be doing this? What are the benefits for the school?
- Is there a school policy on involving parents?
- What works well? What are the challenges?

5. How families respond - facilitators and barriers

- How do parents respond? Who tends to be involved - mothers, fathers, others?
- Any anecdotes of changes at home? Changing things for children and parents?
- What have been the main facilitators to linking with families?
 - What seems to be the main success factors?
 - Are there any key characteristics about the families?
 - What are the key linking mechanisms?
 - Could this learning be applied to other health areas, beyond food?
- What have been the barriers to linking with families?
 - What are the main barriers/difficulties?
 - Are there any key characteristics about the families?
 - What extra support is needed?
 - Any difference between food v other health areas?
- Overall, what are the main challenges to involving parents?
- What do you see as the overall role of the school in promoting healthy eating? What do you see as the overall role of the family in promoting healthy eating?
- In terms of the future what do you see as the potential of linking schools and families to promote healthy eating?

Appendix B Research materials for families

B1 Letter to parents

Dear Parent,

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

I am a PhD student based at Cardiff University undertaking research into families, primary schools and food. It has been suggested that links between families and schools are important for improving the diets of children and parents. This study aims to understand how families link with schools around food and eating and identify how these links can be improved.

You are being invited to take part in this study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the enclosed information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. A separate information sheet is available for children to read.

If you choose to take part I would like to ask you questions about your experiences of food and eating in your family and possible links with the school. I would like to conduct one interview with both parents and another interview with your eight to eleven year old child. Interviews will be undertaken in your home at times convenient to you (including evenings and weekends).

If you are interested in taking part in this study please discuss it with other members of your family. If all family members are interested in taking part please contact me on 02920 879053 or email macdonalds@cardiff.ac.uk. Alternatively, please write to me at the above address. I will arrange a convenient time to visit you at home and discuss further issues about the study. It would be useful if all family members could be present for this visit – it should take about half an hour. You will then have more time to think about taking part, discuss it as a family and contact me with further questions. The study will not go ahead unless all participants (adults and children) have agreed to take part.

Please could you contact me by [date] if you are interested in taking part in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah MacDonald
PhD Researcher

B2 Information sheet for parents

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

Who can take part?

Anyone who has a child between eight and eleven years can take part (school years four, five and six). Although I contacted you through the school, this study is in no way linked to school inspections or investigations and no-one in the school will find out what you have said. The study is also being carried out with other families in Wales.

What is involved?

I would like to interview you (and your partner) about your family food routines. I would like to undertake the interview at your home at a time convenient to you. This could be on a week day, evening or weekend. The interview will probably take about one hour. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to any of my questions. I am interested in what you have to say about things like:

- How do you decide what to eat at home?
- What is different about the way children eat at home and school?
- How can families and schools help children choose what to eat?
- Have you been involved in school activities to do with food and eating?
- Has this made any difference to what or how you eat at home?

Will I have to do anything else?

I would also like you to keep a tape recorded diary for a week after the interview. The aim is to record what happens at home to do with food and eating and your thoughts and feelings about food in your everyday life. This will take up to 10 minutes of your time each day. I will deliver and collect the diaries and read them before visiting you again to ask follow-up questions in a second interview.

How will my child be involved in the study?

Previous research on families, schools and food has not always taken account of children's views. It will be important for this study to address this gap and make sure children's views are included. Children will be interviewed about similar topics to you and they will also be asked to keep a week long diary.

Why do I want to interview children alone?

It has been shown that children are more open and honest when interviewed separately from their parents/carers. I will try and meet them during my introductory visit to your home so that they get to know me before the interview.

How do I know my child will be safe?

All interviews will be conducted in communal rooms (e.g. living room) with the doors open and parents/carers will be asked to be present in the house at the time of the interview. I have been 'police checked' before undertaking any work with children. They will be able to stop the interview at any time and no-one will mind. For ethical reasons it may not be possible to guarantee children the same level of confidentiality as adults if the research uncovers child protection issues. If child protection issues do occur, then a protocol will be followed. A copy of this will be provided.

Who will be coming into the home?

I will come into your home on my own but I will contact my work colleagues or partner before and after each visit. This is in line with safety guidelines for researchers.

How will information be recorded?

With your permission, I will record our discussion and write it up into what is called a transcript. This will allow me to read what you have said again.

Will taking part be private?

Yes. Families will not be named or identified in any way in the notes, transcripts or the reports of the study. When I create the transcript, I will change the names of yourself and everyone you mention. The original recording and transcript will be kept in a secure place in Cardiff University. Nothing written in the report will identify who you are. If you wish, I will give you a copy of the transcript so that you can be sure that I have written it accurately and that no-one in it can be identified by others. A summary report of findings will also be available to you and details of all publications can be found on the study webpage

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/research/researchprojects/macdonald-researcherdevaward.html>

Will I be able to find out what my child has said?

Children's interviews are also confidential and therefore I will not be able to tell you what they have said or give you a copy of their transcript. However, children will be free to share with you and others what has taken place.

Will I receive anything for taking part?

A gift voucher will be given to every family member who takes part. This is a 'thank you' for all your time and effort.

Where can I get further information about food and eating?

This study is not targeting families who have food and eating problems. However, it is possible that the interview, or maybe even reading this leaflet, has raised questions about your own or your family's eating habits. If this happens I would recommend that you see your GP or Health Visitor. They will be able to offer professional advice in response to your questions.

Who am I?

My name is Sarah MacDonald, I am a parent to a two year old boy and I have lived in South Wales most of my life. I did a degree in Geography and went on to train as a teacher. After teaching for a short time I moved into university research and I am now undertaking a PhD at Cardiff University funded by a Researcher Development Award from the Department of Health and NHS R&D funded in Wales by the Wales Office of Research and Development for Health and Social Care (WORD). The research is being undertaken in collaboration with two Senior Researchers at the University and has the approval of Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. If you would like further information about the study, you can contact me on 02920 879053 or email macdonalds@cardiff.ac.uk.

Thank you for your time.

B3 Consent form for parents

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

<i>For interviews with parents</i>	Please initial
I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I would be able to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.	
I am willing to take part in the interviews and for the interviews to be tape recorded. I am also willing to complete a diary.	
I understand that no-one will have access to the recordings or notes beyond the researcher and her two supervisors.	
I understand that I will be offered a copy of my interview transcripts and provided with the opportunity to take out or amend any parts that I do not wish to be reported in the findings.	
I understand that data from this research <u>may</u> be used for 3 things: 1. PhD thesis 2. academic research papers and presentations 3. a summary report to all interested participants or other interested parties.	
<i>For interviews with children</i>	
I am willing for my children to take part in the interviews and for the interviews to be tape recorded. I am also willing for them to complete a diary.	
I understand that no-one will have access to the recordings or notes beyond the researcher and her two supervisors EXCEPT where child protection issues arise.	
I confirm I have received a copy of the child protection protocol for this study and I understand the steps that would be taken.	
I understand that my children's participation is voluntary and they are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without there being any adverse consequences.	
I confirm that at least one parent will be at home when the interviews are being conducted.	

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Sarah MacDonald

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

If you would like to receive a copy of your interview transcripts please provide your contact details here.

Name.....

Contact address:

.....

The researcher will provide a summary of the findings from this study. If you would like to receive a summary, please make sure you include your contact details on the provided address slip (if not already provided above).

Name.....

Contact address:

.....

Research into families, primary schools and food

INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN



Hello,

My name is Sarah MacDonald and I am doing some University research about families, schools and food. I would like your help. This research involves talking to children and their parents/carers so I hope you will be keen to take part.

Why should I take part?

- This is a chance to say what you think
- I am interested in what you have to say and will listen to you
- Your views and experiences could make a difference to how important decisions are made
- The activities you will do are fun!

Who can take part?

I want to talk to families with children aged eight to eleven years (school years four, five and six). The study will involve you and your parents/carers. Although I contacted you through the school, this study is in no way linked to school inspections or investigations and no-one in the school will find out what you have said. The study is also being carried out with other families in Wales.

What is involved?

The interview will take place at home and will probably last about an hour. I am interested in what you have to say about things like:

- How do you decide what to eat at home?
- What is different about the way you eat at home and school?
- How your family and school help you choose what you eat?
- Have you been involved in school activities to do with food and eating?
- Has this made any difference to what or how you eat at home?

Will I have to do anything else?

I would also like you to keep a tape recorded diary for a week after the interview. The aim is to record what happens at home to do with food and eating and your thoughts and feelings about food in your everyday life. This will take up to 10 minutes of your time each day. I will deliver and collect the diaries and read them before visiting you again to ask follow-up questions in a second interview.

How will my parents or carers be involved in the study?

I will also be talking to your parents/carers about their views on families, schools and food. They will be asked similar questions to you. They will also be asked to complete a diary.

How do I know I will be safe being alone with a stranger?

I will hold the interview in a living room with the doors left open and a parent/carer will always be in the house at the same time. I have been 'police checked' before starting this study and I have interviewed children in the past.

Will I receive anything for taking part?

A gift voucher will be given to every family member who takes part. This is a 'thank you' for all your time and effort - the study would not be possible without your help.

Your rights:

- It is for you to decide if you want to talk to me
- You do not have to say 'yes'
- If you do say 'yes' you do not have to do the whole interview
- We could stop when you want to, or have a break (we will agree a signal for this before the interview starts)
- If you do not want to answer some of the questions, you can just say 'pass'
- Before you decide whether to help me, you might like to talk about this project with your parents/carers or with a friend
- I keep tapes and notes of the interviews in a safe, lockable place
- When I talk about the research and write reports, I always change people's names, to keep their views anonymous
- I would not talk to anyone you know about what you have said, unless you talk about something that might put someone in danger. If so, I would talk to you first about what could be done to help
- All interviews are confidential and therefore parents/carers will not be able to know what you have said or see a copy of your transcript
- You will be able to see a summary of the findings from this research. You can find out about what I have written at the following webpage:
<http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/research/researchprojects/macdonald-researcherdevaward.html>

Where can I get further information about food and eating?

This study is not targeting families who have food and eating problems. However, it is possible that the interview, or maybe even reading this leaflet, has raised questions about your own or your family's eating habits. If this happens I would suggest that you see your GP or Health Visitor for professional advice. Your parents, carers or school will be able to organise this.

What happens next?

If you are interested in taking part in this study please discuss it with your parents/carers. If everyone agrees to take part one of your parents/carers will contact me. I will then arrange to visit you at home to talk to you about the study. You will then have more time to think about taking part, discuss it as a family and contact me with any further questions. The study will not go ahead until all participants (adults and children) have agreed to take part.

More about me

I am a parent to a two year old boy and I have lived in South Wales most of my life. I did a degree in Geography and went on to train as a teacher. After teaching for a short time I moved into university research and I am now undertaking a research project (called a PhD) at Cardiff University. If you would like further information about the study, you can contact me on 02920 879053 or email macdonalds@cardiff.ac.uk. I would be happy to answer any questions and look forward to meeting you.

Thank you for your time



B5 Assent form for children

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

**Please read each of the sentences below and tick the box if you understand.
If you do not understand anything, please ask the researcher.**

	Please tick
I know what the research is about and I have received an information sheet	
I can decide if I want to take part in the research	
I can leave at any time after the interview has started, without saying why (I have agreed a signal with the researcher)	
If I decide not to take part or if I leave the interview after it starts, no-one will tell me off or punish me	
What is said in the interviews will be recorded	
No-one will be able to listen to the recordings except the researcher and her two supervisors	
What I say in the interviews and in the diary will be reported in such a way that no-one can tell who I am, or which school I go to. The researcher would have to tell someone else if they found out about something that might put someone in danger	
What I say in the interviews and in the diary will be used with other information to write the PhD, for presentations and for writing academic papers	
I agree to take part in the interviews and complete the diary for research on families, schools and food.	

Name of participant

Date

Sarah MacDonald
Name of person taking assent

Date

Signature

If you would like to receive a copy of your interview transcripts please provide your contact details here.

Name.....

Contact address:

.....
.....
.....

The researcher will provide a summary of the findings from this study. If you would like to receive a summary, please make sure you include your contact details on the provided address slip.

Name.....

Contact address:

.....
.....
.....

Appendix C Interview schedules for families

C1 Interview schedule for parents

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

1. About you and your family
How many children do you have and what are their ages? What do you and your partner do? How long have you lived in the area?
2. Family mealtimes
Can you tell me about your typical day in terms of mealtimes – what happens first thing in the morning when you get up? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- what happens at lunchtimes?- what happens when the children come home from school? Tell me more about what goes on at these meals (esp. breakfast and tea)? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- what else happens? What do you talk about?- what do you enjoy about mealtimes? How typical is this routine for your family? Does this happen most days? How does this compare with what happens at the weekend? Do you have any favourite foods? Any foods you really dislike? Do you have any <u>special</u> family food routines/rituals? Does anyone in your family have any special diets? (e.g., any vegetarians, allergies?) Do your food routines involve anyone else? (e.g., grandparents, neighbours, friends?)
3. What influences your mealtimes?
Thinking about <u>what</u> you eat – do you eat similar things to when you were growing up? Why are some of the meals you mentioned above ‘family favourites’? Do you often try new meals/foods? Where do you get ideas from? What influences how you eat? Is it important that you all sit together for a family meal? Changes to family food routines: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Has this always been your family routine?- What main changes have you made and why? Would you like anything to be different about your family food routine?
4. Planning, shopping and cooking food
How do you plan for mealtimes? How do you decide what to eat each day? Do you make a list? Who does the shopping? (do you ask for certain foods to be bought?) Who does the

cooking?

Are the children involved in these tasks?

How do you decide who does what? Is this always the same? Has this always been how things are organised?

Would you like to change anything about these tasks?

5. Children's food routines at home

Focussing on what and how your children eat at home:

- Do you try to influence how and what your child eats – how and why? (do you use different strategies to your partner?)
- Does your child try and influence what and how they eat – how and why?
- Do they ask for certain foods/meals/treats?
- Do they prefer junk food or healthier options?
- Does your child try and influence what and how YOU eat – how and why?
- Do they encourage you to eat things/stop you eating things?
- How do these practices vary for different children in the family – what causes variations (age of child, gender etc.). How much influence do you have over older children?
- Do children try and influence each other?

Is there anything you would like to change about how your child eats at home?

6. Children's food routines in school

- What do you think goes on at lunchtime in school?
- How do you find out what goes on in school – does your child talk to you about what they had for lunch?
- What and how do they eat at break times?
- Does anyone check what they are eating in school?
- If packed-lunch:
 - do you have any guidance from the school?
 - do the children say what they want to eat?
- What is different about the way your child eats at home and school? Are there any differences between schools (if more than one child and in different schools)?
- Would you like to see any changes to lunchtime provision in school?

7. School approaches to food and eating – awareness and involvement

School activities - Are you aware of any school activities to do with food and eating?

Prompt for anything related to:

- What children do in lessons?
- What they do outside lessons?

How did you find out about these school activities? (E.g., have children brought home food they made in school?)

How has your child been involved? How have you been involved?

School priorities:

- How high a priority is healthy eating for your school?
- Do you know if the school is a healthy school?
- How high a priority is it for the school to link with families for this?
- Would you like to know more /be more involved in the school's healthy eating?

What other health related school activities go on at the school? How have the children been involved? Are you involved in any of these?

8. School approaches to food and eating – influence/impact

Have any of the healthy eating activities from schools influenced the family/what you do at home?

- influenced what children do/think?
- influenced what you do/think? what you do at home?
- probe for examples of change - probe for reasons for impact or lack of impact

Have you or your children been influenced by anything else they have done in school on health - not just what they have done on food?

9. Wider involvement with the school

More generally how else are you involved in the school?

- how do you find out what goes on in the school? (through child, pupil post, newsletter, other)
- does your child talk to you about what they've been doing in school?

Would you like to be more involved? What are the barriers?

Do you think there should be any changes to what the school does to involve parents?
Is there more the school could do/could they do things differently?

10. Overall role for school, families and others in healthy eating

Who has a key role in providing healthy eating messages for children?

- what is the role of the schools
- what is the role of the family
- who else has a role?

Do children take more notice of what the school says/what parents say?

Does the school have a role in extending healthy eating messages to parents/rest of family?

C2 Interview schedule for children

Research into Families, Primary Schools and Food

1. About you and your family
How old are you? School year? How long have you lived in this house? Have you been to any other schools?
2. Mealtimes at home – explain format, photos and then questions
<p>PHOTO – FAMILY LUNCH – start thinking about how families eat:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is happening in this picture? How are they eating? 2. Who are these people? What are they eating? Why are they eating it? 3. Where are they? What meal is it? Who prepared it/where did they get it from? 4. Do you think they eat like this very often? 5. Is it an important meal? <p>Tell me what happens in your house first thing in the morning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where do you eat and who with? Who prepares it? - What sort of things do you eat? How do you decide what to eat? - Is there anything you enjoy? Is it important to have breakfast? - Do you talk to people? <p>A couple of other pictures of children eating at home: PHOTO – BOY SAT IN FRONT OF TV – BOY SAT ALONE EATING</p> <p>Tell me what happens at home when you get home from school. Tell me about your evening meal.</p> <p>What happens at weekends?</p> <p>Do you have any favourite family meals? Any dislikes?</p> <p><u>Encouraging eating:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does anyone at home encourage you to eat in a particular way? For example, they might encourage you to eat certain things, or they might stop you eating certain things, or they may give you food if you do something good? Can you tell me more about when and where this happens? - Is it important that your family helps you in this way? - Do you have treats? If so, when, where, why? <p><u>Encouraging eating – parents:</u></p> <p>Do you encourage your parents to eat things? Do you stop them eating things? Tell me more about this.</p>
3. Mealtimes at school
<p>PHOTO – SCHOOL DINNER – qs as above and then - is this similar to your school?</p> <p>Can you tell me what happens in school at lunchtimes. Can you remember what happened today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where do you eat and who with? - What sort of things do you eat? How do you decide what to eat?

- Is there anything you enjoy?

If packed-lunch – do you help prepare/decide what goes in?

Encouraging eating:

- Does anyone at school encourage you to eat in a particular way? For example, they might encourage you to eat certain things, or they might stop you eating certain things? Can you tell me more about this?

- Does anyone check what is in your lunchbox?

- Is it important that your school helps you in this way?

Do you talk to your family about what you have eaten in school?

4. Planning, shopping and cooking

Does someone in your family make a shopping list? How does this get done? Do you add things to the list? What sort of things?

Tell me about how your family shops for food? What do you do as part of this? If you go, what sort of things do you put in the trolley?

Tell me about cooking for food in your family? What do you do as part of this? (Help, lay the table, clear away?)

How do you play a part in deciding what you eat?

Do you have a choice in what you eat? Would you like to have more of a choice? Do you have free access to food in the kitchen? Do you like trying new things?

How do you play a part in what other people in your family eat?

Do you suggest new things for others to eat/stop them eating certain things? Where do you get your ideas about new things to try/things to stop eating?

5. Food activities in school

- Have you been involved in school activities to do with food and eating?
- Tell me what happened (pick one activity as an example)
- What did you do? Did you enjoy it? Did you learn anything?
- Have you had a say in what your school does for healthy eating?
- Do you think it is important for your school to be doing this? Why is that?

- Do you talk to anyone in your family about what you have been doing in school? What did they say or do? What do you talk about?

- Have any of your family taken part in these activities?

- Do you think it is important for schools to try and get parents involved in these activities? Why?

6. Other health related activities in schools

- Have you taken part in any other healthy activities in school? E.g. physical activity or smoking? Eco school? If so, tell me about this.

- Have your family taken part in any of these activities?

7. Links between home and school

- Do you talk to your parents about what you've been doing in lessons? When?

- Is there anything more the school could do to get parents involved?

- Is it important that parents are involved in school – or not?

C3 Interview task for children

Sentence completion task and Aladdin's wishes

What do you enjoy? - I have found out a lot about what you eat at home and school. Just to finish, can you complete the following sentences (either write it down or tell me).

I enjoy eating at home because.....

I enjoy eating at school because.....

3 wishes - In the story of Aladdin, the Genie of the lamp grants Aladdin 3 wishes. To end this interview you have 3 wishes for your home and 3 wishes for your school. Can you tell me or write down what they would be?

* state 3 things you wish you could change about eating at school

WISH 1.....

WISH 2.....

WISH 3.....

* state three things you wish you could change about eating at home

WISH 1.....

WISH 2.....

WISH 3.....

Appendix D Diary guidelines for families

D1 Diary guidelines for parents

Thank you for agreeing to record an audio food diary as part of the Families, Schools and Food project. The purpose of these diaries is to give me a better understanding of how and what some families eat. Your diary will give me some idea of the place of food and mealtimes in your everyday life. Remember this is YOUR diary and anything about what you do, think and feel about the food you eat, buy and prepare each day will be of interest to me. There is no need to change what you eat just because you are keeping a diary.

At the beginning of each entry please note the time and day, but try to do this every evening, after your last meal of the day. However, if you also feel like speaking to the recorder at any time of the day, do feel free. If it is not possible to speak at all on a particular day, try and do it as soon as you can the next day. However, if you find that you have missed out several days, please do not give up! Just start again on the next day you are able to record.

Please comment on anything you think will help me understand your family food routines. The following notes provide a guide to the sort of information you may include, but feel free to record anything you like about your experiences of food or other factors now or in the past, which may influence the role of food in your family. It would also be helpful if you could set the scene and spend a few minutes talking about how your day has been in general. There is no 'right way' of making your diary. Anything you want to say will be valued.

Where you record the diary is up to you - do the recording in a place that you feel comfortable.

When you have completed your audio diary please phone me on 02920 879053 and I will arrange to collect the recorder and cassettes.

Thank you very much for your help.

What you may like to include in your diary: some suggestions

AT THE START

Note the time and day.

Set the scene and spend a few minutes talking about how your day has been in general.

YOUR MEALS/FOOD

What you ate? Who made it? Who you ate with? Where you ate? What else was happening?

Did you enjoy the food? Did the rest of the family/friends enjoy it? Why do you think that is?

Who made the food? Did it take long to prepare? How did it fit in with other activities you may have been doing? Perhaps you got a take-away - why was that?

Any snacks? What kind? Why? Any good?

YOUR CHILDREN AND THE SCHOOL

Did they tell you what they ate at school today? What did you think about the food they ate?

Did they eat with you? Do you think they liked any of the meals they had today?

Did they ask for a snack? Any discussions /arguments about meals or snacks today?

Did you have any other links with the school today?

D2 Diary guidelines for children

Thank you for agreeing to record a food diary as part of the Families, Schools and Food project.

The diaries will help me understand how and what some families eat.

Remember this is *YOUR* diary and anything about what you do, think and feel about the food you eat, buy and prepare each day will be of interest to me.

There is no need to change what you eat just because you are keeping a diary.

- Try to fill in the diary every evening after your last meal.
- If you feel like speaking to the tape recorder at any other time of the day, that is fine too.
- The following notes give you a guide to the sort of things to talk about.
- There is no 'right way' of making your diary. Anything you want to say will be valued.
- Where you record the diary is up to you - do the recording in a place that you feel comfortable.

When you have completed your audio diary please phone me on 02920 879053 and I will arrange to collect the recorder and cassettes.

Thank you very much for your help.

What you may like to include in your diary: some suggestions

AT THE START

Note the time and day.

Set the scene and spend a few minutes talking about how your day has been in general.

YOUR MEALS/FOOD

What you ate? Who made it? Who you ate with? Where you ate? What else was happening?

Did you enjoy the food? Did the rest of the family/friends enjoy it? Why do you think that is?

Who made the food? Did it take long to prepare? How did it fit in with other activities you may have been doing? Perhaps you got a take-away - why was that?

Any snacks? What kind? Why? Any good?

YOUR PARENTS/CARERS

Did you tell them what you ate at school today? What did they think about the food you ate?

Did they eat with you at home? Do you think they liked any of the meals they had today?

Did you ask for a snack? Any discussions /arguments about meals or snacks today?

Were there any other links between your parents/carers and the school today?

Appendix E Child protection protocol

This information has been produced as guidance for the interviewer and also as information for parents who are participating in the study:

- The interviewer has been 'police checked' for working alone with children
- Interviews will be held in a 'public' part of the child's home. For example, in part of the living room, or in a room with the door left open
- The whole interview from 'Introductions' to 'Thank you' will be audio taped
- Parents and carers are free to come into the room if necessary
- Children can stop the interview at any time, either for a break, or to finish the interview completely
- Researchers will keep all information confidential, EXCEPT when there are child protection concerns. If this occurs the issue will be discussed with an appropriate third party.

What to do if a child discloses that they or another young person is being abused:

- Show the child that you have heard what they are saying, and that you take their allegations seriously
- Encourage the child to talk, but do not prompt or ask leading questions: do not interrupt when the child is recalling significant events. Do not make the child repeat their account
- Explain what actions you must take, in a way appropriate to the age and understanding of the child
- Do not promise to keep what you have been told secret or confidential, as you have a responsibility to disclose information to those who need to know. Reporting concerns is not a betrayal of trust
- Write down as soon as you can and no later than 24 hours what you have been told, using the exact words if possible
- Report your concerns to your line manager or (if appropriate) the member of staff in your organization with designated responsibility for child protection. In this case, this will involve the researcher's supervisory team and the School Research Ethics Committee
- Ensure that your concerns are immediately reported to the duty social worker at the local office. Do not delay
- Do not confront the alleged abuser
- Do not worry that you may be mistaken. You will always be taken seriously by social services. It is better to have discussed it with somebody with the experience and responsibility to make an assessment
- Make a note of the date, time, place and people who were present at the discussion.
- Referrals should be made to social services as soon as a problem, suspicion or concern about a child becomes apparent, and certainly within 24 hours. Outside office hours, referrals should be made to the social services emergency duty service or the police.